



# Burma (Myanmar) 1930-2007

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## Introduction

Though trading along Burmese coasts from the early 17th century, the British drastically expanded their political influence over [Burma](#) throughout the 19th century. Three successful Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-26, 1852-53 and 1885) gradually incorporated the Burmese territories into the British Indian colonial enterprise. The last king of the Konbaung dynasty, [Thibaw](#) (1878-1885), was deposed and exiled to western India in January 1886, marking the complete annexation of the Burmese province by the British crown, from then on directly ruled by India's Vice-Roy administration (Blackburn, 2000). The first ten years of British colonization (1886-1896) were marked by brutal campaigns of «pacification» launched by colonial troops, both in [Burma](#)'s central plains dominated by the Burman ethnic group and in the remote northern tribal areas where Kachin, Shan and Wa minorities offered fierce resistance to British expansion (Aung-Thwin, 1985). Once pacified, [Burma](#) witnessed relative stability, benefiting from the economic boom borne out of the early 20th century colonial exploitation.

## British Colonial Repression

Following the Great War and the Montagu-Chelmsford political reforms implemented in British India in 1919, social and nationalist agitation broke out in the left-out Burmese province. The creation of the University of Rangoon in 1920 sparked a broad anti-colonial movement led by Burmese students, largely guided by Gandhian and Buddhist non-violent principles. Two Burmese monks, U Ottama and U Wizara, inspired a Burmese nationalism that promoted non-violence to fulfil its objectives until U Wizara died in 1929 after a five month-long hunger strike. From then on, with the effects of the Great Depression spread across the British Empire throughout the 1930s, Burmese nationalist agitation took a harder line, opting for popular rural uprisings, urban riots and violent political disturbances. New waves of mass repression were then orchestrated by the British authorities and their colonial military and police forces made-up of ethnic minorities (Karens, Chins...) and Indian *sepoys* .

**1930-1932:** A broad rebellion of Burman peasants led by U Saya San, a disrobed monk and mystic pretending to be the heir to the Burmese monarchy (*minlaung* ), shook the province. Out of the economic exploitation and historical acculturation of the Burman Buddhist majority, Saya San managed to forge a massive rural rebellion that still remains a major mark of nationalist pride in the contemporary Burmese psyche. The harsh repression devised by the British colonial authorities but mostly handled by Indian, Karen, Chin and Kachin police forces left between 1,700 and 3,000 dead after 18 months of unrest.

\*\*\*(Solomon, 1969: 210; Adas, 1979: 40; Gravers, 1999: 37; Smith, 1999: 91)

**1930; May-June:** Several anti-Indian riots exploded in Rangoon and various Burmese cities and ports following a massive Indian coolies strike which began at Rangoon's harbour on May 8.

**1930; May 26:** A night-long riot stirred up by ethnic Burmans in Rangoon's Indian quarters left 120 people of Indian origin dead as well as more than 900 injured, according to British colonial government sources. More recent analyses estimate that more than 200 were killed and 2,000 injured, these figures are likely closer to reality.

\*\*\*(Pearn, 1939: 291; Harvey, 1946: 72; Desai, 1954: 39; Pakem, 1992: 140; Smith, 1999: 44; Gravers, 1999: 38; Seekins, 2002: 15)

**1931; January:** Anti-Chinese riots led by Burmese mobs erupted in Rangoon's Chinatown (near the Indian town). Twelve dead and 88 wounded were reported.

\*\* (Pearn, 1939: 291; Government of [Burma](#), 1939)

**1937; April 1:** Following the 1935 *Government of India Act*'s reforms, the British granted [Burma](#) a larger autonomous status with the *Government of Burma Act*. The constitutional reform enabled Ba Maw, a former defence lawyer for Saya San, to become [Burma](#)'s first Prime Minister (1937-39).

**1938; July-August:** New waves of anti-Indian violence (more specifically anti-Muslim) were stirred up by the Burman population in the country's major cities while general strikes (workers, civil servants and students) paralysed the economy of the province. Riots began on July 26 in Rangoon and lasted for a month, officially causing the death of 204 people and leaving 1,000 injured in the capital.

