

CHAPTER 29**Critical Thinking Activity****Mainland Southeast Asia****Myanmar and the Tatmadaw**

Myanmar is a country where magnificent and ancient Buddhist temples gaze out serenely over a nation restless for change. For the last 30 years, a notoriously repressive military government, known as the Tatmadaw, has ruled its people. In 1989 the Tatmadaw renamed the former British colony of Burma, Myanmar.

Myanmar has witnessed years of European dominance throughout its history. The country's last foreign domination was that of Great Britain. In 1930 a Burmese named Saya San led a major armed rebellion against the British. The revolt was quashed and San executed, but the experience did inspire Britain to make Burma a separate colony. This slight rise in status was not enough, however, for Thakin Aung San, a student leader who spoke out eloquently for independence.

San was eventually arrested for his statements, but he escaped to China, where he collaborated with the Japanese. The Japanese promised San independence for Burma if he assisted them in driving out the British. In 1941, the Japanese and San did exactly that. The allies of World War II eventually retook Burma, but only after four years of arduous and deadly fighting. Aung San, who realized that the Japanese had their own interests in his country eventually sided with the allies.

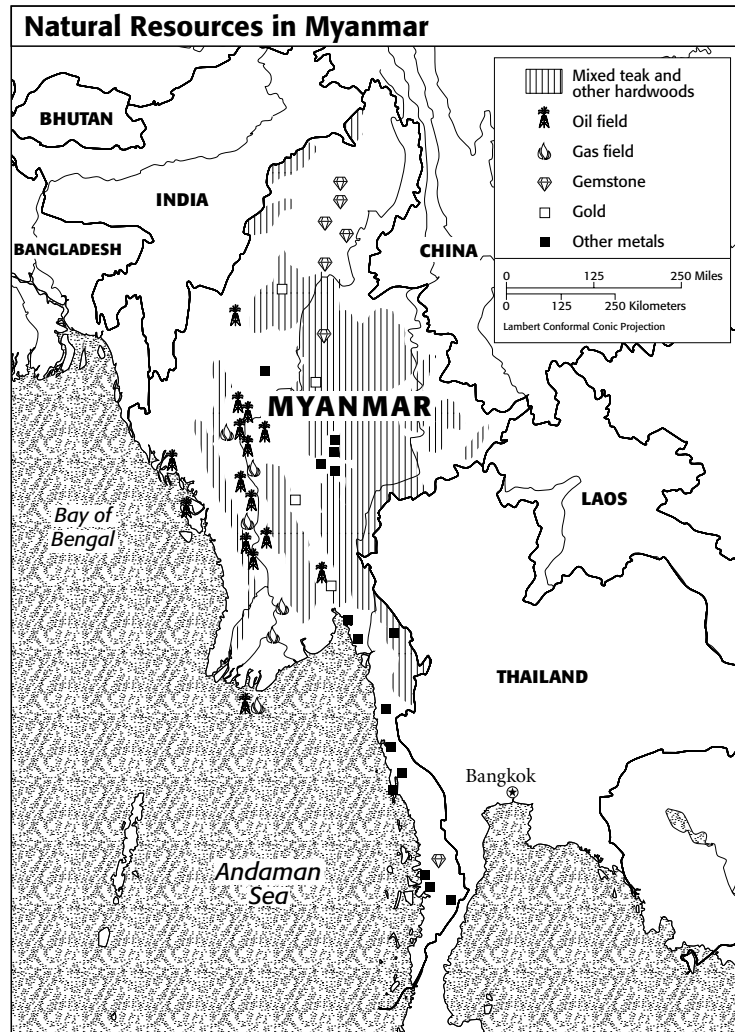
The British granted independence to Burma in 1947. Aung San, who was ostensibly to have been the new leader, was assassinated the same year, and his colleague Thankin Nu became president. Thankin Nu asked General Ne Win to assume control as soon as the first signs of civil unrest erupted in 1958. Nu returned to power in 1960. When another rebellion took place in 1962, General Ne Win assumed control without waiting to be asked.

Ne Win had Nu arrested and isolated the country, at the same time declaring the Tatmadaw, or military government. After Nu was released in 1966, he fled the country and began to organize a rebellion.

In 1988, a huge demonstration led by students resulted in a violent crackdown by the Tatmadaw. The country's army gunned down demonstrators and forced the relocation of at least a half million people. Hundreds of Myanmar's citizens are still political prisoners. Aung San Suu Kyi (the daughter of Aung San) campaigned for democracy and human rights even after the military threatened to shoot her. In 1990 the Tatmadaw agreed to an election in response to international pressure. The party led by Suu Kyi won 80 percent of the seats, even though she was placed under house arrest before the election. The Tatmadaw effectively nullified the election.

The government continues to hold Suu Kyi in custody. Her supporters are regularly harassed or jailed. Persistent rumors say she might be released, but she vows she will accept no conditions that compromise the pro-democracy movement. Now study the map then answer the questions that follow.

Chapter 29, Critical Thinking Activity, continued



1. Name Myanmar’s natural resources as shown on the map above. If it has so many natural resources, why isn’t Myanmar a rich nation?

2. Myanmar’s western coastline defines the eastern shore of what body of water? Which countries border Myanmar to the west? Which countries border it to the east?

3. If you had to choose one item that hindered Myanmar’s ability for self-government throughout its history, what would it be?
