

# Mainland Southeast Asia Today

## SECTION

# 3

### If YOU lived there...

You live in Vietnam, where your family works on a collective state-run farm. On the side, your family also sells vegetables. Now your older brother wants to start his own business—a bicycle repair shop. The Communist government allows this, but your parents think it is safer for him to keep working on the farm.

### What do you think your brother should do?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** After decades of war and hardship, most countries in Mainland Southeast Asia are moving forward. Even those countries with Communist governments, such as Vietnam and Laos, are working to develop freer and stronger economies.

## The Area Today

Look at the map at the start of the chapter and identify the countries of Mainland Southeast Asia. These countries include Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

War, harsh governments, and other problems have slowed progress in most of Mainland Southeast Asia. However, the area's countries have rich resources and are working to improve their futures. For example, as of 2005 all the countries of Southeast Asia except East Timor had joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This organization promotes political, economic, and social cooperation throughout the region.

### Rural Life

Mainland Southeast Asia is largely rural. Most people are farmers who live in small villages and work long hours in the fields. Most farm work is done by hand or using traditional methods. Farmers grow rice, the region's main crop, on fertile slopes along rivers and on terraced shelves of land. The wet, tropical climate enables farmers to grow two or three crops each year.

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. The area today is largely rural and agricultural, but cities are growing rapidly.
2. Myanmar is poor with a harsh military government, while Thailand is a democracy with a strong economy.
3. The countries of Indochina are poor and struggling to rebuild after years of war.

### The Big Idea

Many of the farming countries in Mainland Southeast Asia are poor but are working to improve their economies.

## Key Terms and Places

Yangon, p. 630

human rights, p. 630

Bangkok, p. 630

klongs, p. 630

Phnom Penh, p. 633

Hanoi, p. 633

### TAKING NOTES

As you read, use a chart like this one to take notes on each country in Mainland Southeast Asia. Add a row for each country.

Country

Description

Most rural people live in the area's fertile river valleys and deltas, which have the best farmland. A delta is an area of fertile land around the mouth of a river. A few people live in remote villages in the rugged, forested mountains. These areas have poor soils that make farming difficult. Many of the people who live there belong to small ethnic groups known as hill peoples.

### Urban Life

Although most people live in rural areas, Mainland Southeast Asia has several large cities. Most are growing rapidly as people move to them for work. Rapid growth has led to crowding and pollution. People, bicycles, scooters, cars, and buses clog city streets. Smog hangs in the still air. Growing cities also mix the old and new. Skyscrapers tower over huts, and cars zip past pedicabs, taxicabs that are pedaled like bikes.

**READING CHECK** **Finding Main Ideas** Where do most people in Mainland Southeast Asia live?

## Myanmar and Thailand

Myanmar and Thailand form the northwestern part of Mainland Southeast Asia. While Myanmar is poor, Thailand boasts the area's strongest economy.

### Myanmar

Myanmar lies south of China on the Bay of Bengal. Also known as Burma, the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. The capital is **Yangon**, or Rangoon. It is a major port on the Andaman Sea.

Most of the people in Myanmar are Burmese. Many live in small farming villages in houses built on stilts. Buddhism is the main religion, and village life often centers around a local Buddhist monastery.

Life is difficult in Myanmar because a harsh military government rules the country. The government abuses **human rights**, rights that all people deserve such as rights to equality and justice. A Burmese woman, Aung San Suu Kyi (awng sahn soo chee), has led a movement for more democracy and rights. She and others have been jailed and harassed for their actions.

Myanmar's poor human-rights record has isolated the country and hurt its economy. Some countries, such as the United States, will no longer trade with Myanmar. Despite rich natural resources—such as oil, timber, metals, jade, and gems—Myanmar and most of its people remain poor.

### Thailand

To the southwest of Malaysia is Thailand, once known as Siam. The capital and largest city is **Bangkok**. Modern and crowded, it lies near the mouth of the Chao Phraya (chow PRY-uh) River. Bangkok is known for its many spectacular palaces and Buddhist wats. The city is also famous for its **klongs**, or canals. Klongs are used for transportation and trade, and to drain floodwater.

#### FOCUS ON READING

What words in the paragraph to the right tell you the definition of *pedicabs*?



#### BIOGRAPHY

### Aung San Suu Kyi (1945– )

Aung San Suu Kyi has dedicated herself to making life better in her native Myanmar. Suu Kyi is the best-known opponent of the country's harsh military government. Her party,

the National League for Democracy (NLD), won control of the country's parliament in 1990. The military government refused to give up power, however. The government then placed Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD members under house arrest. For her efforts to bring democracy to Myanmar, Suu Kyi received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. As of 2005 she remained under house arrest. However, Suu Kyi continues to fight for democratic reform and free elections in Myanmar. Her efforts have led the United States and some Asian countries to press Myanmar's government to change.

