

# Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 24

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

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## TEACHER'S GUIDE

Here is the twenty-fourth issue of 'Learning with the Irrawaddy', a monthly educational supplement to the Irrawaddy Magazine. It is designed for reading/writing, English or social studies classes in Post-10 schools and adult education classes. You can teach this to learners with good pre-intermediate or intermediate English.

In this issue we have included:

- ★ this teacher's guide
- ★ some copies of the Irrawaddy magazine
- ★ a class set of photocopies of the article
- ★ a class set of worksheets.

### A. Activities before reading

#### Activity 1 Vocabulary Links

Before handing out the article to the learners, write the following words on the board: "*minority, Muslims, support, discrimination, protests, Burma*".

Put learners in groups of 4 or 5. Have them try and guess what the content of the article will be about.

#### Activity 2 K-W-L

Draw the following chart on the board and have the learners copy it into their notebooks. First have the learners fill in the **K** part of the chart-what they know about Muslims, and particularly Muslims in Burma. After about 5 minutes elicit from the class what the learners have written under K-write this on the board. Repeat this with the **W** part of the chart-what they want to know about Muslims and Muslims in Burma. Stop at this point. The **L** part of the chart will be filled in when the lesson has been completed.

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>
What I <i>Know</i>	What I <i>Want To Learn</i>	What I <i>Have Learned</i>

### **Activity 3** True or False

1. False. There are approximately 1.3 billion Muslims in the world.
2. True
3. True
4. False. Muslims pray 5 times a day.
5. True
6. True
7. False. Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world.

## **B. Activities during reading**

### **Activity 4** Crossword puzzle

**Answers:**

#### **Across**

1. derogatory
4. detain
5. incite
6. repercussion
8. despise
9. related

#### **Down**

1. discriminate
2. resilience
3. commemorate
7. huddled

### **Activity 5** Phrases in context

Learners find the example in the article, and identify the best definition or synonym of the underlined phrases.

**Answers:** 1. *a.*    2. *b.*    3. *d.*    4. *c*    5.. *a.*

### **Activity 6** Comprehension

**a)** These questions all have one clear answer, easily identifiable from the article.

1. Pan Cha is a Burmese Sikh businessman who helped organize security for the demonstrations.
2. The USDA is the “Union Solidarity and Development Association”.
3. The “Kala Burma Adigayone” were the Muslim-Buddhist riots.
4. U Razak was the Minister of Education and National Planning in Burma’s pre-independence government. He was also the leader of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League in Mandalay.
5. Than Shwe despises the Muslims who live in Burma.

**a)** These questions require longer answers, explained in learners’ own words. Check that they understand the main points in these questions and answers.

**Possible answers:**

1. Pan Cha went to the Thai-Burma border to escape for awhile and to tell the truth about what happened in Burma to the international media.

2. The Muslims offered water, betel nut and fresh towels to the monks. They also knelt down and paid respects to the Buddhist monks. Wealthy Muslims supported demonstrators by providing mobile phones and blocking the military trucks that carried the arrested demonstrators. They also tried to help the arrested demonstrators to escape.
3. The Burmese government will not grant citizenship to Muslims and do not recognize Muslims as being Burmese.
4. The Chinese in Burma were not directly involved in the demonstrations. The Chinese kept their doors closed, a sign that they were not in support of the demonstrations.
5. Muslims were brutally beaten and many were hospitalized. More than 100 Muslims were still being detained.

**Activity 8 Race to Write**

Divide the class into two teams. Write various phrases, names, dates, and words from the article on the board (For example: *Pan Cha, Kala Burma Andigone, USDA, Pabedan Township, Kala, July 19 1947, Martyrs' Day,*) Also on the board have some words, dates, etc that are not in the story. Prepare some questions that are from the article and whose answers are on the board.

Have the teams in two lines. The person at the front of the line has a marker or chalk. The teacher asks a question, such as: “What is remembered every year on July 19th?”. The first team member who circles the correct answer on the board gets a point. The team with the most points is the “winner”

**C. Activities after reading**

**Activity 9 K-W-L**

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>
<i>What I Know</i>	<i>What I Want To Learn</i>	<i>What I Have Learned</i>

Have learners take out the K-W-L chart they wrote for the pre-reading activity. Now have them fill in the L part of the chart. Come together as a whole class and fill-in the L part on the board.

**Activity 10 Discussion**

Put the following questions about discrimination on the board. Put learners in groups of 5 and have them discuss. Come back together as a whole class to compare group’s ideas.

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?

Some ideas:

Discrimination can be based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexuality, physical appearance, wealth, class, etc.

Acts of discrimination can include: name-calling, excluding someone from activities, ignoring or denying requests, physically or verbally attacking someone and treating someone unfairly in the workplace, public space or educational institution.

### **Activity 11** **Role-play**

Put the learners in groups of 4 or 5. Give them up to one hour (some groups may need more time) to discuss and write a 5 minute role-play about anything related to discrimination.

Have them perform their role-plays to the class. Get the class to discuss the main ideas in the role plays, what they liked about them, and how they might change them.

## 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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