

# **The repression of the August 8-12 1988 (8-8-88) uprising in Burma/Myanmar**

Sunday 21 February 2021, by [EGRETEAU Renaud](#) (Date first published: 25 February 2009).

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## **A. Context**

Since the military coup of March 2, 1962, the Burmese armed forces (Tatmadaw) had been holding power in Burma. Under the leadership of General Ne Win (1910-2002) who established a socialist and autarchic military regime, Burma isolated itself from the outside world for almost three decades (1962-1988). But after 25 years of a “Burmese way to socialism”, the country was classified as one of the world’s Least Developed Countries by the United Nations and was on the verge of a socio-economic collapse. When the military government announced a complete demonetization of small bank notes in September 1987, spotted protests broke out in Rangoon. Students unable to pay their university fees (Burma’s economy being mainly a cash one) organized the first demonstrations against the military government since the mid-1970s when student protests were last crushed by the Army and anti-riot police forces between 1974 and 1976. Universities and colleges were thus closed for two months by the military authorities, nipping the social explosion in the bud before the end of 1987.

In March 1988, a new wave of student protests erupted in Rangoon after a young student, Maung Phone Maw, was gunned down by the police the day after a tea-shop brawl near Insein (North of Rangoon) on March 13. One of the instigators of the brawl, son of a local official, was rapidly released to the wrath of students who led in reaction large demonstrations criticizing the government and its one-party apparatus (the Burma Socialist Program Party or BSPP). Gathering thousands of young people, the protestors marched mainly around the Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) and Rangoon University, located near Inya Lake. On March 14, the campuses were sealed off by anti-riot forces (Lon Htein, led by General Sein Lwin), raided the following day, and hundreds of students were arrested. On March 16, while marching on Pyay Road, near Inya Lake Embankment, one thousand demonstrators (mainly from Rangoon Arts and Science University) were shot at by Lon Htein battalions that had surrounded them. About 200 students were killed, beaten to death and drowned into the near Inya Lake (the event being now known as the “The White Bridge Incident”). Two days later, after student demonstrations spread throughout the city centre, army troops were brought into town to assist Lon Htein and police forces in order to contain the unrest.

Hundreds of protesters were arrested around Sule Paya and the City Hall during this “Black Friday”, as March 18, 1988 had then been then known. Indeed, in a major incident, 41 students died after they suffocated in a jam-packed police van while being transferred to Insein Prison. Again, universities were shut down by the regime to prevent further student gatherings.

When they reopened on June 15, 1988, new waves of protests rapidly broke out. A night curfew was then declared by the Rangoon military authorities and thousands of students were again arrested. On June 21, at Myeinigone Junction, Lon Htein troops threw tear-gas and fired at a small demonstration led by students joined by Buddhist monks. Dozens of dead and injured demonstrators were reported during the incident to which local crowds retaliated by spontaneously killing several policemen who were hunting down students in the narrow streets of Myeinigone blocks. Throughout the country, where Rangoon’s example began to be followed in a wide up-rising against the regime, street protests were equally repressed by police forces.

In face of this social havoc, General Ne Win stepped down on July 23, 1988 and resigned from his function of President of the Republic of Burma and Chairman of the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP). General Sein Lwin, one of his most loyal second who orchestrated the March and June 1988 bloody crackdowns (gaining there his nickname of “Rangoon’s Butcher”), succeeded him as head of the Burmese state. But social discontent continue to grow in the country and a rumor broadcast by a BBC correspondent announced one of the biggest general strikes ever organized in Burma since colonial times rapidly for August 8, 1988 (or 8-8-88, this date following the 8 noble number being auspicious to Buddhist and Burmese beliefs). Martial law was again declared in Rangoon on August 3 to avoid any further trouble, bringing the Tatmadaw at the forefront of the event.

At 8:00 am on August 8, huge mass rallies began in most of Burma’s cities, gatherings hundreds of thousands people. In Rangoon, demonstrations started near the harbor where dockers and workers began to march towards the city hall. Thousands of students, monks, women, civil servants and even low rank soldiers joined them to meet at Sule Paya and in the surrounding streets. Huge crowds demonstrated peacefully, almost in euphoria throughout the day, with few student leaders delivering speeches and organizing improvised political meetings, initiatives that had been prohibited since 1962. By late afternoon, Brigadier-General Myo Nyunt, who was the Administrator of the Martial Law in Rangoon, ordered the crowd gathered around Sule Paya and Mahabandoola Gardens to disperse while troops from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry Division were brought near the city hall. But people gatherings remained late in the evening, responding to the army warnings by singing the Burmese national anthem. At 11:00 pm, the first army trucks came out from behind the city hall and spread their armed soldiers in the streets. Shootings of demonstrators by troops began just before midnight.