\*\*\* (Harvey, 1946: 92; Government of [Burma](#), 1939; Chakravarti, 1971: 158; Smith, 1999: 463)

**1942; January:** The Japanese Imperial Army invaded [Burma](#) from Thailand with the help of the [Burma](#) Independence Army (BIA), a military force made-up of 4,000 Burman nationalists led by 30 officers (the «Thirty Comrades») who had been trained and equipped in Japan since 1940. Two leaders of the BIA, [Aung San](#) and [Ne Win](#), were to dominate [Burma](#)'s political landscape over the next few years. About 400 Karen villages were torched and destroyed while 1,800 Karen civilians were reportedly murdered by BIA troops in the first two months of the invasion (January-March, 1942).

\*\* (Callahan, 2004: 75-76; Selth, 1986: 191, Smith, 1999: 63, Seekins, 2007: 26)

**1942; March-May:** Between 500,000 and 600,000 Burmese of Indian, Anglo-Burman and other ethnic origin (Arakanese, Kachins, Chins, Karens...) fled the Japanese invasion of [Burma](#) on foot, heading towards India. Their dramatic exodus through western [Burma](#)'s dense jungles left tens of thousands of victims.

\* (Seekins, 2007: 27, 36)

**1945; May:** The Japanese occupation ended and the British returned to [Burma](#). In the last months of the war, around 12,500 retreating Japanese soldiers were killed by local Kachin, Karen, Mon and Indian local militias armed by the Allies.

\* (Seekins, 2007: 26; Smith, 1999: 63)

Political instability increased in the wake of the struggle for independence (1946-48). Mass demonstrations, general strikes, peasant uprisings, and ethnic armed insurgencies (Naga, Arakanese and Karen) followed one another from 1946, while General [Aung San](#) was negotiating the conditions of [Burma](#)'s full independence with the British in London.

**1946; May 18:** The People's Volunteer Organization (PVO) of [Aung San](#) and the Communist Party of [Burma](#) (CPB) organised a demonstration in the streets of Tantabin (north of Rangoon). The Police opened fire and killed three people while more than 40 were injured.

\*\* (Tantabin Incident Enquiry Committee, 1947: 51; Lintner, 1999: 431; Callahan, 2004: 110)

**1947; July, 19:** General [Aung San](#), acclaimed Burmese nationalist harbinger since his student years in the 1930s, veteran of the «Thirty Comrades» and revered hero of [Burma](#)'s independent struggle was

assassinated in Rangoon's Secretariat, along with his elder brother and six cabinet ministers. The circumstances of the event now known as «Martyrs' Day» still remain unclear, even though radical military factions as well as a few rival political leaders and even the British secret services were suspected culprits,.

\*\*\*(Kin Oung, 1993; Lintner, 1999: xii-xiv; Naw, 2001)

## **Ethnic Violence and Civil War in Independent [Burma](#)**

On January 4, 1948, the Union of [Burma](#) achieved its independence from Great Britain, but the newly nominated Prime Minister, [U Nu](#), failed to maintain the cohesion of the country, which rapidly collapsed into a protracted civil war. Political and ethnic insurgencies took up arms against each other (Communist, Arakanese, Naga, Karen, Karenni, Mon...), threatening the stability of the decolonized state's federal structure. The government thus opted for a massive military response to avoid the implosion of the Union. The counterinsurgency operations were led by the Burmese Army which had rapidly reformed the BIA around the personality of General [Ne Win](#), its uncontested leader since 1949.

**1948; December 24:** A year after the Karen armed rebellion broke out, ethnic Burman militias killed at least 80 Karen villagers near Palaw (southern [Burma](#)), by throwing hand grenades into a church on Christmas Eve. Several similar incidents led by local armed militias occurred during the following days until the end of January 1949, hundreds of Karen civilians were killed.

