

that had recently passed. An electrical circuit had failed again on the ancient and underpowered Rangoon electrical grid. And, yet, one or two streets over, bright lights and the glow of televisions shone through apartment windows. It was the electrical version of roulette: spin the wheel and see who wins power tonight.

Circa 2012, *this* — along with the pungent smells of human waste that competed with the exhaust fumes — was Burma at its most modern.

For nearly half a century, this former British Colony jammed between China, Southeast Asia and India was locked away from the rest of the world. A military junta in 1962 seized the country after a brief period in which a British-free Burma had managed to hold a series of open and democratic elections. With the junta in power, however, life in Burma (now also known as Myanmar) devolved into a comical, if regularly violent farce that left the country one of the poorest places on the planet. It should have never come to this. Burma should have grown into one of the Asian tiger economies during the 1990s and 2000s, along with places like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. British legal and economic heritage had certainly helped Hong Kong and Singapore achieve economic stardom with much less than Burma had. The place is overrun with natural resources, the gem that the British Empire exploited for decades. At one point in history, it was a leading rice exporter, and it has the abundant land today to potentially reclaim that post. Vast teak forests dot the countryside, as does bamboo and other harvestable timber. The bulk of the world's jade supply flows from a single town, Hpakant, in a northern province bordering China, while the bulk of the world's high-quality rubies come from the Mogok Valley 30 miles to the south. Burma, at one