

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 24

Selected article: *The Role of Muslims in Burma's Democracy Movement*

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B. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Vocabulary Links

In groups look at the following words. From the words try and guess what the article this month will be about:

minority Muslims support discrimination protests Burma

Activity 2 K-W-L Chart

Copy the chart that your teacher gives you into your books.

Fill out the K and W parts of this chart.

K-What you **KNOW** about Muslims and Muslims in Burma and

W-What you **WANT** to learn about Muslims and Muslims in Burma.

Do not fill in the L part until after this lesson has been completed.

Activity 3 True or False?

Answer true or false to the following questions about Islam (Islam is the name of the religion of Muslims).

1. There are about 2 million Muslims in the world.
2. The Holy Book of the Muslims is called the Koran.
3. A prophet called Mohammed was the founder of Islam.
4. Muslims should pray 3 times a day.
5. 'Allah' is an Arabic word that means God.
6. Muslim women cover their heads because their God said that they should dress modestly.
7. Saudi Arabia is the most populous Muslim country in the world.

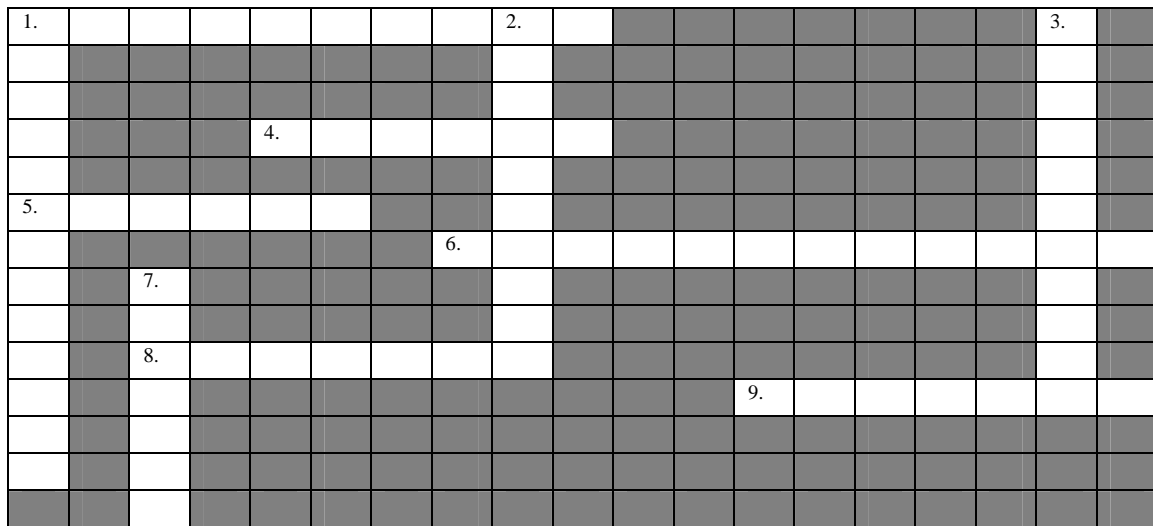
B. Activities during reading

Activity 4 CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Fill in the crossword puzzle below with the following words. Look at the paragraph the word comes from to try and guess the meaning from its context.

huddled (paragraph 7)
derogatory (paragraph 9)
repercussion(s) (paragraph 9)
resilience (paragraph 10)

inciting (incite) (paragraph 12)
 detain (ed) (paragraph 12)
 commemorate (paragraph 16)
 despise (paragraph 18)
 related (paragraph 19)
 discriminate (paragraph 19)



ACROSS

- 1. rude, unpleasant
- 4. to keep in prison
- 5. to encourage, to stir up action
- 6. consequence; effect of some action
- 8. to hate; to dislike intensely
- 9. connected to

DOWN

- 1. to treat or consider people differently because of their religion, colour, gender, etc.
- 2. the ability to survive in difficult situations
- 3. to remember by a ceremony
- 7. crowded together (usually in secrecy or in fear).

Activity 5 Phrases in context

Choose the word or phrase that means the same as the underlined phrase from the article.

- 1. against the Muslim community as a whole (paragraph 9)
 - a. all parts of the community
 - b. only the adult community
 - c. large population
 - d. only the religious community

2. They were standing up for the rights of all the people of Burma (paragraph 10)
 - a. waiting in a long line
 - b. defending; supporting
 - c. interested in
 - d. ignoring

3. They risked their own lives on behalf of others (paragraph 11)
 - a. with other people
 - b. against other people
 - c. only a little bit
 - d. for other people

4. Seven monks were charged with inciting state unrest (paragraph 12)
 - a. used force
 - b. had to pay money
 - c. were officially accused of a crime
 - d. ran forcefully

5. Muslims have long played a leading role in Burma’s democracy movement (paragraph 14)
 - a. been very involved in; been active
 - b. been the stars of a film
 - c. pretended
 - d. played games

Activity 6 Comprehension

a) Answer these questions. Write a short answer.

1. Who is Pan Cha?
2. What is the USDA?
3. What were the “Kala Burma Adigayone”?
4. Who was Abdul Razak (U Razak)?
5. How does Tha Shwe feel about Muslims?

b) Answer these questions. Write a longer answer.