\*\* (Lintner, 1999: 435; Smith, 1999: 117; Callahan, 2004: 132)

**1953; November 20:** CPB insurgents ambushed a train between Mandalay and Maymyo (central [Burma](#)), killing 15 people and injuring 23.

\*\* (Lintner, 1999: 167, 440; Smith, 1999: 482)

**1955; March 26:** CPB insurgents mined a train near Mandalay, killing 30 passengers.

\*\* (Lintner, 1999: 167, 442; Smith, 1999: 482)

**1955; August 15:** CPB insurgents dynamited a public bus near Tavoy (southern coast of [Burma](#)), killing 37 passengers.

\* (Lintner, 1999: 442; Smith, 1999: 482)

## **Mass and Targeted Violence Under the [Ne Win](#) Military Regime**

After ten years of civil war, [U Nu](#)'s democratic government officially asked the Burmese armed forces ( *Tatmadaw* ), who had been at the forefront of the counterinsurgency campaigns since the independence, to stabilise the political situation. In September 1958, [Ne Win](#) formed a caretaker military government, installed military officers in key administrative and economic positions and launched a severe repression against political and ethnic opponents.

**1960; January 10:** Karen insurgents ambush a train north of Moulmein (Mon State). Seventeen passengers were killed, including police officers and government officials.

\*(Lintner, 1999: 444)

The caretaker military administration led by the Burmese Army gave back political power after new parliamentary elections were held freely in April 1960. They were won by [U Nu](#)'s coalition and he was reinstalled as [Burma](#)'s Prime Minister, the elections marked the return of a democratic regime. Yet after another two years of severe political instability witnessing the rise of the Kachin and Chin rebellions, General [Ne Win](#) eventually staged a military coup d'État on March 2, 1962 and gradually established a socialist and autarchic military regime that would last for almost three decades.

**1962; July 7:** Four months after assuming power, the military authorities repressed a large student demonstration at Rangoon University. Military and police forces under the command of Lieutenant Sein Win dynamited the Students' Union building where many had taken shelter. Fifteen dead and 27 wounded were officially reported. Estimations by witnesses and historians number several hundred victims.

\*\*\*(Silverstein & Wohl, 1964: 50; Steinberg, 1981: 250-251; Bhattacharya, 1991: 1137; Lintner, 1999: 214-216; Seekins, 2002: 58-59)

**1967; June - July:** Anti-Chinese riots occurred in Rangoon following the agitation spread by a few ethnic-Chinese Burmese «Red Guards» in the regional context linked to China's Cultural Revolution. Burmese official sources announced 50 dead (June 22-29), but Chinese officials claimed there were several hundred victims.

**1967; June 29:** An angry Burmese mob, tacitly supported by the authorities, ransacked the Chinese Embassy in Rangoon, killing a Chinese official and injuring 18 others during the attack.

\*\*\*(Badgley, 1967: 754; Trager, 1968: 112-113; Lintner, 1999: 242, 449)

**1967; August 13:** Following a destructive cyclone, a mass demonstration demanding an increase in rice rations from the authorities was organized in the streets of Sittwe (Arakan State, western [Burma](#)); military and police forces opened fire killing more than 100 people.

\*(Lintner, 1999: 450)

**1974; June:** Rapid increases in the price of rice led to social disturbances throughout the country, though political reforms were implemented with a new Constitution.

**1974; June 6:** Armed forces opened fire against dockyard and textile workers demonstrating in Rangoon, officially killing between 22 and 27 people, while wounding between 60 and 80. Unofficial estimations numbered around 100-300 dead and several hundred injured.

\*\* (Martin, 1975: 131; Lintner, 1999: 455; Smith, 1999: 269; Seekins, 2002: 94-95)

**1974; December 5-12:** Burmese students demonstrated in Rangoon over the burial site of [U Thant](#), former Secretary-General of the United Nations (1961-71). After he passed away in New York on November 25, [U Thant](#) was a well-known opponent of [Ne Win](#) and his corpse was refused national funerals and rites by [Ne Win](#) himself. Martial law was declared while demonstrations spread throughout the town on December 5, marking at the same time the anniversary of the first student demonstration organized in 1920.

