

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 33

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

Selected article: *Heroes of the Cyclone*

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Discussion

The title of the article is “Heroes of the Cyclone.” What do you think this article is about? What does the word ‘hero’ mean? Who do you think are the heroes of the cyclone?

B. Activities during reading

Activity 2 Match the vocabulary

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

b) Match these words with their definitions.

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|-----------------------|--|
| 1. significant (adj.) | a. not enough |
| 2. negligence (n.) | b. important |
| 3. inadequate (adj.) | c. someone who disagrees with a government |
| 4. dissident (n.) | d. making problems for someone |
| 5. dimension (n.) | e. supplies, means |
| 6. en route (adv.) | f. mission |
| 7. divert (v.) | g. carelessness, failure to act properly |
| 8. expand (v.) | h. to give out |
| 9. harassment (n.) | i. on the way |
| 10. operation (n.) | j. to change the direction of something |
| 11. distribute (v.) | k. part, factor |
| 12. resources (n.) | l. increase in size |

Activity 3 Gap-fill

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

1. People should not have to suffer _____ by the police.
2. The supplies were delayed because the trucks got stuck in the mud _____.
3. Ban Ki-Moon’s visit was _____ because it helped to allow aid workers into Burma.
4. The government was accused of _____ because they did not help the people.
5. Many people are hungry because their food supplies are _____.
6. The government imprisoned the _____ because she argued against their policies.
7. Now that we have more money we can _____ our school.
8. The dam was built to _____ the water onto the rice fields.
9. The _____ was completed successfully without any problems.
10. When he killed his goat, Kyaw Kyaw _____ pieces of meat to his family.

Activity 4 True or false?

Are these statements true or false? If false, explain how you know they are false.

1. Only international NGO's helped the victims of the cyclone.
2. The Burmese government immediately agreed to allow foreign aid workers into Burma to help.
3. Both Zarganar and Zaw Thet Htwe were imprisoned for distributing aid to cyclone victims.
4. The Tripartite Core Group consists of the UN, ASEAN and the Burmese regime.
5. Ban Ki-Moon's visit to Naypyidaw didn't achieve anything.

Activity 5 Phrases in context

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

1. *The volunteers came **from every walk of life**...* (Paragraph 2)
 - a. on foot
 - b. a long way
 - c. from many different backgrounds
 - d. slowly
2. *Their efforts **earned them no official recognition**...* (Paragraph 4)
 - a. made them a lot of money
 - b. were ignored by the government
 - c. made them no money
 - d. were supported by the government
3. *...aid workers gathered in neighbouring Thailand, waiting for **a green light** to enter Burma...* (Paragraph 8)
 - a. a torch
 - b. a good moment
 - c. money
 - d. permission
4. *Finally, **under the auspices of** the Tripartite Core Group...* (Paragraph 11)
 - a. in disagreement with
 - b. paid by
 - c. with the support and guidance of
 - d. in agreement with

Activity 6 People and organisations

This article is divided into two main categories, **people and NGO's (organisations)**

List 2-3 names mentioned in the article for each category and explain why they were important in this article.

C. Activities after reading

Activity 7 Discussion

In this article we read about people and organizations that were stopped and sometimes imprisoned for trying to help. Why do you think the Burmese government did this?

Activity 8 **Discussion**

“The volunteers came from every walk of life, monks, business people, ordinary citizens, celebrities, intellectuals, dissidents and members of religious charities.” (Paragraph 2)

Why do you think this was important for the relief effort?

Activity 9 **Roleplay**

Follow your teacher’s instructions.

THE IRRAWADDY

Covering Burma and Southeast Asia

COVER STORY

Heroes of the Cyclone

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MANY Burmese individuals risked harassment, arrest and imprisonment by joining the operation to bring relief to the victims of Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. Their involvement was a significant factor in helping to make up for the criminal negligence displayed by the regime in providing inadequate aid for the more than 2 million victims of the disaster. 1



Ashin Nyanissara (Illustration: Harn Lay/The Irrawaddy)

The volunteers came from every walk of life—monks, business people, ordinary citizens, celebrities, intellectuals, dissidents and members of religious charities. 2

One leading monk, **Ashin Nyanissara**, also known as Sitagu Sayadaw, organized relief supplies, including shelters and mobile clinics, for more than 1,300 monasteries and about 900 villages in six townships. 3

Burma's best-known comedian, **Zarganar**, assisted by **Zaw Thet Htwe**, set up a group of about 400 volunteers who traveled through the cyclone-devastated region, distributing aid. Their efforts earned them no official recognition—only arrest and imprisonment. Zarganar was sentenced to 59 years in prison, and Zaw Thet Htwe was given a 19-year sentence. 4

Ohn Kyaing of the opposition National League for Democracy was also arrested after traveling with a group of relief workers into the Irrawaddy delta. His assistant, **Aye Kyu**, gave medical treatment to victims and also provided information about the post-cyclone situation to Burmese news organizations in exile. 5

Among the charities who gave valuable help was the **Free Funeral Services Society**, which also suffered harassment from the authorities.

There was also an important international dimension to the relief effort.

For several weeks after Cyclone Nargis struck, hundreds of aid workers gathered in neighboring Thailand, waiting for a green light to enter Burma, while others made their way into the country on tourist visas, only to be turned back at military checkpoints en route to the disaster area.

Meanwhile, a handful of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) already present in the country diverted resources from established projects in a bid to provide much-needed assistance to survivors of the cyclone in the Irrawaddy delta.

It was only after UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made a high-profile visit to the junta's capital of Naypyidaw in late May that Burma's highest authorities agreed to an expanded role for foreign aid workers.



Top: Zarganar (left) and Zaw Thet Htwe
Below: Aid workers from MSF distribute rice.

delta, where 95 of its 550 community health workers were killed by Cyclone Nargis.



Buddhist monks played a crucial role in coordinating relief efforts and distributing aid in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. (Photo: AFP)

Finally, under the auspices of the Tripartite Core Group, consisting of representatives of the UN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Burmese regime, INGOs began to operate in the region on a larger scale.

A number of well-established INGOs continue to play a major role in the relief effort. **Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)**, which has been in Burma since 1992, said it planned to remain in the delta until the end of the year, while **Save the Children**, the largest INGO in the country, said that its operations would be needed for years to come.

Some INGOs, such as UK-based medical charity **Merlin**, are relatively new to Burma. Merlin has been in the country since 2004, working mainly in the Irrawaddy