1. Why did Pan Cha go to the Thai-Burma border?
2. Give examples of two ways in which the Muslims supported the demonstrators?
3. Give examples of two kinds of discrimination against Muslims in Burma.
4. How did the Chinese in Burma react to the recent protests there?
5. What happened to the Muslims who protested in Burma?

Activity 7 Race to Write

Follow your teacher’s instructions

A. Activities after reading

Activity 8

K-W-L

Complete the L part of the K-W-L chart (What I Have Learned) about Muslims and Muslims in Burma

Activity 9

Discussion

Discrimination.

What different kinds of discrimination can you think of?

What kinds of things do you think cause discrimination?

Can you think of any examples of discrimination in your own community?

Is discrimination a bad thing for a society? Why/Why not?

How do you think the problems of discrimination can be solved?

Activity 10

Role-play

Get in groups of 4 or 5.

Write a 5 minute role-play about anything related to discrimination.

Perform your role-play to the class.

Discuss each role play.

The Irrawaddy Online Edition

The Role of Muslims in Burma's Democracy Movement

by Shah Paung

November 12, 2007

Although the September protests in Rangoon were led by Buddhist monks, Burmese Muslims were among the first to offer water to the monks as a means of showing support for the peaceful demonstrations.

"I saw some Muslims kneel down and pay respect to the Buddhist monks," said Pan Cha, a Burmese Sikh businessman who arrived at the Thai-Burmese border in early October after being involved in the September demonstrations.

Over a month since the junta cracked down violently on the monks and their supporters in the streets of Burma, Pan Cha forcefully said in an interview with *The Irrawaddy* that "The Burmese people are not afraid—nationwide demonstrations are coming back again soon!"

"I came here [to the border] just to escape for a while and tell the truth about what happened in Burma to the international media," he said. "After, I will go back to Burma."

In the context of the pro-democracy movement in Burma, it is important to remember the role of Burmese Muslims.

According to residents and journalists who were at the demonstrations, many Muslims supported and participated in the protests and were badly beaten by Burmese security forces.

In a video clip seen around the world, soldiers beat and kick a young Muslim man who is huddled on the ground. They club him with batons and kick him brutally.

Pan Cha, who helped organize security for the demonstrations, said that a top Burmese minister ordered pro-junta group, the Union Solidarity and Development Association, to beat any Muslim in sight at the demonstrations, because Muslims were never USDA members.

He went on to say that when they first saw Buddhist monks demonstrating on September 18, many Muslims wanted to support the monks, but were worried about repercussions against the Muslim community as a whole. They feared it would cause more Kala Burma Adigayone (Muslim - Buddhist riots) and create problems for all Muslims in Burma (Kala is a derogatory name for Muslims and Indians in Burmese).

Inspired by the resilience of many Muslims in Rangoon, Pan Cha began encouraging them not to fear the government, telling them that they were standing up for the rights of all the people of Burma. On September 19, many Muslims joined in the demonstrations after their prayers and supported the monks by offering water, betel nut and fresh towels.

Some wealthy Muslims supported demonstrators by providing mobile phones to make communications between the protesters easier. Some who were car owners blocked the military trucks that were carrying arrested demonstrators and tried to help them escape when the army convoys stopped. They risked their own lives on behalf of others.

According to the 88 Generation Students group, at least seven Muslims in Rangoon were charged with inciting state unrest by supporting the monk-led demonstrations. They are currently being detained in Pabedan Township in Rangoon.

Pan Cha also confirmed that before he left Burma on October 4, he knew of about 30 Muslims who had been hospitalized from being beaten during the street protests. More than 100 Muslims were still being detained, he said.

Muslims have long played a leading role in Burma's democracy movement, even dating back to before Burmese independence.

All scholars of Burmese history know the story of Abdul Razak. Better known as U Razak, he was the Muslim headmaster of Mandalay Central National High School and became Minister of Education and National Planning in Burma's pre-independence government. He was also a leader of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League in Mandalay.

He lost his life at aged 49, when he was gunned down by assassins on July 19, 1947, together with Burmese independence leader Gen Aung San and seven other cabinet members and colleagues. The day is now commemorated annually in the country as "Martyrs' Day."

As a minority group, Muslims in Burma regularly suffer from social and religion discrimination. The Burmese government regularly encourages ultra-nationalism and uses religion as a political tool. The Burmese government will not grant citizenship to Muslims and, to all intensive purposes, do not recognize Muslims as being Burmese.

The junta's top leader, Snr Gen Than Shwe, is known to despise Muslims and Chinese people who live in Burma. However, most Chinese in Burma are business people and were not directly involved in the September uprising. In Mandalay, home to thousands of Chinese immigrants, most doors remained closed during the protests, a sign that the ethnic Chinese were not in support of the demonstrators. The Muslim minority, on the other hand, played an active part in the pro-democracy demonstrations, just as they have throughout the country's troubled recent history.

"We cannot say that the demonstrations were not related to Muslims just because they were led by Buddhist monks," Pan Cha concludes. "We were all born and live in Burma and should not discriminate among each other. We must work together toward democracy."

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