**1974; December 11:** The military police forces finally opened fire and bayoneted students who had kept [U Thant](#)'s coffin inside Rangoon's University campus. According to various official sources, between 9 and

18 people were killed, 74 wounded and thousands arrested. Local observers estimated the figures at hundreds of dead and injured.

\*\* (Lintner, 1999: 455; Smith, 1999: 269; Seekins, 2002: 95-97)

**1978; February - June:** On February 11 the Burmese Army launched the Naga Min Operation against thousands of Muslim civilians (reportedly «illegal immigrants») in the western districts of the Arakan State, near Bangladesh's borders. Reportedly, scores of people were killed, raped, looted and arrested (mainly from the Rohingya community). Villages were burned, ransacked and after four months of repression some 200,000 people had fled to neighbouring Bangladesh (June 1978). On July 9, 1978, an agreement was reached between Dhaka and Rangoon for the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees, but refugee camps remained on Bangladeshi soil. Between May and December 1978, 10,000 refugees, including 7,000 children, died due to starvation and poor health conditions.

\*\* (Scully & Trager, 1979: 152; Asia Watch (HRW), 1992; Lintner, 1999: 316-317, 458)

**1983; October 9:** A bomb planted at Bogyoke [Aung San](#) Martyr's Mausoleum (Rangoon) by North Korean agents killed 21 members of a delegation from South Korea visiting [Burma](#) (including three South Korean cabinet ministers and the Vice-Premier So Suk-Chan). Following the attack, diplomatic relations were broken between Rangoon and Pyongyang - only to be restored in 2007 - and the Burmese Military Intelligence entirely restructured by the young Colonel [Khin Nyunt](#) .

\*\* (Steinberg, 1984: 195-200)

On September 5, 1987, [Ne Win](#) decided to swiftly demonetize [Burma](#)'s economy for the second time in less than two years. By replacing the 25 and 75 kyats banknotes with 45 and 90 kyats notes (9 being his lucky number according to his astrologists), this decision sparked one of the deepest political upheavals [Burma](#) had known since it gained independence four decades previously. For a year (September 1987 - September 1988), until a new military regime took power in Rangoon, [Burma](#) witnessed a mass student and pro-democratic uprising that was met with harsh military repression, political coercion and counterinsurgency operations orchestrated by the authorities.

**1988; March 12-18:** Though in a latent state since the first spontaneous demonstrations of September 1987, student agitation re-emerged in Rangoon following a non-political brawl that erupted in a teashop (March 12). Anti-riot police troops (*Lon Htein* ) under the command of Brigadier-General Sein Lwin (see 1962, July 7) opened fire at various occasions during the following days.

**March 16:** An estimated crowd of 200 students were killed (shot, beaten to death and drowned) by the anti-riot forces on Prome Road at Inya Lake Embankment (near Rangoon University). The event has since become known as «The White Bridge Incident». A former officer close to [Ne Win](#) later claimed that there were officially 283 dead.

**March 18:** Student demonstrations spread outside the campus of Rangoon University into the streets of downtown Rangoon, especially around Sule Pagoda and the City Hall. Police forces and elite Light Infantry Divisions brought into the city centre charged at the crowd: in a major incident, 41 arrested demonstrators suffocated in a jam-packed police van while being transferred to Insein Prison, to the north-east of the town.

\*\*\* (Yitri, 1989: 545; [Burma](#) Watcher, 1989: 174-180; Maung, 1990: 616; Lintner, 1999: 463; Seekins, 2002: 127-142)

**1988; June 15-21:** Once the Universities re-opened, new waves of demonstrations began again with the students at the forefront. Mass rallies followed one another in the major cities of the country. Curfew was declared and thousands of students were arrested in the capital. Demonstrators were reportedly killed by anti-riot policemen in Myeinigone (Rangoon) on June 21 and 70 were reportedly killed by police forces in Pegu (80 kms north of Rangoon) on June 23.

