

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 37

To accompany the **August 2009** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: *Left to rot*, page 12

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 Look at the title

The title of the article is 'Left to Rot'. Rot means to decay or break down.
The subject of the article is Rangoon. What do you think the article will focus on?

Activity 2 Prediction

Make a list of all the problems in Rangoon that you think the article will mention.

Activity 3 Describe the pictures

Look at the two pictures before reading the article. Which problems are highlighted by the pictures?

B. Activities during reading

Activity 4 List the problems

Read through the article and make a list of all the problems in Rangoon described by the writer. For example: '*The roads are in a bad condition*'.

Activity 5 Match the vocabulary

Read through the text and find the words listed below. Try to match each word with its definition. The paragraph each word appears is given in brackets after the word.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1) shatter (paragraph 1) | a) respecting the beliefs of others |
| 2) stumble (2) | b) not satisfactory, not sufficient |
| 3) collide (4) | c) observer, person watching |
| 4) onlooker (5) | d) damage or break |
| 5) sheepish (7) | e) move through |
| 6) negotiate (12) | f) people who live in the city |
| 7) inadequate (12) | g) to pay no attention |
| 8) forsaken (13) | h) crash against one another |
| 9) severe (17) | i) serious or harsh |
| 10) impassable (22) | j) abandoned |
| 11) widespread (22) | k) walk unsteadily |

- 12) city dwellers (24)
- 13) neglect (27)
- 14) hardship (31)
- 15) tolerance (31)

- l) suffering
- m) not able to be crossed or passed through
- n) spread over a large area
- o) embarrassed for doing something stupid

Activity 6 Gap-fill

The _____ went to the mayor to discuss the _____ they face everyday in Rangoon. They asked the mayor why the government had _____ them. They described how many years of _____ had created _____ and _____ problems for everyone. The people begged the mayor to show _____ and asked him to _____ with his bosses for better conditions in Rangoon. The mayor looked very _____ as he talked with the people and promised he would do something.

Activity 7 Giving Evidence

Look at the list of problems you made in Activity 5. Reread the article and provide the evidence the author uses to support each of the problems you listed. An example is given to help you.

Problem	Supporting evidence
<i>The roads are in a bad condition</i>	<i>In paragraphs 1-8 the author describes how two cars collided because they were trying to avoid holes in the road.</i>

Activity 8 Comprehension questions

- 1) Why did one of the drivers in the collision want to leave quickly?
- 2) Why was the writer not able to take a picture of the car crash?
- 3) What did one resident think would happen if there were fewer soldiers in Rangoon?
- 4) What are some of the differences between Rangoon and Naypyidaw?
- 5) What did the government promise would happen during the rainy season?
- 6) How did the people react to comments from the mayor about flooding in Rangoon?
- 7) What risk do people take when they walk on the road and not the pavement?
- 8) The government is not watching for people's safety; what is it watching for?

B. Activities after reading

Activity 9 Mayor of Rangoon 1

Imagine you are the Mayor of Rangoon, part of your job is to lie and tell important visitors that Rangoon is a modern, developed city. Next week you have to give a speech about Rangoon to some Japanese diplomats. Prepare your speech, it should be no longer than 5 minutes. Try to use some of the words in the box:

modern	invest	smooth	electricity	generator
hydropower		flooding	negotiate	adequate
develop	residents	trash		widespread

Activity 10 The people

Look at the picture of the street vendor in the article. She watched the Mayor's speech about Rangoon on MRTV. She is very angry because she knows he is lying. She decides to write a letter to the Mayor describing the real situation in Rangoon. Imagine you are the street vendor and write the letter. Use the table you wrote in Activity 7 to support the problems you write about in your letter.

Try to use some of the words in the box:

neglect	generator	negotiate	severe
hydropower	flooding	impassable	inadequate
develop	residents	trash	widespread

Activity 11 Mayor of Rangoon 2

After listening to the Mayor's speech the Japanese diplomats toured Rangoon. They were shocked to see that the Mayor was lying and that there are many problems. When they went to Naypyidaw they described their feelings to Than Shwe. He was very embarrassed and decided to sack the mayor.

You are given the job of Mayor of Rangoon and have been told by Than Shwe to fix the problems so he is not embarrassed by diplomats again. Use the first conditional to describe what you would do *if* you were the mayor of Rangoon. Write at least 5 sentences.

For example:

If I was mayor of Rangoon, I would allow people to ride bicycles in the city centre to help solve the traffic problems.

Left to Rot

By WAI SANN / RANGOON AUGUST, 2009 - VOLUME 17 NO.5

The city of Rangoon is a victim of the junta's abandonment—streets are crumbling, trash piles up, electricity is an on-off affair, sewage drains overflow and traffic lights don't work



1 A shattering sound in front of my home woke me suddenly at 6 a.m.—a car accident so early in the morning?

2 I stumbled to the window to have a look and saw two damaged cars on the empty road. How could two cars have crashed when there's no traffic?

