

# Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 27

To accompany the June 2008 issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *Surviving the Storm*, pages 32-33.

## A. Activities before reading

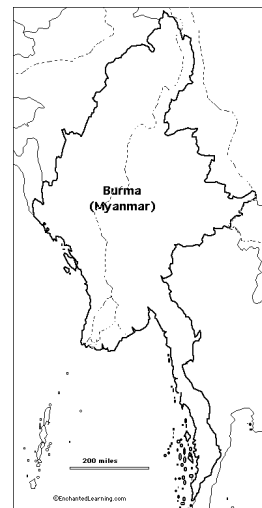
### Activity 1 Discussion

This article is about Cyclone Nargis. What is a cyclone? What do you know about Cyclone Nargis?

### Activity 2 Mapwork

What was the path of the cyclone? Which areas of Burma were most affected by it? Mark your ideas on the map on the right.

Do you know which townships were most affected by the Cyclone? Can you find them on the map?



### Activity 3 Imagination

What do you think were the effects of the cyclone? What problems do you think people now face in the affected areas?

## B. Activities during reading

### Activity 4 Match the vocabulary

a) Go through the article and underline the words you don't understand.

b) Match these words or phrases with their definitions.

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. swirl (v.)           | a. remains of broken things, rubbish                  |
| 2. swell (v.)           | b. miserable, pitiful                                 |
| 3. subside (v.)         | c. the period just after a terrible event             |
| 4. collapse (v.)        | d. to pack tightly                                    |
| 5. carcass (n.)         | e. to get bigger, become more powerful                |
| 6. debris (n.)          | f. a dead body (usually of an animal)                 |
| 7. stagger (v.)         | h. remains of a destroyed building                    |
| 8. trauma (n.)          | i. someone who gives gifts and help to people in need |
| 9. abysmal (adj.)       | j. coming in  |
| 10. aftermath (n.)      | k. to rotate, move quickly in a circle                |
| 11. level (v.)          | l. to become less powerful, flow away                 |
| 12. inundate (v.)       | m. to fall down                                       |
| 13. rubble (n.)         | n. a large group                                      |
| 14. stench (n.)         | o. to walk unsteadily                                 |
| 15. cram (v.)           | p. very bad   |
| 16. philanthropist (n.) | q. to force someone to leave a place where they live  |
| 17. horde (n.)          | r. to flatten   |
| 18. influx (n.)         | s. a bad smell  |
| 19. evict (v.)          | t. to flood   |
| 20. wretched (adj.)     | u. mental stress caused by a terrible experience      |

Note: The word 'debris' is pronounced 'debree'.

### Activity 5 Gap-fill

Fill the gaps with some of the words from Activity 4, Exercise b, using the correct tense where indicated.

1. Your homework is \_\_\_\_\_. It's the worst I've ever seen.
2. The drunk man \_\_\_\_\_ (past simple tense) down the road.
3. Many child soldiers suffer from \_\_\_\_\_ because of the terrible things they have seen.
4. Last month my landlord tried to \_\_\_\_\_ me because I couldn't pay the rent. Luckily my friend lent me some money.
5. During the hot season the \_\_\_\_\_ from the rubbish dump is disgusting. Some people wear masks over their mouth and nose because of it.
6. There was a huge earthquake in China in June. Many houses \_\_\_\_\_ (past simple tense) and left piles of \_\_\_\_\_ in the streets.
7. In the morning the bus is very full. People \_\_\_\_\_ into the back and it is very uncomfortable.
8. My uncle spends a lot of time helping people in need. He is a famous \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The SPDC attacked many villages, creating a huge \_\_\_\_\_ of refugees to the camp.
10. My brother killed the pig, cut up the \_\_\_\_\_ and gave everyone a piece of meat.

