

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 29

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

Selected article: *Where is the End-game Strategy?* pages 38-39

TEACHER'S NOTES

Here is the 29th 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 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 Discussion

Write the title of the article on the board, and explain the definition of 'end-game'. Students discuss what they think the article will be about. Write their ideas on the board.

Activity 2 Brainstorm

Do this either as a class or in groups. Students list the words that they think of when they think about the 1988 demonstrations. They shouldn't think of entire sentences, only words and short phrases.

B. Activities during reading

Activity 3 Guess the meanings

Students work in four groups (or eight groups if you have a large class). Each group reads a section of the article, and chooses five words that they don't know. They try to figure out or guess the meanings of these words from the context they are used in. They then check their guesses with a dictionary.

Activity 4 Match the vocabulary

- a) Give learners 5 minutes to read through the article and underline the words that they don't understand.
- b) Give learners 10-20 minutes to complete the matching exercise, using the context in the article to help them. Then elicit one answer from a different learner in turn and check agreement with the rest of the class.

Answers:

1. *intransigent* 2. *complacency* 3. *counter-offensive* 4. *reconciliation*
5. *crackdown* 6. *reschedule* 7. *aftermath* 8. *vacuum* 9. *deadlock*
10. *distinguish* 11. *evade* 12. *hardliners* 13. *activist* 14. *inclusive*
15. *mobilize* 16. *negotiate* 17. *vow* 18. *prolong* 19. *strategy*
20. *demonstration* 21. *transition*

Activity 5 Phrases in context

Students choose the correct definition for these phrases.

Answers:

1. *a* 2. *a* 3. *c* 4. *d* 5. *a*

Activity 6 True or false?

Students decide whether the statements are true or false. If false, they write a correct statement.

Possible answers:

- 1. *False. They didn't have any clear plan about how to take over and get democracy.*
- 2. *False. Aung San Suu Kyi didn't support this plan.*
- 3. *True*
- 4. *False. The ongoing protests made people tired and frustrated.*
- 5. *False. 10,000 people or more were killed.*
- 6. *True*
- 7. *True*

Activity 7 Main idea

Students identify the main idea of the article.

Answer: *c*

Activity 8 Restate the sentence

Students match the sentences that have the same meaning.

Answers: 1. *c* 2. *a* 3. *d* 4. *b*

Activity 9 Answer the questions

Individually or in pairs or groups, students answer the questions.

Possible answers:

- a. Any of the following: *provide strategic leadership, unite, use the promise of free elections as an opportunity for change, or have a plan for the transfer of power.*
- b. *That they have no 'end-game' strategy – no realistic plan to negotiate or take over power from the military.*
- c. *They both had a mass movement, but no end-game strategy.*

C. Activities after reading

Activity 10 Discussion

Students discuss these points in groups. After the discussion, groups briefly summarise their idea to the class.

Activity 11 Roleplay

In groups or as a class, students take on the roles of politicians, and have a meeting to develop a strategy to bring democracy to Burma.

GUEST COLUMN

Where's the 'End Game' Strategy?

By MIN ZIN

AUGUST, 2008 - VOLUME 16 NO.8

An activist-turned-journalist draws a lesson from the events of 1988

TWENTY years have now passed since Burma started its struggle for democracy—famously known as the “8-8-88 Movement,” a nation-wide uprising calling for the removal of military dictatorship and the restoration of democratic government. 1



Min Zin is a Burmese journalist in exile. He participated in the 1988 uprising and spent nine years in hiding.

