

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 36

To accompany the July 2009 issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *June, the Cruellest Month*

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1

Discussion

The title of the article is “June, the Cruellest Month.”

- What do you think of when you think of June?
- What do you think other people might think of? Why?

Activity 2

Prediction

This story is about Karen people in Internally Displaced areas inside Burma. Why do you think June might be a bad month for them?

Activity 3

Prior Knowledge

What do you already know about the Karen people’s struggle against the military government? When did it start? What are some of the main events?

What do you know about Sri Lanka? Have you ever heard of the Tamil Tigers or the LTTE? Do you know why the Tigers are fighting?

B. Activities during reading

Activity 4

a) Put the following events in the right order.

- A. Sri Lankan President visits Burma
- B. DKBA takes over KNLA 7th Brigade
- C. Shangri-La Dialogue Meeting in Singapore
- D. Sri Lankan government defeats Tamil Tigers
- E. KNLA begins fighting military junta
- F. Tamil Tigers begin fighting Sri Lankan government
- G. DKBA begins offensive against KNLA

- | | |
|------|--------------------|
| I. | May 2009 |
| II. | 2 June, 2009 |
| III. | Before 1949 |
| IV. | 14 – 15 June, 2009 |
| V. | May 2009 |
| VI. | 21 June 2009 |
| VII. | Before 1976 |

b) Match each event with the time it happened. (Note: two events have the same date)

Activity 5

Match the vocabulary

- a) Read the article and underline the words and phrases you don’t understand.
- b) Match these words and phrases with their definitions.

- A. Seize
- B. Station
- C. Employ
- D. Inspire
- E. Pledge
- F. Witness

- | | |
|------|--|
| I. | To motivate or influence |
| II. | To see an event |
| III. | To place or position things somewhere |
| IV. | To put into service |
| V. | To take a hold of, or to take control over |
| VI. | To make a serious promise |

Activity 6**Gap-fill**

Fill the gaps with words from the text.

Mu Set K’Bru woke up one morning and saw the sun. The sun (a)_____her to get out of bed. She (b)_____ to be active and do something important with her day. She (c) _____ her clothes in her hands and ran out the door of her house. She went outside and waited for a bus. At the bus stop, she (d) _____ herself close to the road. There was a loud crashing sound. Mu Set K’Bru got her mobile phone out of her pocket and (e) _____ it. “I just (f)_____ a car crash!” she said.