### Activity 6 Phrases in context

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

1. Suddenly the roof was **blown clean off** the farmhouse. (paragraph 3)
  - a. cleaned by
  - b. completely removed from
  - c. completely destroyed by
  - d. fell onto
2. While the junta **dragged its feet** on allowing in international aid... (paragraph 13)
  - a. moved fast
  - b. made mistakes
  - c. refused
  - d. moved slowly
3. ...However, the authorities **moved to impede** the efforts... (paragraph 16)
  - a. tried to slow down
  - b. improved
  - c. helped
  - d. ignored
4. ...Army trucks were filled with **wretched souls**... (paragraph 19)
  - a. rotten fish
  - b. miserable people
  - c. broken shoes
  - d. dead animals

### **Activity 7 True or False**

Have a look at the following statements about the text. Are they true or false? If they are false, provide a correct statement.

1. Kyin Hla knew that the storm was coming.
2. Kyin Hla didn't eat for four days after the cyclone.
3. Many cyclone survivors took shelter in Buddhist monasteries, schools and public buildings.
4. The military authorities helped private donors to give aid to cyclone victims.
5. The government refugee camps only provided help for a small number of victims.
6. Soon after the cyclone, the military authorities ordered rural survivors to return to the location of their villages.
7. It is easy for Khin Mya to find shelter in Maubin.
8. There were only twelve cyclone survivors from Pain Nai Kone village.

### **Activity 8 Comprehension**

Answer these questions. In some cases the answers may not be given clearly in the text.

1. How did Kyin Hla survive the tidal wave?
2. After the cyclone, why did many farmers decide to leave their villages and go to the nearest town?
3. How did twelve year old Lei Lei try to get food?
4. What did the military government mean when it said in the media that helping cyclone survivors would 'make them lazy'?
5. What were the conditions like in the monasteries, schools and other buildings where the cyclone survivors sheltered?
6. What reason did the government give for evicting rural survivors from the towns?
7. What did the authorities give cyclone victims in western Rangoon when they told them to leave the refugee camp?
8. What is the situation like for people who have returned to their villages.

### **Activity 9 Identifying problems and difficulties**

Make a list of the problems and difficulties faced by the cyclone survivors in the text. How long do you think it will take to resolve these different problems and difficulties?

## **C. Activities after reading**

### **Activity 10 Discussion**

Since the cyclone, the military government of Burma has refused to accept a lot of international aid. Their arguments are:

- 1) The government has enough resources to solve the problems. Burma doesn't need help from outside.
- 2) The Burmese people can look after themselves. It is not good for them to become dependent on outside help.
- 3) Many of the foreign countries and organisations offering aid cannot be trusted. Their offers of help have conditions attached which are unacceptable to Burma. They want to interfere in Burma's politics.

Do you agree with these arguments? Why / Why not?

