



## Weekly Security Review

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### **Safety and security highlights for clients operating in Myanmar**

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## **Anti-Money Laundering Central Board shut down Rakhine restaurants in Yangon**

The Anti-Money Laundering Central Board (AMLCB) has sealed off a seafood restaurant "Phoenix" in Tamwe Township on 9 January. Arakan Army (AA) Chief Tun Myat Naing's younger brother According to Myanmar Now media, Aung Myat Kyaw's lawyer confirmed that Aung Myat Kyaw was providing financial support to the restaurant. Another seafood restaurant "Mahar Nwe" on Yadanar Road in South Okkalapa Township, Yangon was also sealed off by the AMLCB for the same reason on 7 January.



*Photo via Myanmar Now - Mahar Nwe Seafood and Unplugged on Yadanar Road in South Okkalapa Township, Yangon*

Aung Myat Kyaw and five of his co-workers were detained by the Singapore police on 10 July 2019 on suspicions of fundraising for the AA and later arrested by the Myanmar Police Force (MPF) at the Yangon International Airport upon deportation from Singapore and charged under the 2014 Counter-Terrorism Law.

In July 2019, two relatives of AA spokesperson Khaing Thu Kha from Ann Township, Rakhine State were detained by the Tatmadaw and charged under the Counter-Terrorism Law. On 25 August 2019, Yangon Police raided a house in Dagon Seikkan Township and arrested a 32-year-old woman who they say was providing financial support to the AA by drug trafficking. Police seized 6,700 methamphetamine pills from the woman and an additional 2.6 million tablets in the baggage holds of two highway buses serving the route between Yangon and Sittwe.

On 18 October, the sister of AA chief along with her husband and child was arrested upon arrival at Yangon International Airport after receiving medical treatments in Bangkok. MPF charged AA chief's sister and her husband under three anti-terrorism acts. According to Police, the arrest of AA chief's brother-in-law is also linked to the arrest of AA members in Mandalay with explosives. Acting on information, Mandalay Police raided a house in Mandalay's Chanmyathazi Township on 10 September and arrested four AA members with dynamite, detonators and satellite phones.

On 4 December, Thai authorities detained spouse and children of AA chief when the spouse was renewing her visa at the immigration office in Chaing Mai. There was no more information regarding the arrest.

## Assessment

The frequency of civilian arrests made by the Tatmadaw and abductions conducted by AA insurgents have significantly increased in the past year, substantially in the conflict affected regions of northern and central Rakhine State. The current situation with regard to conflicts in Rakhine State is unlikely to change without political dialogues between government peace stakeholders and AA delegation. A formal talk is planned to take place between the armed groups of Northern Alliance and government's National Reconciliation and Peace Centre this month.



*Photo via The Kachin Net - Chinese Special Envoy Sun Guo Xiang (right) with AA Chief (left) in Laiza on 10 January*

On 10 January, Chinese Special Envoy for Asian Affairs, Sun Guo Xiang held talks with top leaders from the AA and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Laiza, a remote mountainous town and KIA's headquarter in the Kachin State, on the border with China. According to local media outlets, Sun Guo Xiang urged AA chief to

reduce clashes in Rakhine State and engage further with Myanmar government through political means.

The meeting came before the Chinese President's visit to Myanmar. Chinese President Xi Jinping will pay a visit to Myanmar from 17 to 18 January. According to the Deputy Minister for Commerce, the Chinese President will sign the Memorandum of Understanding on border economic cooperation and Kyaukphyu economic zone in Rakhine State.

Despite participating in formal peace talks and declaration and extension of ceasefire by twice, the AA is actively engaged in an insurgency that has spread towards southern parts of Rakhine State, which has no history of armed fighting. From 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> January, clashes were observed mostly in Minbya and Myebon townships in the vicinity of Yangon-Sittwe Highway north of Ann. The AA reported its forces clashed with Tatmadaw troops near Kan Chay Ywar Thit in Toungup Township on 7 January. Two days later, on 9 January around 9:30am local time, AA troops ambushed a Tatmadaw convoy between Kyauk Ka Lay and Nga Oke villages in Kyaukpyu Township. More than 400 people from different villages around Ann Township have fled their homes due to the recent fighting and making their way to Magway Region as there are no shelters provided by the government for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ann Township yet.