\*\*\*(Yitri, 1989: 546; [Burma](#) Watcher, 1989: 174-180; Maung, 1990: 616; Lintner, 1990: 106-108; Lintner, 1999: 339-341)

**1988; July 23:** General [Ne Win](#) surprisingly stepped down and retired after 26 years of autocratic leadership, leaving his apparent heir, Brigadier-General Sein Lwin, to succeed him. Popular resentment against the new head of state, infamous for the dreadful repression campaigns he had launched in ethnic areas and against student demonstrations since 1962 further alienated the Burmese population from its leadership.

**1988; August 8-13:** Hundreds of demonstrations were organized throughout the country by student militants, joined this time by Buddhist monks, Burmese intellectuals, womens' groups, minority leaders, political activists and even civil servants on a Buddhist auspicious day (8-8-88). The peak of the pro-democratic uprising, August 8, 1988, marked a turning point in [Burma](#)'s contemporary history. Repression orchestrated by anti-riot police, but also *Tatmadaw* troops (Light Division Infantry) began in the evening and lasted for four days. By mid-August 3,000 dead were reported by independent sources (*see Level-2 Case Studies* ).

**August 8:** Shootings by anti-riot police began in Rangoon at 11PM. Between 100 and 200 were killed during the first night of the repression according to foreign diplomats and journalists based in the capital. In the city of Sagaing (near Mandalay), Army and police forces opened fire on a peaceful gathering: 31 dead were first reported, but the figures then reached around 500, with hundreds of wounded as the crowd had been literally surrounded and ambushed by the troops.

**August 9:** Shooting by police forces continued in Rangoon, Mandalay, Tavoy, Moulmein, Pegu, Bassein, Sittwe, and Taungoo.

**August 10:** In the afternoon, in a major incident, police forces and Military Intelligence Services agents gunned down wounded demonstrators brought to Rangoon General Hospital, as well as doctors, nurses and blood donors.

\*\*\*(Yitri, 1989: 549; [Burma](#) Watcher, 1989: 174-180; Maung, 1990: 617; Lintner, 1990; US Congress, 1990; Deutz, 1991: 170-171; Thompson, 1999; Seekins, 2002: 152-160)

**1988; August 22:** In Moulmein (Mon State), an angry crowd tried to seize the Customs Office. Army and Navy forces retaliated during the night and killed around 58 students and Buddhist monks.

\*\* (Smith, 1999: 5)

**1988; August 26:** [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), daughter of General [Aung San](#), assassinated in 1947, made her first public appearance during a mass rally in Rangoon. Her charismatic figure has become the leading voice of the Burmese democratic and civilian opposition ever since.

## Military Repression Under the SLORC-SPDC Junta

**1988; September 18:** After weeks of a political vacuum, a military coup was staged by a group of Army officers led by General Saw Maung who formed the «State Law and Order Restoration Council» (SLORC). The new junta then intensified the political repression and Army troops opened fire on any public demonstration in most of the major cities on September 19-20. General Saw Maung later admitted that 500 people had been killed, but more than 1,000 dead were reported by Amnesty International and other political and diplomatic observers in the aftermath of the coup.

\*\*\*(Yitri, 1989: 552-553; [Burma](#) Watcher, 1989: 174-180; Maung, 1990: 616; Amnesty International, 1990; US Congress, 1990; Lintner, 1990; Bhattacharya, 1991: 1141; Deutz, 1991: 172; Seekins, 2002: 175-181)

**1988; October - November:** Stirred up by the August 1988 urban - and mainly Burman - pro-democracy uprising and the political vacuum that followed, many ethnic armed insurgencies took this opportunity to revive their armed struggle against the central Burmese military authorities. New waves of counterinsurgency operations were thus launched in the frontier areas (Mon, Karen, Karenni, Shan, Kachin, Chin and Arakan States) by the Burmese Army once again in power, leaving scores of destroyed villages and burned fields.