## **B. Decision-Maker, Organizers and Actors**

After few warning shots, soldiers from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry Division opened fire straightforward at the crowd gathered around Sule Paya (Pagoda) and Mahabandoola Gardens. Others military troops and police forces marched disparately in the streets downtown, shooting at civilians indiscriminately. According to first-hand accounts, the all-out shootings lasted for few hours until the early morning of August 9. Contrary to the repression of the March and June 1988 demonstrations, the Army itself (Tatmadaw) was the main organiser of the crackdown. Indeed, People’s Police Forces as well as General Sein Lwin’s Lon Htein had been overwhelmed by the numbers of protesters since late July and the Army had been brought into the streets of Rangoon. Deployed at strategic locations, Tatmadaw troops (especially the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup> and 77<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Divisions, which were elite corps inured to counterinsurgency operations) had observed the demonstrations without being involved

since early August. Even during the massive protest waves of August 8, the army did not move, still keeping somehow the prestige it had by not taking part to the repression. Seen as the incarnation of the elitist Burman majority, Tatmadaw had rarely been considered negatively by the urban population of the country. Clearly, the common Burman had still great respect for the armed forces that had asserted itself as the sole savior of the state and guarantor of the national unity, despite the authoritarian stance the Tatmadaw's undisputed leader, General Ne Win, had chosen. To the eyes of the protesters, the economic havoc and the harsh repression of 1987-88 had been so far mostly due to a corrupted elite and police forces, not to a revered Tatmadaw. The fact that on the night of August 8 the armed forces directly took part and led the crackdown considerably affected its image in the public minds (so would do the September 18, 1988 military coup and the repression that followed, as well as the similar, though lower-scaled, repression of the "Saffron Revolution" in September 2007).

A night curfew (8:00 pm - 4:00 am) had been imposed by Martial Law Administrator Brigadier Myo Nyunt and public gatherings of more than five people forbidden. During the day of August 9, the streets downtown had been cleared but army troops kept on firing at any groups of demonstrators in the northern outskirts. Makeshift barricades began to be built in the areas of North Okkalapa and South Okkalapa (North-East of Inya Lake) and retaliation against police forces were reported by demonstrators. Several police stations were burned down, some units overran by angry mobs that attacked them with pickaxes, sickles, knives, stones and even stolen fire weapons. Six policemen and an informer had been officially killed, all of them were beheaded (the photographs of their heads being afterwards published by the military propaganda in 1989, see Myanmar Ministry of Information 1989:330-332).

Another event particularly tarnished the Army's image on August 10. Assisted by Military Intelligence (MI) agents who had been hunting down the leaders of the demonstrations since early August, a Tatmadaw battalion burst into Rangoon general hospital, a colonial-era building then packed with hundreds of students, monks and demonstrators who had been wounded during the two previous days. When doctors and nurses tried to hang a banner at the entrance asking to stop killings, soldiers shot at them with machine-guns while MI agents tracked down inside the building student leaders and "agitators". Several killed were reported, including blood donors waiting to help outside the hospital. The news of the incident rapidly spread. The fact that the Tatmadaw shot down in cold blood dying civilians in an hospital then definitely turned the population against the army itself (Burma Watcher, 1989: 177; Yitri, 1989: 549; Lintner, 1990: 144-145; Seekins, 2002: 159).