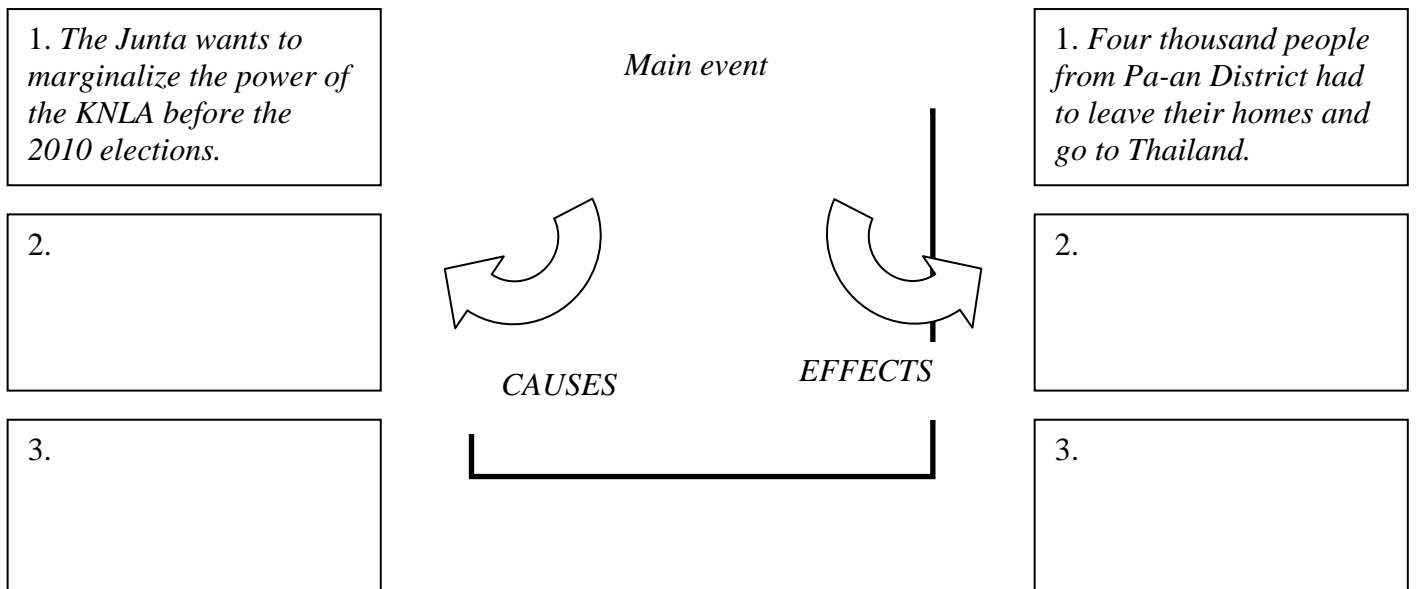
Activity 7**Main point**

The main point captures the most important part of the article in just one sentence. Pick the best main point from the choices below:

- I. The situation in Sri Lanka has influenced the situation in Burma
- II. An attack by the DKBA forced people in Karen State to flee into Thailand
- III. The KNLA has been fighting for a long time.
- IV. June is the author’s least favorite time of year.

Activity 8**Cause and effect**

This article talks about a major event in Burma: the attack of KNLA 7th brigade by DKBA forces. The article discusses several ideas about what may have caused this particular attack as well as some of the effects it had. Fill in the chart below using information from the article. An example has already been provided for you.



Can you think of any other events or reasons why this event may have happened?
 Can you think of any other effects of the attack that aren’t mentioned in the article?

Activity 9**Summarize: Table**

A summary contains all the important information in the article, in short form, using your own words. Use the table provided to fill in the important information about this article.

Who	<i>The DKBA</i>
What	
When	
Where	
Why	1. 2. 3.
Effects	1. 2. 3.

C. Activities after reading

Activity 10**Summarize: Writing**

Now use this information to write a short paragraph, in your own words about the most important things in the article. This is your article summary

Activity 11**Discussion**

The author of this article thinks that maybe the junta attacked the KNLA because it is getting ready for the 2010 elections. What do you know about the elections? What else do you think the junta might do before the elections begin?

Do you think that peace between all the groups of Burma is important before the 2010 elections? Should all groups stop military activity before the elections? Why or why not?



June, the Cruellest Month

A major push to further marginalize the Karen National Liberation Army has resulted in the fall of its last major base

1.

ON June 21, after three weeks of fighting, a joint force of Burmese army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) troops seized the headquarters of Brigade 7 of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), ending an offensive launched on June 2.

The fall of the KNLA's last major base inside Karen State was the latest blow for the ethnic insurgent army, which has been at war with Burma's rulers for more than 60 years. Fierce clashes also forced some 4,000 people in Pa-an District, including Karen villagers and internally displaced persons from a camp in Ler Per Her, to flee to Tha Song Yang in Thailand's Tak Province for safety.

3.

The Karen National Union, the KNLA's political wing, said that about 20 Burmese and DKBA troops were killed in the offensive, while the KNLA lost just five of its soldiers. However, the pro-junta force succeeded in taking not only the KNLA Brigade 7 headquarters, but also smaller bases where the brigade's Battalions 21, 22, 101 and 202 were stationed.

Maj Hla Ngwe, the secretary of the KNU's information department, said that KNLA Brigade 7 would now use guerrilla tactics similar to those employed by other brigades operating in northern Karen State.

5.

The offensive was seen as part of a push to further marginalize the KNU ahead of next year's planned election. Some analysts also suggested that it was an attempt to put pressure on Thailand for its criticism of the Burmese regime's trial of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

6.

The junta is also unhappy with Thailand for allowing family members of KNLA soldiers to take shelter on Thai soil. However, human rights groups have criticized Thailand for pushing refugees back into Burma.

7.

Burma's ruling generals were also said to be inspired by Sri Lanka's military defeat of the Tamil Tigers in May, after more than a quarter century of civil war. Sri Lankan President Mahindra Rajapakse made a two-day state visit to Burma on June 14-15, during which the two countries pledged closer cooperation on a host of issues, including anti-terrorism measures.

8.

In May, at the 8th Shangri-La Dialogue Meeting in Singapore, Burma's Deputy Defense Minister Maj-Gen Aye Myint said the world had witnessed the successful end of the conflict in Sri Lanka, but had forgotten about the insurgency in Burma.