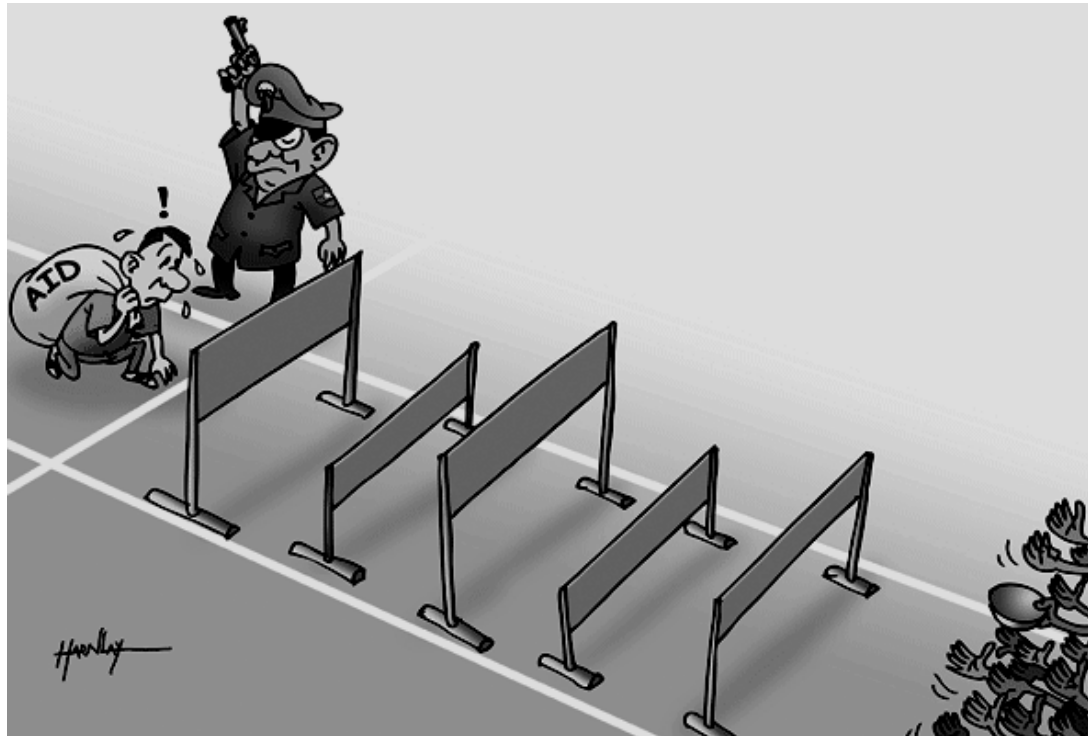
**Activity 11** **Roleplay**

The military government of Burma has impeded the delivery of international aid to cyclone victims. How do you think the international community should respond to this?

Imagine that you are advisors to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. What advice/recommendations would you give him on how to deal with this problem?

**Activity 12** **Cartoon analysis**

Have a look at the cartoon below by Harn Lay from the Irrawaddy. It is called 'The Race to Save Lives'. What do you think it is trying to say about Cyclone Nargis and the military government of Burma?



**Activity 13** **Create a cartoon or poster**

Create a cartoon or a poster about an issue related to Cyclone Nargis. You don't have to be a good artist – a simple drawing with a strong message is enough.

# THE IRRAWADDY

Covering Burma and Southeast Asia

COVER STORY

## Surviving the Storm

JUNE, 2008 - VOLUME 16 NO.6

### ***Bloodied, traumatized and heartbroken, the survivors of Cyclone Nargis are now victimized and treated with contempt by the military authorities***

1 KYIN Hla suddenly stopped doing her household chores at 11:20 on the morning of May 2. The wind had started swirling fiercely and from her farmhouse window she saw the sea swell and turn black. The 65-year-old woman called to her grandchildren to stop playing and come indoors. She closed the windows.



2 A young girl waits for food in the rain on the outskirts of Rangoon.  
3 (Photo: AFP)

By midday the sky had turned “an angry red color” and dark clouds had gathered overhead. Instinctively alarmed, Kyin Hla drew her grandchildren closer and began praying.

The house began shaking violently. The noise outside grew louder and louder. Suddenly the roof was blown clean off the farmhouse, then the walls were pulled down one by one.

4 She managed to hold on until the tidal wave struck at 1 p.m. The force ripped her grandchildren from her arms. She remembers one child screaming “Grandmother!” as they were swept away.

5 The wave carried Kyin Hla into a tree. With the last of her strength she grabbed the branches and held on until the wave subsided. Then she collapsed.

6 When she woke up, she was surrounded by dead bodies, animal carcasses and debris. Her clothes had been ripped off, and she had to take a *longyi* from a dead woman to cover herself.

7 Her village had been destroyed. She staggered around until she met some other survivors who gave her some coconut. That was her only food for the next four days until she managed to get to a shelter in Laputta.

