



## Monks' Prayers

Yangon, Myanmar

**W**E HAVE YOUR PICTURES, and we are going to come and get you." The message blaring from loudspeakers on scores of vehicles cruising the leafy boulevards of Myanmar's principal city, Yangon, was simple and sinister, after the country's military rulers crushed an uprising in late September in this heavily Buddhist nation of 53 million people. What started as a peaceful protest against the quadrupling of fuel prices in mid-August almost blossomed into a saffron revolution, as thousands of robed monks, like these at the Shwedagon Pagoda, were joined by ordinary Burmese fed up with the generals' 45 years of harsh and penurious rule. As the monks' marches gathered momentum and captured the world's attention, the generals shut their country off from view, denying entry visas and cutting phone lines and Internet connections. Then they went to work breaking up the demonstrations with

force. The junta claimed that 13 people, none of them monks, died in the confrontations. But some foreign diplomats say the number was as high as 1,000 and that the generals' bullets made no distinction between the robed and their supporters, who have seen their country, once Asia's wealthiest, fall far behind the region by almost every human measure. When news of the killing leaked out, fingers were pointed at China, India, and Myanmar's other neighbors, all of whom avail themselves of the country's resources, notably gas, and help keep the junta afloat with lucrative deals. Even as the protests were building in September, a state-owned Indian gas company was signing a \$500 million exploration deal. A UN envoy was eventually dispatched to plead with the bunkered generals to stop slaughtering their own citizens. When they did, the junta was shaken but still in power—at least until what seems an inevitable next time. —Eric Ellis

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