

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 41

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

Selected article: *Events of 2009*

A. Activities before reading

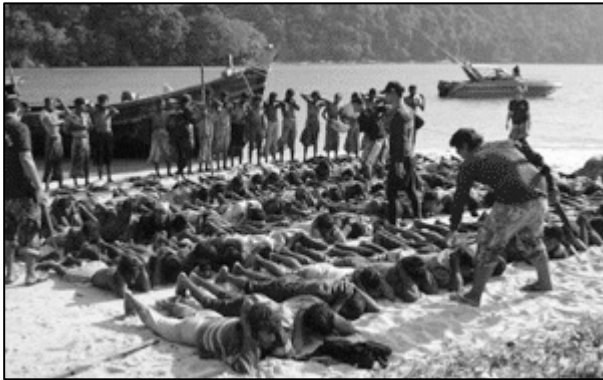
Activity 1 What happened?

What happened in 2009? What were the main events and trends for Burma in 2009? Make a list.

Activity 2 Pictures

Here are some pictures of important events in 2009. What is happening in these pictures?

a.



b.



c.



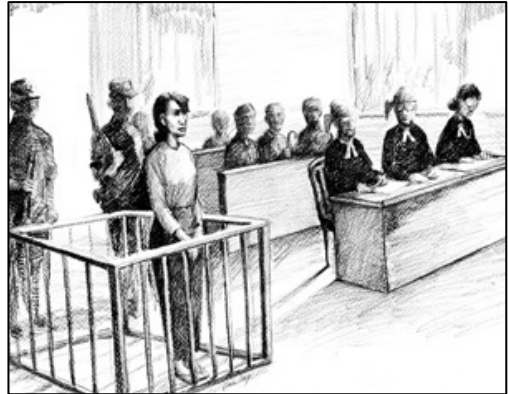
d.



e.



f.



g.



h.



i.



Activity 3 Captions

Write a caption for each of these pictures. Your teacher will give you some useful key words to go with them.

B. Activities during reading

Activity 4 Introduction

Read the introduction to the article (on the next page). Which pictures from exercise 2 go with which paragraph? Some pictures go with more than one paragraph.

Picture A: _____

Picture D: _____

Picture G: _____

Picture B: _____

Picture E: _____

Picture H: _____

Picture C: _____

Picture F: _____

Picture I: _____

Events of 2009

1.

For Burma's generals, 2009 was little more than a breathing space between last year's constitutional referendum and next year's election. For everyone else, however, it was a year full of disturbing developments, with just the faintest ray of hope on the horizon.

2.

Early in the year, the plight of the Rohingya grabbed the headlines, highlighting a humanitarian crisis that is just one of many in military-ruled Burma. Before the year was over, tens of thousands of refugees from other ethnic minorities would pour over the country's borders with Thailand and China, fleeing military offensives launched by the junta and its allies.

3.

But for the regime, all of this was merely a sideshow. The generals' main tasks for the year were to keep opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi safely under wraps—which it accomplished thanks to an unwanted American "visitor" and a compliant court—and to rein in restive cease-fire groups ahead of the 2010 election.

4.

When it wasn't settling scores within its own borders, the regime was busy forging new ties overseas. But while the Burmese generals found fellow pariah state North Korea to be a natural ally, they seemed less sure about how to respond to the friendly overtures from the US, their staunchest international critic.

5.

Many in Burma welcomed the US initiative with cautious optimism, but after yet another year marked by farce and tragedy, few look forward to the year ahead with any great expectations.

Activity 5 Match the Vocabulary

Match the word with the definition or synonym. Use a dictionary if you like.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. referendum (<i>n</i>) | a) a person or group who supports or provides help |
| 2. plight (<i>n</i>) | b) create |
| 3. ally (<i>n</i>) | c) obedient |
| 4. merely (<i>adv</i>) | d) offer of friendship |
| 5. accomplish (<i>v</i>) | e) a public vote on an important issue |
| 6. compliant (<i>adj</i>) | f) careful |
| 7. rein in (<i>v</i>) | g) bring under control |
| 8. forge (<i>v</i>) | h) firm, strong |
| 9. pariah (<i>adj</i>) | i) achieve |
| 10. overture (<i>n</i>) | j) only |
| 11. staunch (<i>adj</i>) | k) dangerous or worrying situation |
| 12. cautious (<i>adj</i>) | l) outcast |

Activity 6 Idiomatic language

Choose the best words to replace the underlined idioms.

1. For Burma's generals, 2009 was little more than a breathing space between last year's constitutional referendum and next year's election.
 - a. time to rest
 - b. oxygen tank
 - c. comprehensive report
 - d. heart attack
2. When it wasn't settling scores within its own borders, the regime was busy forging new ties overseas.
 - a. playing sports
 - b. getting revenge
 - c. organising competitions
 - d. moving houses
3. ...but after yet another year marked by farce and tragedy, few look forward to the year ahead with any great expectations.
 - a. natural disasters
 - b. unhappy and unhealthy people
 - c. unlikely, stupid and sad events
 - d. forced relocations of villages

Activity 7 Texts around the Room: Match the Summary

The main article is divided into seven sections. These sections are around the room. Match each section with one of these short summaries.

1. The Burmese army broke their ceasefire agreement with the Kokang militia, causing thousands of refugees to flee to China.
2. Many Rohingya people are leaving Burma by boat, hoping to reach Malaysia. They often don't get past Thailand. The Burmese government is making it difficult for them to both leave Burma and return back.
3. The US government is changing its approach to Burma. The Obama administration hopes high-level engagement with the junta will persuade them to change their behaviour.
4. Burma and North Korea are developing stronger military ties. The US and Southeast Asian countries are concerned about this.
5. The SPDC wants ethnic ceasefire groups to become border guards. Most of these groups have rejected this, so the regime is putting more pressure on them.
6. The DKBA have been fighting the KNU along the Thai-Burma border. They are also fighting amongst themselves.
7. An American man swam to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house and stayed two days. The authorities used this as a reason to extend her house arrest.

Activity 8 Texts around the Room: Comprehension Questions

Work in groups. What are the answers to these questions? Which text are they in?

Answer:	Text No.
1. Did Aung San Suu Kyi invite John William Yettaw to visit her?	
2. Which ethnic armies have agreed to become border guard forces?	
3. Is Obama ending US sanctions on Burma?	
4. What do the Rohingya need to do if they want to return to Burma?	
5. Who will be in charge of the border guard forces?	
6. Who decided to reduce Suu Kyi's sentence?	
7. What did Kurt Campbell and U Thaung talk about?	
8. Why did SPDC troops say they raided Peng Jiasheng's house?	
9. Why did the US threaten to board the North Korean ship?	
10. Are the SPDC building a wall to keep Rohingyas out of Burma?	
11. When did the KNU split off from the DKBA?	
12. Why do Chinese authorities want money from the SPDC?	
13. What is North Korea helping the Burmese military to build?	
14. How did San Pyote die?	

C. Activities after reading

Activity 9 Roleplay – Expert Commentator

Work in pairs. Partner A is a radio or TV interviewer. Partner B is an expert on Burma. You are going to roleplay an interview about the main events in Burma in 2009.

Spend five minutes planning what questions you might ask. Roleplay your interview, and then swap roles.

Activity 10 Prediction

What do you think will happen in 2010 in each of these situations? Make predictions.