

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 41

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Selected article: *Events of 2009*

TEACHER'S NOTES

Here is the 41st issue of 'Learning with The Irrawaddy', a monthly educational supplement to The Irrawaddy magazine. It is designed for English or social studies classes in Post-10 schools and adult education classes on the Burma border. With each issue of The Irrawaddy, we select one article and design some learning activities for it. The language level in this month's article is intermediate/upper intermediate.

NOTE: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO ALL OF THE ACTIVITIES LISTED IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE. YOU CAN CHOOSE WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE MOST APPROPRIATE DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH TIME YOU HAVE, AND THE LEVEL OF ABILITY OF YOUR LEARNERS.

In this issue we have included:

- ★ this teacher's guide
- ★ a copy of the student worksheet
- ★ A copy of The Irrawaddy magazine
- ★ a copy of the article from The Irrawaddy magazine

A. Activities before reading

Activity 1 What happened?

Brainstorm a list of things that happened in or about Burma in 2009. Under each event, get students to provide a few details, e.g.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Trial

- *American guy – John William Yettaw - swam to her house*
- *Extended house arrest*
- *Was allowed to meet with diplomats and journalists*

Activity 2 Pictures

In groups or as a class, students discuss what is happening in each picture. They should try to guess the identities of the people in the pictures.

Activity 3 Captions

Write the following on the board:

Thai authorities Rohingya General Shwe Mann Kurt Campbell
North Korean General Kim Kyok-sik memorandum Aung San Suu Kyi
Colonel Chit Thu DKBA Kokang Peng Jiasheng Obama General
Thein Sein

In groups, students use these key words to write captions for each photo.

Here are the ones from the original Irrawaddy article, but students might have different ones. The important thing is that the key information is there.

- A. *Thai authorities process Rohingya boat people apprehended in Thailand's territorial waters*
- B. *General Shwe Mann (seated at left) and his North Korean counterpart General Kim Kyok-sik sign a memorandum in November 2008.*
- C. *Kokang civilians flee the fighting in August*
- D. *Gen. Thein Sein and US diplomatic envoy Kurt Campbell*
- E. *DKBA troops pass in review*
- F. *Suu Kyi in the dock*
- G. *Peng Jiasheng*
- H. *Colonel Chit Thu*
- I. *US President Barack Obama*

B. Activities during reading

Activity 4 Introduction

Students read the introduction to the article, and match the pictures with the paragraphs.

Answers:

A. 2 B. 4 C. 2 D. 4, 5 E. 2 F. 3 G. 2 H. 2 I. 4, 5

Activity 5 Match the Vocabulary

Answers:

1. e 2. k 3. a 4. j 5. i 6. c 7. g 8. b 9. l 10. d 11. h 12. f

Activity 6 Idiomatic language

Answers:

1. a 2. b 3. c

Activity 7 Texts around the Room: Match the Summary

Stick each of the texts A-G on different parts of the wall around the classroom. Students go around skim-reading the texts and deciding which summary goes with each text.

Answers:

1. f 2. a 3. g 4. b 5. e 6. d 7. c

Activity 8 Texts around the Room: Comprehension Questions

Students work in groups of 4 or 5. Each group answers the questions and marks which text the answer comes from. The winner is the group that completes the questions first.

(Note: You might like to tell groups that they will finish faster and more efficiently if they divide the texts between all the team members)

Answers:

1. *No, he was uninvited (Text C)*
2. *Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the National Democratic Army-Kachin (Text E)*
3. *No, sanctions will remain in place (Text G)*
4. *They have to identify as Bengalis born in Burma, not as Rohingya (Text A)*
5. *General Than Shwe (Text E)*
6. *General Than Shwe (Text C)*
7. *Stopping the drugs trade, the SPDC's relationship with North Korea and getting back the remains of US soldiers from WWII whose bodies are still missing (Text G)*
8. *To look for drugs and weapons (Text F)*
9. *To look for banned weapons or materials (Text B)*
10. *No, they are building it to stop people from illegally entering Bangladesh (Text A)*
11. *In 1995 (Text D)*
12. *For the loss of property when the SPDC were attacking the Kokang (Text F)*
13. *Caves and tunnels (Text B)*
14. *He was ambushed and killed by armed men (Text D)*

C. Activities after reading

Activity 9 Roleplay – Expert Commentator

In pairs, students roleplay an interviewer interviewing a Burma expert. Give students five minutes to think of some good questions to ask. This will work best if students use opinion or inference based questions, rather than asking about the facts. You may want to put some examples up on the board:

- *Why does the SPDC not like the name 'Rohingya'?*
- *Why does Burma want to be friendly with North Korea?*

Students take turns interviewing. If you like, get students to swap partners and repeat the activity with a new interviewer and expert.

Activity 10 Prediction

In groups or as a class, students predict new developments for each situation for \ next year.

Rohingya Refugees on the High Seas

A.