The crackdown continued on August 11, more specifically in the northern part of Rangoon where riots were more and more severe. The next day however, General Sein Lwin announced his resignation as Head of the State and BSPP Chairman, less than three weeks after he had succeeded Ne Win. Thus, after four days of large-scale repression, Tatmadaw troops were sent back to their barracks (near Mingaladon in the northern outskirts of Rangoon) on August 13. The army evacuated the city centre, leaving to the police forces and intelligence services the task of maintaining security. It remains unclear who ordered the army to shoot and crush the 8-8-88 uprising. Four men seemed to have had a key-role in one way or another: General Sein Lwin (Head of the State since July 23, Chairman of the BSPP, known as the "Butcher of Rangoon"), General Saw Maung (Tatmadaw Chief of Staff since 1985 and Defense Minister of Sein Lwin), Brigadier-General Myo Nyunt (Rangoon's Martial Law Administrator) and General Ne Win. Despite his "retirement" announced on July 23, Ne Win was still very much influential and both Sein Lwin and Saw Maung remained his most loyal officers. During his resignation speech in front of the BSPP officials, he even declared: "When the Army shoots, it shoots to kill!". The Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI or Military Intelligence), headed by a protégé of Ne Win, Colonel Khin Nyunt, took also part to the repression on the days following 8-8-88, tracking down leaders throughout the city thanks to a wide network of

informers (some of them having been however lynched by angry mobs).

### **C. Victims**

By mid-August, when killings stopped throughout the country, the first reports that came out evaluated the outcome of the 4-day repression at somewhere between several hundreds and 2,000 dead, as well as thousands wounded by gunshots, bayonets, rifle butts or injured during crushes, panic flight or fire (Burma Watcher, 1989: 177; Lintner, 1990: 94-103; Deutz, 1991: 171; Thompson, 1999: 35; Fink, 2001: 55; Seekins, 2005: 262). For the whole country, a toll of 3,000 dead is still twenty years after the most credible estimation (Amnesty International, 1990; US Congress, 1990; Steinberg, 2001: 9). Statistics coming from hospitals and crematorium throughout the country confirmed these figures in 1988 (Seekins, 2002: 160) despite the fact that army troops reportedly carried away in trucks many dead bodies lying in streets and then cremated them in the military compounds outside of the city. Thus a clear account of the number of victims is difficult to give as many people have been registered as “disappeared”, but not officially “dead”.

The first dead were reported downtown Rangoon, near the Mahabandoola Gardens and city hall where troops began to shoot before midnight on August 8. As soon as the first gunshots were heard, people panicked and fled rapidly the ground where they had been demonstrating since the morning between Sule Paya, Immanuel Church and the Mahabandoola Gardens. Most of the observers estimate that between 100 and 200 people died of shotguns or bayonets wounds this very first night, while hundreds had been injured (Lintner, 1990 1994; Seekins, 2002: 155). A first official toll was announced by the regime the next morning (broadcast through the state-controlled Burma Broadcasting Service or Bama Athan), admitting only 4 wounded and 822 jailed (Seekins, 2002: 155). On August 10 however, Bama Athan reported 41 dead for the “incidents” (Myanmar Ministry of Information 1989:146-147). Later, in a January 1989 interview given to Asiaweek after he took power through the September 18, 1988 coup, General Saw Maung, who was the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief by that time, admitted 6 casualties for the first night of killings (Faulder 1989). Whilst accepting the violence of the Tatmadaw’s reaction to the August disturbances, he denied the figures put forward by foreign commentators or insiders in the aftermath of the repression, and gave his own version of the role of the army on that critical night: “We tried our best to be very controlled. We looked at the situation very objectively. On the 8 of August, we waited until 8:00 pm, 9:00 pm, and 10:00 pm. That was the time when rioters [indicated that no matter what] were going to have this uprising. At twelve after ten, we fired into the crowd four rubber bullets. Four, that’s all. There were six people who were hurt. Six people.” (Faulder, 1989) One can notice that the army did not deny that orders to shoot were given nor that people were killed. Only the concern of toning down the casualties toll prevailed within the Tatmadaw circles (soldiers rapidly picking up corpses, burning them secretly outside of Rangoon...).

The day of August 9 left also several dead, most of them being wounded people brought to hospitals and clinics that died from their injuries. Given the havoc, lacks of facilities, adequate medicine or blood donations led to the death of many dying civilians. On August 10, the Rangoon hospital carnage left many wounded but again, no credible figures came out. When the army opened fire on the doctors, nurses and blood donors trying to stop them, many were injured as well as some dying patients inside the hospital. Some bystanders were also shot (Yitri, 1989: 549; Burma Watcher, 1989: 177; Lintner, 1990: 144-145; Seekins, 2002: 159). According to Dr. Maung Maung, official historian of Ne Win’s regime who became President of the State a week after General Sein Lwin resigned (August 19, 1988), several injuries were reported, but no deaths (“Some were injured, but fortunately there were no deaths from what I could gathered from conflicting reports and eyewitness accounts of medical friends”, Maung Maung 1999: 63). As a civilian, Maung Maung was not part of

the decision-making process early August 1988 (despite of being close to Ne Win and the military apparatus). Even during his one-month tenure as President of the Burmese Republic, he was not in control of the whole political and military apparatus. He gave thus a rather measured and naive, if not voluntarily toned down and simplistic account of the August 8 demonstrations.