**1989; July 20:** The military junta put [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) under house arrest, Secretary-General of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the main opposition party she had formed along with revered Burman political figures after the September '88 coup. Thousands of NLD members were jailed at the same time, though the SLORC had announced the organization of parliamentary elections for May 1990.

**1990; March 22:** The Burmese Army bombed the city of Ye (Mon State), killing several villagers, following a counterinsurgency operation targeting the Mon rebels.

\*\* (Lintner, 1999: 468)

**1990; May 27:** The SLORC organized «free and fair» elections, which were overwhelmingly won by the civilian opposition led by [Aung San Suu Kyi](#)'s NLD. The junta however refused to hand over power to the newly elected Members of Parliament. Denying them the legislative mandate they had won, the SLORC reinforced its coercitive grip.

**1990; August 8:** Government troops opened fire on a demonstration of 7,000 students and monks celebrating the second anniversary of the 8-8-88 uprising in Mandalay. Officially, two Buddhist monks and two students were killed.

\*\*\* (Guyot, 1991: 206; Matthews, 1993: 420; Lintner, 1999: 469)

**1991; October 14:** The 1991 Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to [Aung San Suu Kyi](#).

**1991; December - 1992; March:** A massive and widespread police operation targeting Muslim communities (especially the Rohingyas) in Arakan State (now called Rakhine State) is orchestrated by the military authorities. Similar to the 1978 exodus, 250,000 Rohingyas fled to neighbouring Bangladesh by March 1992.

**Early February:** Beside 35 drowned, 20 Burmese Muslims were shot by local *Nasaka* security forces while attempting to cross the Naaf River to Bangladesh.

**\*\***(BBC News Group, February 9, 1992 (main source); Amnesty International, 1992; UN Commission on Human Rights, 1993)

**1992; April 23:** An internal purge enabled the deputy head of the SLORC, General [Than Shwe](#), to become the new leader. With the sacking of General Saw Maung, [Than Shwe](#) consolidated his power over the Burmese military structure. In 2008, he was still the undisputed head of the junta.

**1995; July 10:** Six years after being placed under house arrest, [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) is released without conditions.

**1997; June:** Shan rebels killed 25 Burmese villagers in Kunhing District (Shan State). The Burmese Army retaliated by murdering between 300 and 400 Shan civilians in the same area over the following days.

**\*\***(United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1997; Amnesty International, 1998; Lintner, 1999: 478)

**1997; November:** The SLORC became the «State Peace and Development Council» (SPDC), after a new purge orchestrated by General [Than Shwe](#).

**2000; September 23:** [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) is put under house arrest for the second time, after five years of political stalemate.

**2001; February:** Full-scale riots led by Burman Buddhist and Arakanese mobs targeted Muslim communities - mainly Rohingyas - in Sittwe (in Arakan State, west of [Burma](#)). Several dead and injured were reported (20 according to Arakanese activists). Curfew was imposed in the Arakan State neighbouring Bangladesh.

**\*\***(Human Rights Watch, 2002; Karen Human Rights Group, 2002; Amnesty International, 2004a)

**2001; May:** Spontaneous violence against Muslim communities erupted in Taungoo, central [Burma](#). Mobs led by Buddhist monks attacked and set fire to several Muslim shops, restaurants and mosques. Nine dead were reported (including three children). The local authorities (police and the Army) did not intervene nor did the fire-fighters.

**\*\***(Human Rights Watch, 2002; Karen Human Rights Group, 2002)

**2001; October:** Communal violence against Muslims spread throughout central [Burma](#) (especially in the cities of Pyay/Prome, Bago/Pegu), in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001. Several people were killed but no figures came out.

**\*\***(Human Rights Watch, 2002; Karen Human Rights Group, 2002)

**2002; May 6:** [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) is released by the military government after 19 months under house arrest. Along with the NLD leadership, she then travelled throughout the country to organise meetings, public debates and demonstrations to prepare a political transition.

