

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 如箭在弦

*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*

The chief executive election is just months away. While no one has yet to declare that they will be candidates, tense preparations must be going on behind the scene. The media used “如箭在弦” (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*) to describe this state of affairs.

“如” (*ru2*) is “as,” “like,” “similar to,” “箭” (*jian4*) “an arrow,” “在” (*zai4*) “at,” “in,” “on,” and “弦” (*xian2*) “bowstring.” “如箭在弦” (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*), literally, is “like an arrow on the bowstring.”

The expression that follows “如箭在弦” (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*) is “一觸即發” (*yi2 chu4 ji2 fa1*), which is, literally, one slight touch and off it goes.

“如箭在弦” (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*) is an analogy. When an arrow has been put on the

bowstring, it is all ready to be shot, and “一觸即發” (*yi2 chu4 ji2 fa1*) is what it means.

“一觸即發” (*yi2 chu4 ji2 fa1*) is “to be triggered at any moment,” “to be on the verge of breaking out,” “to be ready to be set off at a touch”.

So when the election is drawing close and the race is about to start, the situation is one of “如箭在弦” (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*).

The idiom is often used to describe confrontations, like in war. When two countries have mobilized their armies and issued each other an ultimatum, the situation is “如箭在弦” (*ru2 jian4 zai4 xian2*).

### Terms containing the character “觸” (*chu4*) include:

接觸 (*jie1 chu4*) – to contact; to touch

觸覺 (*chu4 jue2*) – the sense of touch

觸鬚 (*chu4 xu1*) – a tentacle; a feeler; antenna

觸動 (*chu4 dong4*) – to stir up (trouble or emotions)