The plight of Burma's minority Muslim Rohingya won wide international attention in January when it was disclosed that Thailand's navy had intercepted more than 1,000 in open boats in Thai waters and sent them back out to sea with little food or water.

A few hundred were later rescued near India's Andaman Islands and Indonesia's Aceh Province, but many others are presumed to have died at sea.

The Rohingya were taking to open boats to escape oppressive conditions in Burma's Arakan State, most hoping to reach Malaysia. Many failed to make it that far south and ended up on Thai beaches.

The Arakan Project, a Thailand-based NGO that advocates for the Rohingya, estimated in June 2008 that more than 8,000 Rohingya had reached Thai shores over the preceding two years.

Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win said the boat people would be allowed to return, but only if they identified themselves as "Bengalis" born in Burma, rather than as Rohingya.

In a bid to stop illegal border crossings, Burmese authorities are building a 200-kilometer wire fence along Burma's frontier with Bangladesh.

A Pact between Pariahs: Burma and North Korea

B.

Signs of closer ties between Burma and North Korea created unease in Washington and the capitals of Southeast Asia, as suspicions grew that the two pariah states have joined forces in a bid to thwart international sanctions against them.

Two developments added to worries that the countries are becoming a double threat to regional security.

The first was the departure of a North Korean cargo ship, the Kang Nam 1, from a port near Pyongyang on June 17. The ship—which later turned back to North Korea for no apparent reason—was believed to be heading for Burma. It was shadowed by the US Navy, which threatened to board it in accordance with a UN resolution authorizing inspections of North Korean vessels suspected of carrying banned weapons or materials.

The second was the leak of two secret documents—one detailing a trip to North Korea by Gen Thura Shwe Mann in November 2008 and another containing photos and video footage showing caves and tunnels being constructed in Burma, possibly for military purposes.

According to a memorandum of understanding signed by Shwe Mann and his North Korean counterpart, Gen Kim Kyok-sik, the two countries agreed to formalize their military cooperation. North Korea will reportedly build or supervise the construction of some Burmese military facilities, including tunnels and caves that can be used to hide missiles, aircraft and even naval ships. Burma will also receive air-defense and special-forces training, and a language-exchange program for armed forces personnel will also be established.

Before traveling to Burma in November as the head of a delegation tasked with initiating the new US policy of “direct engagement” with the Burmese junta, US Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell testified in Congressional hearings that the US wants Burma to end any prohibited military or proliferation-related cooperation with North Korea in full compliance with UN sanctions.

Courtroom Theater of the Absurd

The Burmese regime found an elaborate pretext in August for putting opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on trial and extending her house arrest. The pretext had a name – John William Yettaw, a 53-year-old American who was hauled from Rangoon’s Inya Lake after apparently swimming to and from Suu Kyi’s waterfront home, where he spent nearly two days as an uninvited visitor.

Yettaw and Suu Kyi were arraigned before a court in Insein Prison, which sentenced the American intruder to seven years imprisonment for his foolhardy venture and Suu Kyi to three years hard labor for “violating security laws.” The theatrical proceedings were given added drama by two surprise interventions – Home Affairs Minister Maung Oo entered the courtroom minutes after the judgment against Suu Kyi and announced that junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe had commuted her sentence to 18 months house arrest, while a visit to Burma by US Sen. Jim Webb succeeded in securing Yettaw’s freedom.

Yettaw returned to his family in the US, saying he intended to write a book about his Rangoon adventure. Suu Kyi also returned home – to the house that has been her prison for more than 14 of the past 20 years.

The DKBA: Bloodstained Opportunism

D.

In June, Burmese government troops and their Karen ally, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), captured three military bases from their traditional foe, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), in an offensive that forced about 4,500 Karen civilians to flee in one of the largest movements of refugees across the Thai-Burmese border in a decade.

Since separating from the Karen National Union (KNU) and signing a cease-fire agreement with the Burmese regime in 1995, the DKBA has staged daring attacks on several Karen refugee camps along the border and was implicated in the 2008 assassination of KNU leader Mahn Shah at his home in Mae Sot, Thailand, on Feb. 14, 2009. The man many observers believe to be most influential in the DKBA, Col Chit Thu, the commander of DKBA Battalion 999, reportedly ordered the most recent offensive against KNLA Brigade 7.

Chit Thu is said to be close to high-ranking members of the Burmese military and was reportedly paid well by the junta for leading the campaign.

However, reports have surfaced of internal conflicts within the DKBA as leaders vie for business concessions such as logging, mining and building factories in newly acquired areas.

Inside sources have speculated that Chit Thu may have had a role in the killing of San Pyote (aka Soe Myint), another influential DKBA commander, who was ambushed and killed by armed men in June while traveling by long-tail boat along the Moei River on the Thai-Burmese border.

Border Guard Force Proposal Sets Off Test of Wills

E.

Relations between ethnic cease-fire groups and the junta deteriorated in April when Naypyidaw ordered all cease-fire groups to transform their armies into a border guard force, to operate under the command of the Burmese army.