From the opposition side, many accounts and estimations were given. For instance, U Aung Gyi, former lieutenant of Ne Win during the 1962 coup but who became one of his main opponent afterwards (he formed in September 1988 the National League for Democracy along with Aung San Suu Kyi, and became its Chairman), gave his own estimations of the 8-8-88 killings toll: between 4,000 and 5,000 (Faulder, 1988). However, he had been in prison from July 29 to August 25, 1988 and thus did not take part in the early August agitation nor saw any demonstrations before the huge mass rally of August 26 in front of the Shwedagon. The All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF, created in November 1988 by Burmese students determined to pursue the armed struggle for democracy underground) as well as the government in exile (formed in December 1990 by political activists, including Dr. Sein Win, cousin of Aung San Suu Kyi), NGO reports (Amnesty International, 1990; Human Rights Watch, 1990) and foreign diplomats' statements also put forward figures between 3,000 and 10,000 killed.

Most of the victims were young people and students who were leading the demonstrations. Young men and women were equally affected by the repression as many groups of women took an active part in the uprising and mass rallies. Monks did also pay a considerable price. As they tried to spontaneously maintain a calm and disciplined atmosphere during demonstrations, to avoid excesses and above all dreadful retaliations by angry mobs against regime informers or agents, Buddhist monks were too at the forefront of the repression and suffered many losses (Matthews, 1993: 420). Acts of retaliation nevertheless occurred as the beheading of policemen and informers in Rangoon proved it (Myanmar Ministry of Information, 1989: 330-332).

#### **D. Witnesses**

Estimations of the number of people who have demonstrated and then directly observed the repression are difficult to make. In Rangoon alone, they numbered themselves in hundreds of thousands (between 500,000 and 700,000 in Rangoon on August 8). Many of them have reported to the few journalists, diplomats or NGO workers present in Rangoon what they had seen or endured. Many interviews have been conducted and recalled precisely the course of the events of that 8-8-88 day. However, as soon as shootings began in the evening, people rapidly fled and dispersed in panic, and precise accounts of the sequence of the repression that then lasted for four days are rare (Lintner, 1990 and 1994). But isolated shootings or beatings of demonstrators by military troops were reported in number.

Few foreign observers of the crackdown have recounted the events. By early August 1988, a small number of foreign tourists were travelling in Burma in spite of the crisis brewing since June. As soon as they left the country, most of them told the international press the havoc they had seen in Rangoon on August 8-10 and some even showed photographs and small films they had shot. Despite strong visa restrictions, some foreign journalists were nevertheless also present during the August uprising. For instance, Christopher Guinness (from the BBC News Services which broadcast the announcement of the 8-8-88 events few days before) and Richard Gourley (from the Financial Times) attended the gatherings downtown and reported the shootings which began late in the night (Gourley, 1988). A Buddhist scholar, Peter Conard, and a 22-year old British Student, Georgina Allen, were also present on August 8, and described the crowds cheering all day long (Bertil Lintner, who was in Thailand by that time, personally interviewed them afterwards: Lintner, 1994: 342).

