

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 31

To accompany the **October 2008** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *Time to Embrace the Truth.*

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Discussion

This is the *editorial* of this issue of the Irrawaddy Magazine.

- a) Who writes the editorial?
- b) What is in an editorial?

Activity 2 Brainstorm

The title of this Editorial is 'Time to Embrace the Truth'. What do you think this means?

B. Activities during reading

Activity 3 Match the vocabulary

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

b) Match these words with their definitions.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. restricted (<i>adj</i>) | a. difficult experience |
| 2. confined (<i>adj</i>) | b. to keep things away |
| 3. ordeal (<i>n</i>) | c. kept in one place |
| 4. integrity (<i>n</i>) | d. results |
| 5. mentor (<i>n</i>) | e. very important |
| 6. incarceration (<i>n</i>) | f. not allowed to do many things |
| 7. deflect (<i>v</i>) | h. only |
| 8. critical (<i>adj</i>) | i. innocently |
| 9. scrutiny (<i>n</i>) | j. imprisonment |
| 10. headway (<i>n</i>) | k. attention |
| 11. naively (<i>adv</i>) | l. honesty and reliability |
| 12. sole (<i>adj</i>) | m. progress |
| 13. consequences (<i>n</i>) | n. a person who guides your actions |

Activity 4 Gap-fill

Fill the gaps with some of the words from Activity 3, Exercise b.

1. Burma is not making any _____ towards democracy,
2. After the accident, it was _____ that we got the injured people to a hospital.
3. The _____ of his drinking were liver disease and kidney failure.
4. My maths teacher was my _____ when I was a child. I wanted be just like her.
5. Aung San Suu Kyi's ongoing _____ is an issue for the democracy movement.
6. Some people _____ thought the junta would step down after the 1990 election.
7. The media is _____ in Burma. They are not allowed to print everything.
8. He was the _____ survivor of the accident. Everyone else was killed.

Activity 5 Phrases in Context

Match the underlined phrases with the phrases with the most similar meaning.

- ...qualities these two champions of democracy share in equal measure. (paragraph 3)
 - divide everything equally
 - calculate how big it is
 - have the same amount of
 - are respected for
- ...Win Tin was Suu Kyi's "puppet master". (paragraph 4)
 - toy supplier
 - actor
 - chairperson
 - controller
- His wholehearted engagement in the pro-democracy struggle. (paragraph 5)
 - total commitment
 - happy romance
 - important dialogue
 - loving kindness
- ...Gambari is the victim of a capricious regime, which has treated him like a whipping boy. (paragraph 8)
 - person you can blame
 - person you consider too young
 - person you punish
 - unskilled fighter
- ...that a "humanitarian space" has opened up in the country... (paragraph 11)
 - place you can keep people
 - place you can do aid work
 - place for armed conflict
 - place for space exploration
- ...UN agencies and regime apologists claiming that this presents a window of opportunity for the 2010 election. (paragraph 11)
 - people who are sorry for the regime
 - people who dislike the regime
 - people who are part of the regime.
 - people who say the regime is doing a good job

Activity 6 True or false?

Are these statements true or false? If false, explain how you know they are false, and what the editor means to say.

According to the editor...

- Suu Kyi might be released soon, because Win Tin was released.
- The regime thought Win Tin controlled Suu Kyi.
- The regime released Win Tin because they want a peaceful, modern, democratic nation.
- Gambari has been treated badly by the regime.
- Because of Cyclone Nargis, many government officials want change.
- The Tripartite Core Group are experts.
- The junta should make the political 'road map' process quicker.
- People want the UN and international community to have dialogue with the generals.

Activity 7 Fact, opinion or hypothesis?

A hypothesis (*plural – hypotheses*) is a statement that might be true, but hasn't been tested yet, e.g. *Dinosaurs became extinct because a meteor hit the earth*. This is a hypothesis, because nobody has proven that it is true or false yet. Another example might be *Educating people about malaria reduces the number of malaria deaths*. We can test this by educating people about malaria and looking at how many people die from it.

Look at the statements. Are they facts, opinions or hypotheses? Some statements have some parts underlined. Are the underlined parts fact, opinion or hypothesis?