**Identifying Points of View** What does Aung San Suu Kyi hope to achieve through her efforts in Myanmar?



Close-up

## A Bangkok Canal

Sick of crowded roads? In Bangkok, you can use a network of canals, called klongs, to travel through parts of the city. Water taxis and boats transport people and goods. At floating markets, vendors sell fish, fruit, and other foods to locals and tourists.

To move around the klongs, people use narrow, shallow boats and poles.

Many sellers wear bamboo hats with wide brims to block the sun and rain.

Small bananas, called finger bananas, are displayed on green banana leaves.

Vendors sell both cooked food and raw produce, such as the pomelos shown here.

ANALYSIS  
SKILL

ANALYZING VISUALS

What advantages do you think klongs provide to both travelers and people selling goods?





Interactive Map

## Southeast Asia: Land Use and Resources



Geography Skills

**Regions** The countries of Southeast Asia have rich farmland and many other natural resources.

1. **Identify** Which cities in the region are major manufacturing centers?
2. **Draw Conclusions** Why might timber be an important product in the region?

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KEYWORD: SK7 CH24



A Vietnamese woman gathers and washes carrots in traditional woven baskets.



A woman uses traditional methods to carry sea salt across the salt pans in Doc Let Beach in Vietnam.

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy. A monarch, or king, serves as a ceremonial head of state. A prime minister and elected legislature hold the real power, however.

A democratically elected government and rich resources have helped Thailand's economy to grow. Industry, farming, fishing, mining, and tourism fuel this growth.

Farms produce rice, pineapples, and rubber. Factories produce computers, textiles, and electronics. Magnificent Buddhist wats and unspoiled beaches draw tourists.

### READING CHECK Comparing and Contrasting

What are some similarities and differences between Myanmar and Thailand?

## The Countries of Indochina

The former countries of French Indochina lie to the east and south of Thailand. They are struggling to overcome decades of war.

### Cambodia

Cambodia lies to the northeast of the Gulf of Thailand. **Phnom Penh** (puh-NAWM pen) is the capital and chief city. Located in the Mekong River valley, it is a center of trade.

Some 20 years of war, terror, and devastation in Cambodia finally ended in the early 1990s. Today the country has a stable, elected government similar to Thailand's. Years of conflict left their mark, however. Although farming has improved, the country has little industry. In addition, many land mines remain hidden in the land.

### Laos

Laos is landlocked with rugged mountains. Poor and undeveloped, it has few roads, no railroads, and limited electricity.

The Communist government of Laos has been increasing economic freedom in hopes of improving the economy. Even so, Laos remains the area's poorest country.

The economy is based on farming, but good farmland is limited. Most people are subsistence farmers, meaning they grow just enough food for their families.

### Vietnam

Like Laos, Vietnam is rugged and mountainous. The capital, **Hanoi**, is located in the north in the Hong (Red) River delta. The largest city, Ho Chi Minh City, is in the south in the Mekong delta.

Vietnam's Communist government has been allowing more economic freedom and private business. The changes have helped the economy grow. Most people still farm, but industry and services are expanding. Fishing and mining are also important.

**READING CHECK** **Evaluating** How would you rate the economies of these three countries?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** The mainland countries are rural and agricultural with fast-growing cities. Most of the countries are poor despite rich resources. Next, you will read about Island Southeast Asia.

## Section 3 Assessment

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Online Quiz

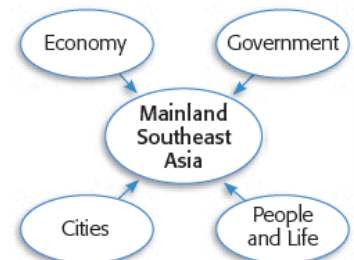
KEYWORD: SK7 HP24

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- a. Recall** In what areas do most people in Mainland Southeast Asia live?  
**b. Identify Cause and Effect** How has rapid growth affected the area's cities?
- a. Define** What are **klongs**, and in what ways are they used?  
**b. Contrast** How does Thailand's economy differ from Myanmar's economy?  
**c. Predict** How might Myanmar's economy change if the country had a government that respected **human rights**? Explain your answer.
- a. Identify** What is the area's poorest country?  
**b. Summarize** What issues and challenges face Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam?

### Critical Thinking

- Categorizing** Draw a chart like the one shown. Use your notes to provide information for each category in the chart.



### FOCUS ON SPEAKING

- Writing Questions about Mainland Southeast Asia Today** Write one question about each country covered in this section. Your questions might highlight differences among the countries or focus on similarities across the area.