**2003; May 30:** In Depayin (100 kms north of Mandalay), a crowd of sympathisers with the military regime armed with guns, pickaxes, sickles and knives attacked the NLD convoy that had been delivering talks and meetings in the region. Official government figures claimed that four people were left dead and 40 wounded, while NGOs and foreign observers estimated that between 50 and 80 people were killed and over 100 injured. The NLD Vice-President U Tin Oo and [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), both wounded, were caught by the

military intelligence services, imprisoned for three months in government guesthouses only to be put back under house arrest in Rangoon in September 2003.

\*\* (National Council of the Union of [Burma](#) & [Burma](#) Lawyers' Council, 2003; Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2004: 87-92; Amnesty International, 2004b; Taylor 2004: 173-174; Seekins, 2005: 437-439)

**2005; May 7:** Three bombs were detonated in Rangoon, five minutes apart, at Dagon Shopping Center, Junction 8 City Mart and Yangon Convention Centre, three locations that attract Rangoon's Burmese upper-class as well as expatriates. Twenty-one people died and more than 150 were injured. It was the first time such deadly bomb attacks were reported in [Burma](#). No political activist groups nor any ethnic insurgents claimed responsibility for the bombings. Suspicion and rumours spread implicating of former Military Intelligence officers who had been purged along with General [Khin Nyunt](#) in October 2004.

\*\* (Alstean-[Burma](#), 2005: 1-4; Tin Maung Maung Than 2006: 187-188)

**2007; August:** Following the SPDC decision to suddenly raise the fuel and gas prices on August 15, daily demonstrations by dozens of political activists (mainly former 1988 student militants gathered under the informal banner of the «Generation 88» movement) occurred in downtown Rangoon. Swiftly arrested, the activists had nonetheless expressed in public the severe distress of the urban population once more most affected by the dramatic increase in the prices of basic commodities and public transportation. Gradually, the *Sangha*, or Buddhist monk community, took over the public criticism by peacefully demonstrating in the streets of Rangoon and a few of central [Burma](#)'s other cities (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008; ICG, 2008).

**2007; September 5:** While demonstrating in the streets of the countryside town of Pakkokku (a few kilometres north of Pagan in central [Burma](#)), several Buddhist monks were beaten and disrobed by local thugs and the military regime's sympathizers. When presenting their apologies to the monastery to which the monks belonged, the local military authorities were held hostage and their cars burnt by angry young monks. Showing public sympathy to them, many monasteries across the Burman-dominated urban areas of the country began a new wave of daily demonstrations, cheered by local people, starting what was promptly named the «Saffron Revolution». Much to the surprise of the population - and the regime - the number of monks rose rapidly in Rangoon, Mandalay, Pegu and Sittwe, without encountering any reaction from the top military leadership.

**2007; September 26-29:** On September 25, the demonstrations reached their peak, with around 30,000 Buddhist monks in the streets of downtown Rangoon, peacefully followed by a 100,000 strong crowd protecting them. The following day, the military regime decided to react and began to crackdown on the demonstrators after imposing a night curfew in most of [Burma](#)'s cities. Modern technologies (digital cameras, mobile phones, the internet) enabled both the demonstrations and the very first moments of the crackdown to be witnessed world-wide. Mainly orchestrated by the anti-riot police (*Lon Htein*) and a few loyal elite *Tatmadaw* Light Division Infantry (44th and 77th for instance), the crackdown left 15 officially dead, recognized by the Burmese government (14 Burmese people and one Japanese photographer, Kenji Nagai). Two months later after a visit to [Burma](#), the United Nations Special Envoy for Human Rights in [Myanmar](#), Paulo S. Pinheiro, presented a report claiming 31 lives (16 «credible» reports added to the 15 official ones, as well as 74 disappearances). Three days after the crackdown, the «Saffron Revolution» ended with an underground and systematic repression orchestrated by the military intelligence services against most of the monasteries that had taken part in the mass movement.

\*\*\* (Pinheiro, 2007; Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2008: 130-133; ICG, 2008: 2-3; Altsean-[Burma](#), 2008)

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