3 I ran to the scene with my camera and my notebook. Fortunately, no one was injured.



Sidewalk vendors in Rangoon use candles so they can continue selling their wares well into the night. (Photo: Yuzo/The Irrawaddy)

4 The cars had collided in the middle of the road. Both drivers seemed embarrassed. If they had stayed in their own lanes, there would have been no accident.

5 “You asked for it,” said an elderly onlooker. “Why were you crazy guys driving in the middle of the road?”

6 “I was trying to avoid the potholes on the right side over there,” said one driver.

7 The other driver sheepishly gave a similar answer. We looked, and each driver was right. There were deep potholes on both sides of the road. So, who was to blame?

- 8 "I'm leaving before the traffic police see us," said one driver.
- 9 "Look at this road!" exclaimed my neighbor, waving her arms. "You can't even tell it's been paved. How many years has this road been ignored?"
- 10 I turned on my camera to take a picture, but the battery failed: no power. I had plugged the camera in to recharge the night before, but the electricity must have been down all night.
- 11 Since the military government moved the capital to Naypyidaw in central Burma more than three years ago, Rangoon residents have watched as their city has slowly declined ever deeper into neglect and decay.
- 12 The roads are often impossible to negotiate, electricity is inadequate—always an on-off affair—trash piles up, sewer drains are blocked and frequently overflow, and the traffic lights don't work.
- 13 "In the beginning [when the capital was moved to Naypyidaw], it seemed like our lives would get some relief from the government's tight controls," said one Rangoon resident, summing up the general mood around the commercial capital. "You know, the fewer soldiers we see here, the better, we thought. But later I realized they had forsaken Rangoon and left us in bad shape."
- 14 Everybody who visits Naypyidaw immediately notices the striking differences between this new city and Rangoon in terms of roads, buildings, drainage and access to electricity.
- 15 Roads in Naypyidaw are smooth and wide, well lit at night, electricity is always available, and there is no overflowing sewage. The capital is a model of efficiency, which in earlier times also applied to Rangoon.
- 16 Said one Rangoon resident: "The government promised that we would get a 24-hour power supply during the rainy season because the hydropower projects would have more water than in the dry season. But that promise hasn't been fulfilled yet."
- 17 With a severe electricity shortage, businesses throughout Rangoon rely on private generators for most of their working hours. Everywhere you go, you hear the droning of gasoline-powered generators.
- 18 Many homemakers adjust their cooking times based on access to electricity, some rising in the middle of the night to cook for the following day.
- 19 While households must contend with electricity blackouts, commuters and bus drivers struggle to negotiate through intersections, where most traffic lights don't work and potholes pepper the roads.
- 20 "Your eyes are the best traffic guide," said one bus driver. Even when the electricity is on, he said, it is still difficult because sometimes the signals show a red light and green light at the same time.

- 21 “We thought the rainy season would correct the severe power shortage, but so far we’re only getting flooding—not a 24-hour electricity service,” said one resident.
- 22 In the rainy season from June to October, many Rangoon roads become impassable for hours due to standing rainwater. Commuter trains, which are generally used by the poor, must frequently adjust their schedules during widespread flooding.
- 23 According to elderly residents, the former capital never experienced such widespread flooding in the past, and water and sewage pipelines always functioned properly.
- 24 Today, however, most city dwellers are resigned to a love-hate relationship with the Yangon [Rangoon] City Development Committee (YCDC), which is in charge of the city’s infrastructure.
- 25 The mayor of Rangoon, Brig-Gen Aung Thein Linn, was recently quoted by a local weekly publication as saying that it was unusual for streets in Rangoon to flood during the monsoon season. Residents simply shook their heads in disbelief.
- 26 YCDC staffers say that they are doing their best to maintain the water and sewage systems throughout the city, but that many residents do not cooperate, routinely dumping trash into the drains and gutters, clogging the water flow.
- 27 Some residents respond by saying the YCDC does its best work only in high-profile areas and neglects poor neighborhoods and suburbs, allowing utility systems to go from bad to worse.
- 28 One of the most noticeable signs of neglect are the sidewalks in Rangoon, which have fallen into such disrepair that many cannot be used by pedestrians; they walk along the streets instead, facing the risk of being struck by cars swerving from potholes.
- 29 A rise in crime has put additional stress on residents, who say the number of robberies has increased noticeably due to a lapse in security.
- 30 “Poverty is the main cause of so much crime,” said one elderly resident. “When people have no food to eat and no money to spend on their health, they’re more likely to commit crimes of theft or robbery. So, the onus is on you to keep your family safe in a poor city.”
- 31 Amid the hardships of life in Rangoon, many people are reportedly losing their tolerance of one another and becoming more guarded and fearful.
- 22 One senior citizen said it’s clear the junta has left Rangoon in worse shape, but even so it still keeps a close eye on what the people are doing and saying.
- 33 “If you don’t believe me, just go to the Shwedagon Pagoda and say this prayer out loud: ‘May Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners be healthy, happy and released soon,’” she said. “You will soon find out how closely the authorities are watching us, even though they are not watching out for our safety.”