

The Curriculum Project

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 48

To accompany the **October 2010** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article: **A Foregone Conclusion**

Teacher's Notes

Here is the 48th issue of 'Learning with The Irrawaddy' – a monthly educational supplement to The Irrawaddy magazine. It is designed for reading/writing, English or social studies classes in Post-10 schools and adult education classes on the Thai-Burma border. With each issue of The Irrawaddy, we select an article and design some learning activities for it. The language level of this month's article is **intermediate and above**.

NOTE: YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO ALL 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

1. Predictions

This discussion questions are designed to get your class warmed up, speaking English and thinking about the content of the article. Ask students to first discuss the questions in groups and then feedback to the class. This article is about the November 7th elections in Burma.

Foregone conclusion: an end or a result regarded as inevitable

The title of the article refers to the idea that the results of the election will not be a surprise to anyone.

2. Describe the Picture

In this activity, students guess what is happening in the picture and who the people are. This activity is designed to get the students speaking English and to encourage them to use their imaginations. It is not important if they get the answers right or wrong. This is a photo of members of the National Unity Party attending the party's 22nd anniversary in Rangoon in September

3. How much do you know?

- a) USDP: Union Solidarity and Development Party
- b) NUP: National Unity Party
- c) NDF: National Democratic Force
- d) NLD: National League for Democracy
- e) SNDP: Shan Nationalities Democratic Party
- f) SNLD: Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
- g) United DP: United Democratic Party

4. Vocabulary

Choose the meaning that best suits the words.

Answers: 1 (a), 2 (b), 3 (d), 4 (c), 5 (b), 6 (c), 7 (a), 8 (d), 9 (c), 10 (d).

B. Activities during reading

1. Reading for gist

This activity is designed to practice the skill of reading for gist/skim reading. Explain to your students that reading for gist is when you read an article quickly to understand the main idea. It is not important that you understand every single word. For this activity, you need a clock/stop watch to time the students. Depending on the level, give the class 3-5 minutes to skim read the article. When they have finished, ask them to read the statements and choose which ones they agree with. Students should do this activity on their own.

Answers: b, e and f are correct.

2. Grammar: Re-write the sentences in the correct tense.

In this section, students must rewrite the sentences in the correct tense depending on what the date is and whether or not the election has finished or is on-going.

Example:

- a) The two pro-regime parties will field three times the number of candidates representing all the remaining 35 parties.

Election is over and results are unknown: The two pro-regime parties have fielded three times the number of candidates representing all the remaining 35 parties.

Election is over and results are known: The two pro-regime parties fielded three times the number of candidates representing all the remaining 35 parties.

- b) Burma's voters go to the polls in November...

Election is over and results are unknown: have gone to the polls

Election is over and results are known: went to the polls

- c) No party will be contesting the election on anything like a national scale.

Election is over and results are unknown: has contested

Election is over and results are known: contested

- d) *Election is over and results are unknown: has competed*
Election is over and results are known: competed
- e) *Election is over and results are unknown: has fielded*
Election is over and results are known: fielded
- f) *Election is over and results are unknown: have been reserved*
Election is over and results are known: were reserved
- g) *Election is over and results are unknown: have had to fight/have fought*
Election is over and results are known: had to fight/fought

3. Vocabulary: idioms

Idioms are phrases or expressions that have hidden meanings. They can be the most confusing part of any language as they don't mean exactly what the words say.

Answers: a (3), b (1), c (4), d (2).

Ask students to write their own sentences using the idioms.

4. True or False

Answers:

- a) *F – the title suggests the results will not be a surprise at all*
- b) *T*
- c) *T*
- d) *F – Aung San Suu Kyi has called for a boycott of the elections*
- e) *F – they are competing against each other and this weakens both parties as a result.*
- f) *T*

5. Comprehension

Answers:

- a) *37*
- b) *1,150*
- c) *1,163*
- d) *163*
- e) *27 million*
- f) *3*
- g) *110*
- h) *29*

C. Activities after reading

1. Discussion

Students discuss the questions in groups and give feedback to the class. If the election results are already known by the time you do this lesson, ask students to compare the actual results with the predictions made in the article.

2. Answer the Questions

Students write answers to the questions in their own words.

3. Class Debate

Instructions:

Explain to students what a debate is – a kind of contest where you must support your argument and challenge your opponent’s argument with logical reasoning using facts and evidence. The motion for debate is ‘boycotting the elections is a good idea’.

Explain to the class that there will be two teams - one team will support the motion (be in favour of it) and one team will oppose the motion (be against it).

Grouping:

- Two teams of 4
- 1 chairperson
- Rest of class watches, asks questions at the end and decides on the winning team.