***An interactive map revealing armed conflict currently active around Myanmar can be accessed at [https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Sc4V3Ftffydk7-z1zmnMBKujf4L\\_fW7E&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Sc4V3Ftffydk7-z1zmnMBKujf4L_fW7E&usp=sharing)***

From December 2018 onwards, arrests and interrogations of civilians by security forces on suspicion of AA connections and have sharply increased in conjunction with the growing insurgency. Conversely, the AA and allied groups in other areas, such as the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), have accused the Tatmadaw of using civilian vehicles, ambulances, and non-government organizations to cover their movements. On 27 June 2019, an unmarked International Committee of the Red Cross convoy was targeted by a bomb on the road through Kyauktaw Township.

As the AA consolidates control over townships in which it has established a presence, such as Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U, road checkpoints will become more regular with the possibility for detention and interrogation. People seen as associated with the government or security forces in particular, may be at risk of arbitrary delays or detention. Affiliation with

international organizations may not be sufficient to mitigate this risk



*Photo via Arakan Army - Tatmadaw soldiers seen inside an ambulance from local philanthropy group in northern Shan*

## **Night time curfew in Paletwa, Chin State extended through 8 March**

Local authorities announced on 8 January, that the ongoing nighttime curfew in southern Chin State town of Paletwa has been extended until 8 March, over security concerns and Arakan Army insurgent activity in the area. According to Chin State Minister of Social Affairs Pau Lun Min Thang, the curfew requires civilians to be in their homes from 6am to 6pm (local time) and gatherings of five or more people have been restricted during the curfew period. The curfew first declared on 9 November 2019 will remain in place. Paletwa Township administrative office announced two-month dusk-to-dawn curfew order on 9 November 2019, a few days after AA troops abducted ten people including five Indian citizens who were employees of the C&C construction company working on the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transportation Project and a member of the Union Parliament from Chin State between Paletwa and Kyauktaw townships.

Local population complains that this curfew is affecting their livelihood, especially their capacity to work on their fields.

### **Assessment**

Currently, there are not indicators of any announcement that curfew will be changed, and it is likely that there will be some disruption to normal patterns of life where operations are taking place, particularly if they continue for an extended period of time. Heightened security measures, movement restrictions, and ongoing tensions are to be expected in the area.

Individuals in Chin State are advised to monitor developments to the situation, remain vigilant for military activity, and follow instructions issued by local authorities.



## **Ongoing sit-in protest at Mandalay University**

A peaceful sit-in protest called by Mandalay University students has been ongoing since 9 January inside Mandalay University compound. Students have gathered to demand action taken against school authorities including head principal for approving the construction of a food court in the University campus, which they claimed was lack of transparency and involved lots of irregularities.

Students from Mandalay University went on strike from 2 to 5 September 2019 demanded an investigation over the construction of a food court inside Mandalay University campus. Members of the university student union sat in front of the main building carrying placards and banners that denounced the construction project. The student



union submitted a letter to the Education Minister to form an investigation team to inspect the student's claim that the contractors didn't have permission for the project. The students also sent letters calling for an investigation of the project to the State Counsellor's Office, the Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House), Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House), the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the President's Office.



Photo via Myanmar Times

## Assessment

Myanmar continues to operate under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law. Although the 2012 law came up for revision in May 2016, it still requires pre-authorization from the government for permission for demonstrations can occur; the current trend has been for almost all planned protests to proceed, provided organizers provide authorities with notice of their plans. However, the law does include options for criminalization and prison sentences for protestors and has vaguely written sections that increase the chances of arbitrary prosecution. Protests against this law may increase if it is used to suppress what many consider be reasonable activism. For now, tensions in Mandalay and on campuses around Myanmar are likely to remain high in the short term.

## List of Acronyms

**AA: Arakan Army.** The militant outfit of the ULA (United League of Arakan). Created in 2009 by Major General Tunn Myat Naing, the AA has grown into a force of about 7,000 soldiers benefiting from a solid support by the Arakanese Population.

**TNLA : Ta'ang National Liberation Army.** The armed wing of the Palaung State Liberation Front group, claiming more autonomy for the Ta'ang regions. Created in

2009, the TNLA now fields more 7,000 soldiers across Ta'ang populated regions of Northern Shan State.

***KIO/KIA : Kachin Independence Organization/Kachin Independence Army.*** Created in 1961, the KIO/KIA claims to represent the struggle of the Kachin population for self-determination. KIA fields more than 10,000 soldiers operating in 10 different brigades throughout Kachin and Shan States as well as Sagaing Division.

## Source Information

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This product represents highlights from a comprehensive review of Myanmar and English language print, electronic, and social media as well as information obtained from sources in law enforcement, government, diplomatic missions, the United Nations, international NGOs and other Exera partners active in the region. Supplementary research is conducted by Exera investigators and analysts.

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