Despite popular support for the cause and the rule of an unpopular, corrupt regime, the struggle has failed to achieve its professed goal. 2

It would be a great service and a true expression of gratitude to those who sacrificed their lives and who continue struggling against brutal dictatorship if only we could review the weakness of the movement and contribute to its victory. 3

The required attitude for looking at history with a critical assessment is to learn from, but not copy, it. Most activists, however, view the “four eights movement” as the only model for victory and continue to vow that the uprising will be repeated. 4

Sadly, this is just nostalgia, not strategy. 5

One of the central reasons for the failure of the mass uprising was that the opposition could not provide the strategic leadership to finish the “end game.” 6

When the street protests reached their highest peak in late August through September 18, the government mechanism became defunct. The opposition leadership, however, failed to take charge of the emerging power vacuum. The opposition leaders did not unify themselves to create or seize the opportunity for either regime change or a negotiated transition of power. 7

When former Prime Minister U Nu attempted to form a parallel government on September 9, 1988 and contacted diplomatic missions in Rangoon to seek recognition by foreign governments, the other opposition leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, failed to rally behind him. 8

The ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party was, nevertheless, well aware of the gravity of the challenge. 9

A special party congress, originally planned for September 12, was immediately rescheduled and 10

held on September 10 instead. The authorities decided to hold a general election under a multi-party system within three months as a clear demonstration of their counter-offensive against U Nu's strategic move.

Military commanders were allowed to relinquish their party duties. In a television address on September 12, military chief Gen Saw Maung promised to help hold free and fair multi-party elections. It was a bold political offensive by the government. 11

Again, the opposition failed to seize on this promise as a strategic opportunity. There was a general call for an interim government and the political situation reached deadlock. 12

The prolonged street protests resulted in public fatigue and frustration, as well as violent confrontations with the authorities and their "spies and informants." 13

The opposition's failure to break the political deadlock gave the hardliners within the ruling body time and cause to shift from their indecisive wait-and-see approach to a swift crackdown on the protests. The military then staged a coup on September 18. 14

When the troops started firing on protesters that night, I was with hundreds of fellow high school students in Rangoon, staging a hunger strike. In the following days, I found myself in the thick of the shooting and saw students killed before my eyes. According to independent estimates, at least 10,000 people were killed in August and September 1988. 15

In the aftermath of the crackdown, I felt awed and shocked. I tried to reflect hard on what had happened. We stood for the principles of truth and justice and the whole population supported us. So what had happened to us? 16

It was the question of a 14-year-old high school student who had joined the democracy movement because of moral indignation at injustice and human rights abuses. 17

As time passed, especially during the nine years I was on the run, evading arrest, I came to resolve my confusion and to realize that principle alone doesn't guarantee political victory. Political activists need to understand what distinguishes those who succeed by standing on principle from those who fail. Then they have to think about the importance of strategy. 18

In an article for *The Irrawaddy* in April 2000, I wrote: "History has shown that in politics, it is not enough to have truth and justice on your side if you hope to realize your vision of the future. Complacency about being on the 'right' side accomplishes little without a sound strategy for achieving concrete goals." 19

Today, I still believe the Burmese opposition has no "end game" strategy. The lack of such a scenario was shown again in last September's demonstrations. 20

Thousands of Buddhist monks led protest marches in several major cities, chanting loving- 21

kindness (metta sutta) verses and praying for the peace of the country. Students and members of the general public swelled the numbers of protesters to as many as 200,000 in Rangoon alone.

The movement called for national reconciliation, but its overtures couldn't reach Naypyidaw, either directly or indirectly (through third parties, such as the UN or China). 22

The voices of protest were heard only through the Burmese media in exile, where opposition leaders gave rhetorical interviews and public statements. 23

Instead of playing a role in bridging the gap between the junta and the demonstrators, the opposition National League for Democracy joined the street protests. The UN finally acted, sending special envoy Ibrahim Gambari to Burma, but not before many lives had been lost. 24

Burma's opposition leadership has always been keen to mobilize mass movements but has failed to achieve any intended result whenever the protests reached their peak. It confuses the means (the mass movements) with the ends (victory) itself. 25

From the "four eights movement" to last year's "Saffron Revolution," Burma's opposition has failed to learn from the mass mobilizations and continues to repeat them. 26

Mass movements are, of course, sine qua non for Burma's transition as long as the intransigent regime refuses to initiate inclusive political reform. Public pressure alone can challenge the status quo. 27

Whether or not these public movements can lead to a genuine political transition, however, depends on an effective opposition "end game" strategy. This could be one of the key lessons the opposition has to learn in this 20th anniversary of the "8-8-88 Movement." 28

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