8 Kyin Hla was reunited with three of her sons, but 12 members of the family had died, including all her grandchildren.

9 Apart from the trauma of experiencing such a terrifying natural disaster and the heartbreak of losing their loved ones, Cyclone Nargis survivors have had to endure abysmal conditions in the aftermath of the storm. Thousands of children were orphaned and thousands of people were injured or have since died from disease.

10 The majority of the 2.4 million people in the Irrawaddy delta directly affected by the cyclone were farmers whose livelihoods depend on agriculture, especially rice cultivation, and livestock to work the fields.

11 With their homes leveled, their rice paddies inundated with seawater, their livestock dead and their villages reduced to rubble, most rural survivors had no choice but to leave behind the stench of death and walk or be carried to the nearest town.

12 Thousands gathered in Buddhist monasteries where monks fed and sheltered them. Others crammed into schoolhouses or public buildings. There was seldom any electricity or medical help, or enough fresh water, food or sanitation. Many families were lucky to receive a daily ration of one tin of rice.

13 While the junta dragged its feet on allowing in international aid, private Burmese philanthropists attempted to come to the rescue. Burmese celebrities, such as comedians Zarganar and the Moustache Brothers, and the actor Kyaw Thu joined local NGO efforts to deliver supplies to cyclone survivors.

14 Many private donors packed their vehicles with small makeshift aid packages and drove to the delta to hand them out.

15 In Bogalay, some three weeks after the cyclone had killed her father, 12-year-old Lei Lei was still begging for handouts at the side of the highway. She had her baby sister tied on her back in a *longyi* and was competing with hordes of other cyclone victims for packages of food occasionally thrown from of passing vehicles by private donors.

16 However, the authorities moved to impede the effort, preventing aid donors from entering the delta or asking them for bribes at each checkpoint. Through the media, the junta went so far as to warn the public against helping the survivors, saying it would “make them lazy.”

17 Apart from those refugees sheltering at a handful of showcase camps—set up methodically as photo-op backdrops for the Burmese generals, international dignitaries and the media—most survivors had still not received any aid three weeks after the disaster.

18 Then, when it seemed things couldn't get any worse, the military authorities ordered rural survivors to return to their villages. The government argued that towns such as Laputta and Bogalay were overcrowded and could not support the influx of refugees from the countryside.

Overnight, thousands of refuge-seekers were evicted from the monasteries, schools and shelters.

[19] Army trucks were filled with wretched souls who were driven to the approximate location where their villages once stood and dumped by the roadside.

In the cyclone-hit western suburbs of Rangoon, similar incidents took place. A cyclone victim evicted from the Shwe Pauk Kan refugee camp told *The Irrawaddy*: “The authorities gave each [20] refugee 10 *pyi* of rice (about 2.5 liters) and 7,000 kyat (US \$6.22). Then they took back the tents and told us to leave.”

In Maubin, homeless 93-year-old Khin Mya showed *The Irrawaddy* her only shelter—an [21] umbrella and a plastic bag. “I get very worried every evening because I have to find a place to sleep,” she told our reporter. “Maybe under a tree. Or I ask if I can share a hut with someone.”

Many of the cyclone survivors—who have suffered so much already—are back in the rubble of [22] their villages. With few exceptions, they have no food, no water, no medicine and no livelihoods. All they have are horrific memories of death and destruction, and the struggle to stay alive.

[23] As the monsoon season unleashes itself on the delta this month, and the survivors try to rebuild their broken lives, one wonders where they will find the strength to face the future.

[24] In a muddy rice paddy in Laputta, 12 people were crammed into a single tent. They were the only survivors from the village of Pain Nae Kone.

[25] “We are from the same place, so we are together,” said U Nyo, one of the survivors, his eyes red from tears and fatigue. “We are one family now.”

*Correspondents Aung Thet Wine, Min Khet Maung and Moe Aung Tin contributed to this story from Rangoon and the Irrawaddy delta.*

Copyright © 2008 Irrawaddy Publishing Group | [www.irrawaddy.org](http://www.irrawaddy.org)