

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Myanmar Allows First U.S. Aid Shipment Following Horrific Cyclone, 05/12/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june08/cyclone_5-12.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. Where is Myanmar? Can you find it on a map? (On some maps it might be called Burma)**
- 2. What is a cyclone?**
- 3. What are relief agencies? What are some organizations that respond to natural disasters? How do you think they operate?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

- 1. What happened recently in Myanmar? How many people were impacted? In what ways?**

ANSWER

The destructive Category 3 cyclone struck the low-lying Irrawaddy delta region of the country on May 3, destroying villages and wiping out electrical lines. It also slammed the country's largest city, Yangon, in the south.

The Myanmar government estimates 31,938 people died and 29,770 are missing but international aid organizations say the number of those killed is much higher, closer to 100,000 and that nearly 2 million people are impacted in some manner.

- 2. What role is the United States playing in the response to the disaster?**

ANSWER

The first shipment of U.S. aid landed in Myanmar (formerly called Burma) nearly 10 days after a devastating cyclone killed up to 100,000 people and impacted 2 million others in the isolated South Asian nation.

An unarmed U.S. C-130 cargo plane landed in the capital Yangon (formally called Rangoon) carrying 25,000 pounds of supplies including mosquito nets, blankets and water.

- 3. Why is it so difficult to get aid to the people impacted by the cyclone?**

ANSWER

Getting relief aid to the affected region is difficult enough but the Myanmar government has thus far said it will only accept packets of food, not the skilled relief workers to distribute it.

Aid workers, experts in the distribution of relief following massive disasters such as the cyclone, are pressing on the government to change their policy.

"The regime simply can't cope on its own, and they mustn't imagine they can. That's why we need these people in there," United Nations Under Secretary John Holmes told the NewsHour.

"We're trying to make the point privately and publicly that these are international aid workers. They have nothing to do with politics; they're not interested in regime change or anything else. They're just interested in helping people," Holmes also said.

4. Describe the government of Myanmar. How has the government attempted to control the people of Myanmar?

ANSWER

Myanmar was a British colony called Burma until 1948. Since 1962, Myanmar has been ruled by a small group of socialist military generals (a "junta"). The rulers changed the name from Burma to Myanmar, which is similar to the country's official name in the local language.

The period since then has been marked by severe economic decline and erosion of political rights. The junta has refused to recognize democratic elections, and dissenters face arrest and torture. The government has disabled the Internet and other communications to the outside world, and media reports suggest they are passing off the international food and fresh water supplies as their own.

5. How did the government recently change the constitution?

ANSWER

The government has also faced criticism for holding a referendum vote on a new constitution despite the devastating cyclone.

The new constitution guarantees 25 percent of parliamentary seats to the military and allows unelected leaders to take control of executive and legislative powers in a state of emergency. It also bars the famous reformer Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won elections in 1990 before the military junta nullified the results, from seeking office, but does call for general elections in 2010.

The vote was delayed by two weeks in areas hardest-hit by the cyclone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What do you think? What should the United States do if the Myanmar government does not allow aid workers into the country to distribute supplies?

2. Is it up to the United Nations or other international organizations to force a government to save its own people? Why or why not? If yes, how?

3. The Myanmar government has been criticized for continuing to hold a referendum on the country's constitution. What do you think? Should the government have postponed the vote on the referendum throughout the country? Why or why not?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.