Burmese generals, including Lt-Gen Ye Myint, the chief of Military Affairs Security and secretary of the border guard force transformation committee, traveled to Shan and Kachin states to meet with the leaders of the Kachin, Kokang, Shan and Wa based along the Sino-Burmese border.

The general outlined a blueprint for the border guard force, making clear the plan gives control of armed ethnic groups to the commander in chief of the Tatmadaw, currently Snr-Gen Than Shwe, the chairman of the ruling junta.

The plan calls for a battalion to have 326 soldiers including 18 officers and three commanders with the rank of major. Among the three commanders, two would be from the armed ethnic group and one from the Tatmadaw, who would manage day-to-day administration.

Other key positions such as general staff and quartermaster officers would also be from the Tatmadaw, along with 27 non-commissioned officers, such as company sergeant majors, sergeants, clerks and nurses.

All ethnic troops would be mobilized only in areas within their own territory. Salary and benefits would be paid by the Tatmadaw at the same level as regular soldiers.

To date, only the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the National Democratic Army-Kachin have agreed to transform their armies into border guard forces.

In a tactic aimed at achieving compliance with the junta's plan, the regime decided to pressure the Kokang group first, citing its concern about Kokang links to illegal activities, including gambling and drug production.

Many interpreted the cease-fire groups' refusal to accept the proposal as a rejection of the 2008 Constitution.

Clause 338 in Chapter VII, "Defense Services," of the Constitution states that all the armed forces in the Union shall be under the command of the defense services, or Tatmadaw, and that it is the main armed force for the defense of the Union.

The test of wills between the regime's army and the remaining armed cease-fire groups—including the Wa with a 20,000-man army—is likely to be played out over the coming months leading up to the 2010 election.

The Kokang Conflict: The Beginning of the End for Ethnic Insurgency in Burma?

F.

About 37,000 refugees fled to the Chinese border towns of Nansan and Genma from northern Shan State in August after fighting erupted between Burmese government troops and the ethnic Kokang militia known as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

Tensions mounted on Aug. 8 when government troops raided the home of Kokang leader Peng Jiasheng (aka Phon Kyar Shin), saying they were looking for drugs and illegal weapons. Peng had reportedly fled to areas controlled by the United Wa State Army (UWSA). He released a statement urging the Burmese regime to withdraw its troops and seek a peaceful solution. In response, Burmese authorities issued an arrest warrant for Peng and his supporters and appointed defectors from MNDAA ranks as their successors.

A 20-year cease-fire was broken on Aug. 24 when the Kokang capital, Laogai, fell into government hands, albeit without a shot being fired. The MNDAA hit back with a series of ambushes but within three days most of the 700-man Kokang militia had fled to China and surrendered its arms to the Chinese army.

Many refugees—some of them Chinese citizens—complained that their homes and businesses had been sacked and looted by government troops during the clashes. Chinese authorities in Lincang, a border town in southwestern Yunnan Province, demanded 280 million yuan (US \$40 million) in compensation from the Burmese regime for loss of property incurred during the offensive.

Beijing demanded Burma protect Chinese citizens and ensure such incidents did not happen again.

US Rethinks Its Burma Policy

The new US administration of President Barack Obama embarked on a major Burma policy review in 2009 after concluding that the hard-line approach adopted under his predecessor had failed to sway the Burmese junta.

Sanctions will remain in place, while high-level engagement with Burmese leaders is to be encouraged, in line with Obama's policy of talking with countries the US regards as international pariahs.

The policy shift was signaled on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York in September, where US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that Washington would move "in the direction of both engagement and continued sanctions."

Shortly after her announcement, US officials led by Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell met in New York with a Burmese delegation headed by U Thaung, Burma's minister of science and technology, who is a former Burmese ambassador to the US. Their talks focused on ways the two sides could stem the Burmese drug trade, end Naypyidaw's military ties to North Korea and recover the remains of US servicemen who died in Burma during World War II and are listed as "missing in action."

In early November, Campbell led a fact-finding mission to Burma, holding meetings with junta officials including Prime Minister Gen Thein Sein, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic leaders. Campbell and his deputy, Scot Marciel, were the highest-ranking American officials to visit Burma since 1995, when former US Congressman Bill Richardson and then US ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright traveled to the country in a bid to push for democratic reforms.

Campbell told Burmese officials that the US was "prepared to take steps to improve the relationship but that process must be based on reciprocal and concrete efforts by the Burmese government." In late November, US-Burmese contacts took a dramatic turn when Obama attended a summit meeting of the US and leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) in Singapore. Speaking to delegates at the summit, Obama called on the junta to release Suu Kyi and all political prisoners.

In a US-Asean joint statement, participants hoped the Burmese regime

“would contribute to broad political and economic reforms” and said the 2010 election “must be conducted in a free, fair, inclusive and transparent manner in order to be credible to the international community.” The statement did not, however, mention Suu Kyi or call for the release of political prisoners—a sign of differing views between the US and Asean on how to confront the Burmese government.