Foreign diplomats gave also one of the best first-hand accounts of the repression, especially those whose embassy happened to be downtown. The US and Indian embassies are located next to Mahabandoola Gardens, on Merchant Street. Five minutes away, the British and Australian embassies lie on Strand Road where the strike began in the morning of August 8. At the first shots of automatic weapons on the evening of that day, many students and demonstrators rushed to the doors of the US and Indian embassies. Few were already wounded and the then-Indian ambassador, Dr. I.P. Singh, let his staff organized a makeshift hospital in the library of the embassy of India (545-547 Merchant Street). US diplomatic staff also helped students and political activists. The then-US Ambassador to Burma, Burton Levin, recalled that he saw from its embassy “troops on roofs picking off students, (...) and shooting fleeing students as if hunting rabbits” (Levin, 1998). One American diplomat was even shot at on August 9, while he was driving through a demonstration which was being gunned down by army troops (Yitri, 1989: 549). A British military attaché was also “struck with rifle butts” (Seekins, 2002: 157). The Japanese ambassador, Ohtaka Hiroshi, after the first news of the shootings broke, vehemently condemned the Burmese authorities and asked them to stop the crackdown on civilians in a rare diplomatic condemnation. The fact that foreigners saw, reported and even showed images of the crackdown helped publicizing the “Four-Eight Democratic moment” and its repression. During the March and June 1988 riots and the brutal reaction that followed (which caused the deaths of hundreds young Burmese people) occurred far away from tourist and expatriates’ areas of Rangoon. But in August 1988, the demonstrations and then the shootings happened downtown, near embassies, tourist spots and hotels.

## **E. Memories**

Several memory sites remain associated to the 8-8-88 uprising - rapidly known as the “Four-Eight Democratic moment” - and to the crackdown it generated in Rangoon and in the rest of the country. The tarmac ground between Sule Paya (Pagoda) and the Immanuel Baptist Church in front of the city hall behind which Tatmadaw trucks had waited for orders to shoot on the night of August 8 as well as Mahabandoola Gardens and the Independence Monument were the central scenes of the repression. Merchant Street, with the former US (No. 581) and the Indian (No. 545-547) embassies, has been often closed to traffic by military checkpoints (it was reopened in 2007, once the US embassy was transferred on the banks of Inya Lake, further north). Photographs are though still prohibited and any walker prevented to wander around. All around those areas downtown, few rusty barbed wired mobile fences and sandbags surrounding memorial places likely to attract pro-democracy gatherings or simple onlookers can still be seen, especially since the same places around Sule Paya have been central meeting and demonstrating points during the so-called “Saffron Revolution” (September 2007). Further west, on Bogyoke Aung San Road lies Rangoon general hospital where shootings occurred on August 10. Many 8-8-88 killed demonstrators were cremated and buried in the Kyandaw cemetery (west of Rangoon), which had been for decades the burial ground for Rangoon’s Burmese elite. But in December 1996, the Military Junta decided to erase the place. Only very few mausoleum and historical tombs were removed, the whole rest being swiftly destroyed. Besides, since the 8-8-88 uprising, every August 8 has been celebrated inside and outside Burma. Some commemorating demonstrations were too crushed by the armed and police forces (like on August 8, 1990, when monks were gunned down in Mandalay). Rallies by dissident and exiles in front of Burmese embassies throughout the world are common on that day. To follow the example given by the 8-8-88 revolt, political activists and students tried to organize another general strike on September 9, 1999 (9-9-99), but the regime nipped the demonstrations in the bud.

The 8-8-88 events have had an enormous impact on the Burmese psyche as well as on the course of political events in the two following decades. Twenty years later, the same military junta was still ruling the country, confronting a civil urban opposition that was too borne out of the 1988 uprising.

Founding moment for many opposition leaders - the old revered former opponents to Ne Win, U Nu (1907-1995), U Aung Gyi (born in 1919), U Tin Oo (born in 1927) or U Aung Shwe (born in 1917), as well as the younger Aung San Suu Kyi (born in 1945), and the students Min Ko Naing (born in 1962), Ko Jimmy and Ko Ko Gyi -, 8-8-88 and its crackdown remains a landmark event in Burma's recent history. It is commonly recalled by the Burmese population within the country as well as outside it, especially among the Burmese exiled community. Western media and even Hollywood threw light on the mass repression, notably when the cineaste John Boorman successfully released his "Beyond Rangoon" in 1995. Starring Patricia Arquette and U Aung Ko, his movie is often the sole knowledgeable, though partial and simplistic, material the western public has of the 8-8-88 Burmese movement. More recently, the parallel was inevitably drawn with the Buddhist monks' demonstrations of September 2007. Though less violent in its crackdown (31 victims according to the UN, compared to the 3000-odd dead in August 1988), the so-called "Saffron Revolution" was too borne out of social despair and economic crisis and took the same path of peaceful demonstrations in the streets of Rangoon. It was indeed the former student leaders of 1988 (gathered under the informal umbrella "Generation 88" since 2006) that initiated the first demonstrations in August 2007.