1. Suu Kyi has described Win Tin as a “man of courage and integrity” - qualities these two champions of democracy share in equal measure. (paragraph 3)
2. He has rejected any suggestion that he was her mentor or the chief strategist of her party. (paragraph 4)
3. Its true purpose, however, was clearly to deflect international criticism at a critical time. (paragraph 6)
4. There was talk of a return to Burma by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, whose missions so far have achieved virtually nothing. (paragraph 7)
5. It’s still far from clear, however, whether relief efforts being conducted by the Tripartite Core Group... are making any significant headway. (paragraph 7)
6. The US, the UN and INGOs were also accused by the minister of pushing Burma to the top of their agendas. (paragraph 14)
7. Under the brutal totalitarianism of Burma, telling the truth requires great courage and brings fearful consequences. (paragraph 16)
8. The release of Win Tin and a handful of other political prisoners is welcome news, but it isn’t going to change the image of the Burmese regime while Suu Kyi, Nilar Thein and more than 2,000 other pro-democracy activists remain confined. (paragraph 18)

C. Activities after reading

Activity 8 Word families

Complete the chart with other parts of these word families.

noun	verb	adjective	adverb	person
release	release	X	X	X
			X	prisoner
suggestion			X	X
				detainee
X		international		
ineffectiveness	X			X
	X		naively	X
				apologist
organisation			X	
		fearful		X
		inclusive		X
	believe			

Activity 9 Main message

What is ‘the truth’ that the editor wants people to embrace? What is the main point of this editorial?

Time to Embrace the Truth

1

The release last month of Burma's longest-serving political prisoner, 79-year-old journalist Win Tin, must have briefly brightened up the restricted life of Aung San Suu Kyi, confined to her home for more than 13 of the past 19 years.

2

But, while more than 2,000 political prisoners remain behind bars, Win Tin's newly won freedom is unlikely to have given her much hope that her ordeal would also soon be over.

3

Suu Kyi has described Win Tin as a "man of courage and integrity"—qualities these two champions of democracy share in equal measure.

4

In the eyes of Burma's military regime, Win Tin was Suu Kyi's "puppet master," although he has rejected any suggestion that he was her mentor or the chief strategist of her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD).

5

His wholehearted engagement in the pro-democracy struggle, however, earned him 19 years of incarceration in Rangoon's infamous Insein Prison, which ended on September 23 when he was freed along with at least seven other political detainees in an amnesty cynically described by the state media as an act of "loving kindness."

6

The regime said the amnesty—which also gave freedom to nearly 9,000 convicted criminals—was part of its plan for a "peaceful modern discipline-flourishing democratic nation." Its true purpose, however, was clearly to deflect international criticism at a critical time, as the country marked the first anniversary of the September 2007 uprising and as the spotlight again fell on Burma at a UN General Assembly session.

7

The UN record on Burma also came under scrutiny, as the UN's "Group of Friends of Burma," which includes the US, the EU, China and Southeast Asian countries, again called on the junta to release all its political prisoners and open talks with the opposition. There was talk of a return to Burma by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's special envoy, Ibrahim Gambari, whose missions so far have achieved virtually nothing.

8

For all his ineffectiveness, Gambari is the victim of a capricious regime, which has treated him like a whipping boy because of its outrage at what it sees as UN bias and international pressure.

9

Apart from this pressure, the impact of Cyclone Nargis has led many Burmese government officials to realize that change is long overdue.

10

It's still far from clear, however, whether relief efforts being conducted by the Tripartite Core Group, consisting of representatives of the UN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Burmese junta, are making any significant headway.

- 11 The group's so-called experts, handling aid money from international donors, have naively come to believe that a "humanitarian space" has opened up in the country—with some international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), UN agencies and regime apologists claiming that this presents a window of opportunity for the 2010 election.
- 12 The regime view of this is contained in the minutes of a briefing Home Affairs Minister Maung Oo received from Than Shwe in July, in which the UN and INGOs were described as "puppets" of the US and the CIA.
- 13 Maung Oo accused the relief organizations of providing aid to the victims "just for show," alleging that they spent humanitarian aid money on themselves and not, through regime channels, on the cyclone victims.
- 14 The US, the UN and INGOs were also accused by the minister of pushing Burma to the top of their agendas.
- 15 If a "humanitarian space" has been opened up in the Irrawaddy delta it can be closed at any time because the regime retains the sole power to do so, at any time it chooses.
- 16 It's the same power that enables the regime to suppress the truth and imprison those who venture to speak out. Under the brutal totalitarianism of Burma, telling the truth requires great courage and brings fearful consequences.
- 17 Win Tin and Suu Kyi are victims of this perverse power. So is the activist Nilar Thein, who was hunted for more than a year, separated from her infant daughter, before being found and jailed, like her husband, for her role in the September 2007 uprising.
- 18 The release of Win Tin and a handful of other political prisoners is welcome news, but it isn't going to change the image of the Burmese regime while Suu Kyi, Nilar Thein and more than 2,000 other pro-democracy activists remain confined.
- 19 If Burma's generals want to show the world that they are sincerely interested in improving the country's repressive political climate, they should set a timeframe for the release of all these prisoners. They should also make their seven-step political "road map" more inclusive, giving freedom to all political stakeholders to participate in the process and sharing power with opposition forces who were elected in the 1990 election.
- 20 No one expects that to happen anytime soon. But there is a general belief that it's time for the UN and the international community to push the generals to accept the words of Win Tin: "We have always believed in solving problems through democratic dialogue."