

The Curriculum Project

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 48

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Selected article: A Foregone Conclusion



A. Activities before reading

1. Predictions

- The title of this article is 'A Foregone Conclusion'. What do you think a 'foregone conclusion' means?
- What do you think the article is about?

2. Describe the picture

- Who do you think the people are in the photo above?
- Where do you think they are?
- What do you think is happening?

3. How much do you know?

Try to guess the full names of these Burmese political parties.

- a) USDP
- b) NUP
- c) NDF
- d) NLD
- e) SNDP
- f) SNLD
- g) United DP

4. Vocabulary

Choose the meaning that best suits the words.

1. vote-rigging
 - a) illegally interfering in the counting of votes in an election
 - b) legally interfering in the counting of votes in an election
 - c) the place where you vote in an election
 - d) having the right to vote
2. debacle
 - a) a miracle
 - b) a disaster
 - c) a warning
 - d) a success
3. dormant
 - a) tired
 - b) busy
 - c) active
 - d) inactive
4. defunct
 - a) current
 - b) alive
 - c) no longer in use
 - d) useful
5. scenario
 - a) an occupation
 - b) a situation
 - c) a motion
 - d) an idea
6. election boycott
 - a) permission to vote
 - b) encouragement to vote
 - c) intentionally not voting in an election
 - d) intentionally voting in an election

7. proponent a) a person who supports something
 b) a person who opposes something
 c) a person who treats someone badly
 d) a person who is successful
8. cynic a) a person who believes in something
 b) a person who is optimistic
 c) a person who can't vote
 d) a person who is pessimistic
9. monolithic a) small
 b) unimportant
 c) very big
 d) ancient
10. disenfranchised a) not having the right to travel
 b) not having the right to work
 c) not having the right to drive
 d) not having the right to vote

B. Activities during reading

1. Reading for gist

Your teacher will give you 3-5 minutes to skim read the article. When you have finished, choose which of the following statements you agree with. You can choose more than one.

- a) The article is generally positive about the elections.
- b) There are many parties running in the election.
- c) The writer thinks the results of the election will probably be a surprise.
- d) There are not many parties running in the election.
- e) The article is generally negative about the elections.
- f) The writer thinks the results of the election will probably not be a surprise.

2. Grammar: Using the correct tense to talk about an event

What is the date today? Has the election started or is it over? Rewrite the following sentences to make them correct for now. The first one has been done for you.

- 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; or **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...

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

- d) The USDP...will compete for at least 1,150 of the 1,163 seats in the national and regional parliaments.

- e) The NUP...will field candidates in 999 constituencies.

- f) Twenty-nine seats will be reserved for minority ethnic groups.

- g) “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.

3. Vocabulary: Idioms

Match the idioms on the left with the meanings on the right. When you have finished, write sentences using the idioms.

- a) 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
1. prevent
 2. understand
 3. affect
 4. worry
- b) Disputes between the ethnic groups and the regime have also added weight to calls for an election boycott.
1. strengthened
 2. weakened
 3. dismissed
 4. undermined
- c) 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.
1. ban the election
 2. count the votes more carefully
 3. disallow some votes
 4. change the results
- d) 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...
1. became friends with
 2. got into trouble with
 3. entertained
 4. destroyed

4. True or False

Read the statements and decide if they are true or false.

- a) The title of the article suggests that the results of the election will be a surprise. T/F
- b) The NUP and the USDP are pro-regime parties. T/F
- c) The USDP is supported financially by the government. T/F
- d) Aung San Suu Kyi is supporting the elections. T/F
- e) The NDF and the Democratic Party (Myanmar) are not competing against each other. T/F
- f) The NDF is led by people who were previously in the NLD. T/F

5. Comprehension

Read the article and answer the following questions.

- a) How many parties are running in the election altogether?
- b) How many seats will the USDP compete for?
- c) How many seats are there in the national and regional parliaments?
- d) How many NDF candidates are running in the election?
- e) How many registered voters are there in Burma?
- f) Each voter will have to vote for candidates in how many parliaments?
- g) How many seats in the People's parliament are reserved for the military?
- h) How many seats in the regional parliaments are reserved for ethnic minorities?

C. Activities after reading

1. Discuss

- a) Do you agree that the results of the November 7th election are a 'foregone conclusion'? Why/why not?
- b) If you could vote, which party would you vote for? Why?
- c) Do you think Aung San Suu Kyi is right to boycott the election? Why?
- d) What changes do you think there will be in Burma after the election?

2. Answer the Questions

After discussing the questions in (1), work alone and write answers in your own words.

3. Debate

You are going to have a class debate. Your teacher will explain the rules and procedure of the debate. The motion (topic) for debate is ‘Boycotting the elections is a good idea’. Here are some useful phrases you can use when you are debating:

When you want to state an opinion:

Informal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my/our opinion... • I/we think that... • I/we feel that... • I/we believe that... • It seems to me/us that... • If you ask me... • I’d say that... • The point is... • As I/we see it... 	Formal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wouldn’t you say that....? • Don’t you agree that....? • I’d just like to say that... • I’d like to point out that...
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When you want to agree/disagree with someone:

Agree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You’re right • You could be right • That’s a good point • I agree with you • I see what you mean 	Disagree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, but... • That’s not the point... • No, I think you’re wrong. • I see what you mean, but... • Yes, that’s true, but...
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If you are not part of the debating team, you will be in the audience. The audience must watch the debate carefully, ask questions at the end and decide which team should win. Use the scorecard below to rate the teams and decide the winner.

Criteria	Team 1: Rate 1-10	Team 2: Rate 1-10
Opening argument was clear, relevant and well-informed.		
Rebuttals to opposing side’s arguments were clear, relevant, well-informed and effective.		
Closing statement was clear, relevant and effectively summarised the team’s position.		
Answers to audience questions were clear, well-informed and relevant.		
Total:		

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.