## **F. General and Legal Interpretations of the facts**

Since the September 18, 1988 coup d'état, direct consequence of the 8-8-88 mass movement, and in spite of many internal purges, the same military regime has been controlling Burma, its still underdeveloped civil society, its judiciary system, its press and its decimated intellectual and academic circles. Conducting academic research in and on the country, more specifically on the events that led to the 1988 crackdown has logically been very difficult. However, as shown in the bibliography, few academics have been researching the event and many have focused on the "Four Eight Democratic Moment" it generated. The renewed interest became more evident once the hastily-called "Saffron Revolution" failed in September 2007 drawing manifest parallels with August 1988.

Bertil Lintner, the then-correspondent of the Far Eastern Economic Review based in Thailand, made one of the most detailed accounts of the August 1988 events. Despite not having witnessed the shootings and 4-day crackdown in Rangoon, he interviewed many players of the uprising (student leaders, political activists, foreign diplomats, tourists and other eyewitnesses) and listed their stories in his book "Outrage: Burma's Struggle for Democracy" (Lintner, 1990). A shorten version was given in his second work Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948 (Lintner, 1999). Donald Seekins (Professor of Political Science at Okinawa University, Japan), with his book "The Disorder in Order - The Army-State in Burma since 1962" published in 2002, detailed the what he calls the "Democracy Summer". His work is mainly based on a good analysis of international and local press reports and news agencies dispatches (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: East Asia, as well as other Print and Broadcast Media). Half a dozen academic articles were written in 1989-91 on the 1988 uprising but without specifically studying the August 8-12 shootings (which are mentioned and somehow detailed anyway). Asian Survey (University of California, Berkeley) has published its annual year review of Burma in February 1989. Written by a foreign diplomat using a pen name, it recalls the shootings in few sentences (Burma Watcher, 1989). In June 1989, the same journal published another article (by a Burmese citizen also using a pseudonym) describing the 1988 crisis and repression (Yitri, 1989). The year after, an interesting perspective on the crackdown was offered by Dr. Wayne Bert (retired Professor of Political Science at Washington College, Ohio) who analyzed China's own perceptions and reactions to the 1988 Burmese crisis by giving detailed accounts through Chinese eyes (Bert, 1990). In 1991, Contemporary Southeast Asia (Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore) published a piece explaining the American perspective on the

1988 events through an analysis of the US Human Rights Policy towards Burma (Deutz, 1991). More recent scientific articles gave also some details about the crackdown in Rangoon but without disclosing any further elements on the way the repression was ordered or conducted (Thompson, 1999; Seekins, 2005), which was best explained by General Saw Maung's interview given to Asiaweek in 1989 (Faulder, 1989).

Although not studied in details, the course of the 8-8-88 uprising has had crucial implications for both Burma's own internal political evolution and the way the country has been perceived in the region. Academic research has often pointed out that Burma was one failed example of the democratization moment Asia experienced in the late 1980s. While the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan had witnessed successful mass pro-democracy movements between 1986 and 1988 (Thompson, 1999), Burma appeared against the current, with a new military junta consolidating its political grip while tempting to open up and liberalize its economy - thus trying to carefully imitate the Chinese model. Since then, the Burmese political landscape has been extremely polarized - and studied or considered consequently as such outside the country - around the struggle between a Burman civil opposition unified (or perceived as unified) behind the iconic figure of Aung San Suu Kyi and a military regime that came to power after the 1988 repression. Academic research has underlined the Manichaeism borne out of the 8-8-88 moment, and the perceptions of "Good versus Evil" intellectual and political framework it has bred (AUNG-THWIN 2001). For many Burma watchers, foreign diplomats and policymakers, as well as the Burmese opposition elite itself, 1988 has often been comprehended as a founding moment, with most of Burma's current problems being understood by the yardstick of 8-8-88, and not through the socio-historical failures of the past six decades (historical dominating role of the Burmese armed forces since the independence, the unsolved ethnic question, the Burmese Buddhist psyche...etc.). Yet a decisive event, 1988 was only the logical repetition of Burma's contemporary history.

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*Cite this item:*

Egreteau Renaud, The repression of the August 8-12 1988 (8-8-88) uprising in Burma/Myanmar ,  
Mass Violence & Résistance, [online], published on: 25 February, 2009, accessed 17/02/2021,  
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