

On May 2, 2008, just as lunchtime approached, Cyclone Nargis — a storm that would seem to have been cruelly named for daffodils — assaulted Burma. The super-storm had meandered through the Bay of Bengal for a week as it grew into what would become the second-deadliest named cyclone in history. With winds topping 130 miles per hour and a tidal surge that pushed the bay 25 miles inland, Nargis uprooted more than 1.5 million lives and officially killed 146,000 Burmese across the country's densely populated, flat, low-lying delta. Unofficially, the numbers run much higher; some say the government simply stopped counting. Whatever the case, the junta effectively lost control of the country on May 3, when daybreak revealed the extent of the damage wrought upon the grindingly poor nation. When called upon to steer their country through the crisis, the military government proved entirely incapable of managing the massive humanitarian disaster.

That's when the world's youngest, market economy was born.

Outside of Cuba and North Korea, Burma is the final frontier for capitalism on our planet. For that reason, it's where our journey begins. A country so reclusive that people living on less than \$1 a day had no clue that they were poor now represents the earliest form of middle-class desire: the quest to grab that very first rung on the ladder of prosperity.

It's not that Burma has never known prosperity, or has forever been an impoverished backwater. In the years between the conclusion of World War II and the rise of the military junta in 1962, Burma was the wealthiest country in a region stretching