Procedure:

Give each team 10 minutes to prepare their argument. Make sure they do not write a whole speech but simply take notes – the aim of this activity is to practice free speaking, not reading a text*. The chairperson starts the debate by summarising the topic. This is followed by:

- a 3-4 minute constructive speech from each side
- two or three 2-minute rebuttals from each side turn by turn (a rebuttal is when each team gets to disagree with the other team’s argument and explain why it is wrong)
- a 3 minute concluding speech from each side
- questions from the floor – the audience can address questions to both sides after the debate.

Judging:

The audience must score each team according to the different categories on the scorecard. The team with the most points wins.

*If the students are confident enough to do the debate in English, you should encourage this. If they are not confident, they should use their own language.

A Foregone Conclusion

Burma prepares for an election where the winner is already past the finish line

Burma's voters go to the polls in November weighed down by the depressing certainty that, however they cast their ballots, the government of the country will be placed in the hands of legislators committed to the policies followed by the military regime they replace.

The regime won't even have to indulge any further in the kind of vote-rigging it's clearly been engineering in the campaign so far. The two pro-regime parties will field three times the number of candidates representing all the remaining 35 parties and are assured of large majorities in the national and regional parliaments.

Apart from the two pro-regime parties, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the National Unity Party (NUP), no party will be contesting the election on anything like a national scale.

The USDP, which grew out of the regime-supported civic movement, the Union Solidarity and Development Association, will compete for at least 1,150 of the 1,163 seats in the national and regional parliaments—a massive electoral effort made possible by easy access to regime funding.

The NUP, formerly the Burmese Socialist Programme Party and founded by Burma's late dictator Ne Win, will field candidates in 999 constituencies, hoping to win more than the 10 seats it captured in the 1990 election. Since its 1990 debacle, the NUP has been dormant, while quietly supporting the regime.

The opposition National Democratic Force (NDF), led by a group of former leaders of the now defunct National League for Democracy (NLD), will field 163 candidates, hardly enough to make more than a small dent in the USDP election assault. Lack of funding has also forced the NDF to restrict its election campaign to Rangoon Division.

Rangoon is one of 14 divisions and states where Burma's 27 million registered voters will be asked to cast ballots for candidates standing for election to three separate parliaments—the Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Parliament), Amyotha Hluttaw (Nationalities Parliament) and one of 14 regional parliaments.

The People's Parliament will have 440 seats, but 110 of them will be reserved for non-elected military representatives appointed by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Similarly, 56 of the 224 seats in the Nationalities Parliament will be reserved for the military.

Regional parliaments will have a total of 665 seats, distributed according to the size of each state and division. Twenty-nine seats will be reserved for minority ethnic groups.

Disputes between some ethnic groups over the regime's demand for them to join a proposed border guard force have complicated the election scenario, particularly in the Wa Self-Administered Division in Shan State, where the authorities have declined to designate constituencies in four townships.

Disputes between the ethnic groups and the regime have also added weight to calls for an election boycott. Detained opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose NLD was officially dissolved after failing to register for the election, has urged a boycott, although it's unclear how much support she commands.

The boycott call is a controversial issue, with even many regime critics saying it will achieve nothing because of the overwhelming strength of the USDP. Proponents argue that if a boycott resulted in a markedly low turnout it could devalue the election result—but cynics respond that the regime will juggle the figures anyway. “It worked for the 2008 constitutional referendum,” said one. “Why not for the November 2010 election?”

Another handicap facing the opposition parties is their overlapping presence in many contests. In Rangoon, for instance, candidates of the NDF and the Democratic Party (Myanmar) will compete against each other in nearly 20 constituencies, which will only serve to split the pro-democracy vote.

The fourth largest party in the November election, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), will target regional parliaments rather than the national assembly, where less than half its candidates are bidding for admittance.

The SNDP is the successor of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), which won the second highest number of seats in the 1990 election, but then fell foul of the regime—the party's chairman, Hkun Htun Oo, was among several Shan leaders sentenced to long terms of imprisonment for high treason after attending a meeting of opposition and ethnic groups in Shan State in February 2005.

Hkun Htun Oo, who is serving a 93-year prison term, is in good company—one of 2,100 disenfranchised political prisoners.

They include Suu Kyi and leaders of the 88 Generation Students movement, who were organizing themselves into a potent force for democracy until the regime crackdown of September 2007.

The overall election picture, then, is of a monolithic force representing continued authoritarian rule facing off against a splintered and seriously weakened opposition force of diverse aims and backgrounds, including ethnic parties and a handful of independent candidates.

Thein Tin Aung, the general-secretary of the United Democratic Party, who predicts that opposition parties will win no more than 150 seats, described the election in sporting terms in an interview with *The Irrawaddy*.

“Using an analogy from the Olympics, the USDP and NUP will have to fight for first and second place, for gold and silver,” he said.

The horse racing world also has a term to describe the November election contest—a “walkover,” where the result is a foregone conclusion.