

Mass night arrests in Lanmadaw

Report 3: Mass detentions following the February 2021 coup (report series)

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 8 March 2023

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Lanmadaw township (လမ်းမတော်မြို့နယ်), Yangon (ရန်ကုန်မြို့)
[16.777583, 96.138917]
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
 - 8 March 2021
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
 - Lon Htein (specific unit not identified)
 - Myanmar military personnel (specific units not identified)
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - At approximately 2300 on 8 March, activists in Lanmadaw seized two vehicles that were part of a convoy they believed to be undercover military. The two vehicles – a car and a lorry carrying a bulldozer – were found to contain several guns and military clothing.
 - A few hours after the incident, footage verified by Myanmar Witness shows men in police and military fatigues returning to the area; they go from building to building and detain at least 13, and possibly as many as 30 men.
 - Myanmar Witness has verified 15 separate videos and images and has reconstructed the sequence of events that occurred in Lanmadaw.
 - It is not known what happened to the men after they were detained.

Executive Summary

Following the 1 February 2021 Coup, Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) has [stripped](#) away due process and fair trial rights to detain thousands of protestors, activists and human rights defenders. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [reported](#) that the vast majority of these deprivations of liberty were carried out without respect for the rule of law or in accordance with international human rights standards, therefore constituting arbitrary and unlawful detention.

This series of case studies documents four separate incidents in Yankin, Tamwe, North Okkalapa and Lanmadaw in late February and early March 2021. Three of the reports cover mass detentions of protestors, while the other examines a case of mass detention of community members, following an incident involving alleged undercover military officers in the same area.

This report covers the mass arrests of people in Lanmadaw during the early hours of 9 March 2021. The police raided the area after local people detained five men whom they believed to be undercover military. The two vehicles which the activists apprehended – a car and a lorry carrying a bulldozer – were found to contain several guns and military uniforms Myanmar Witness has identified as belonging to the Myanmar military's Engineers Corp. A few hours after the incident, footage verified by Myanmar Witness shows men in police and military fatigues returning to the area; they go from building to building and detain at least 13, and possibly as many as 30 men.

These examples of mass detentions are being released to mark two years passing since their occurrence; however, they are by no means exhaustive. Myanmar Witness continues to monitor the deprivation of civilian liberties.

Introduction

On the night of 8 March, at approximately 2300, activists in Lanmadaw seized two vehicles – a car and a lorry carrying a bulldozer – which they believed were part of an undercover military convoy. The locals reported that the two vehicles contained several guns and military clothing.

Following this, Myanmar Witness has verified a series of events which culminated in police and military personnel moving into the area early in the morning of 9 March. They arrested at least 15 men, however social media users claim that the number was as high as 30.

The investigation - a chronological walkthrough

Incidents at night are challenging to verify – images are often dark and chronolocation is not possible due to the lack of shadows. Despite this, Myanmar Witness has been able to verify 15 separate videos and images and has reconstructed the sequence of events that occurred in Lanmadaw, culminating in the arrests of at least 13 individuals.



Figure 1: Overview of events in Lanmadaw, Yangon, 8 March 2021 [16.777583, 96.138917]

~2330: A 15-minute Facebook live-stream, geolocated by Myanmar Witness, was shot shortly after the vehicles were stopped (the link has since been removed, however this content was archived by Myanmar Witness). The timestamp on the live video says 2340; however, the live stream post appears as an hour-long clip with the same footage looped. While this reduces confidence in the timestamp, it does fit with accounts from individual social media posts and reporting.

The clip shows a crowd of around 50-100 people gathered at the crossroads of Anawrahta Road and Wa Dan Street. At the start of the video, a grey car is stopped on the south side of the junction and is being inspected by members of the crowd. The crowd shine phone lights

into the car, lighting up the backseat, where weapons and other material can be seen wrapped in a white plastic sheet.

On the north side of the junction, a large truck towing a bulldozer is parked. At the 00:44 minute mark in the live stream, it appears the individuals inside the truck try to escape; the doors open and the crowd then run towards the truck and then north up the street, apparently in pursuit of the truck's occupants. At the 02:17 minute mark, a man who had remained in the truck is seen being restrained by several civilians next to the vehicle. At 02:55, another man is escorted back from the street to the north.



Figure 2: Captures from the Facebook Live Video. [Left] Capture (00:09) showing the white truck with a bulldozer on a trailer in the background at the junction. Note the doors are closed. [Middle] Capture (00:18) showing materiel in the backseat of the grey car. [Right] Capture (00:56) showing the truck doors now open. They can be seen open from the 44 second mark, when the crowd start shouting and moving towards the vehicle.

The detained men are then escorted west along the street, while the filmer returns to the grey car. At the 06:00 minute mark, the video shows a man being questioned for several minutes by members of the crowd. The same man is visible at the beginning of the footage (00:10) when a member of the crowd has their arm around him. He tells the crowd he has purchased weapons from a shop nearby, but accepts they will detain him until the morning. The video shows the crowd continuing to inspect the vehicle, and gives a close-up of the car's number plate.

At around the 10:00 minute mark, the man being questioned is also led west along Anawrahta Road, and the filmer then walks to an assembled crowd at the top of 3rd Street where 4-5 men can be seen on their knees with their hands tied behind their back at the 12:10 minute mark. The filmer then moves down 3rd Street with other members of the crowd, panning back to the detained men.

Photos [posted](#) to social media and verified by Myanmar Witness corroborate the events in the video, showing the five men ‘detained’ by the activists, as well as the vehicles and materiel recovered from the grey car.



Figure 3: Still images captured from the Facebook Live Video used to geolocate the events (source: the link has since been removed, however this content was archived by Myanmar Witness).

Another set of images posted to [Facebook](#) shows the items and a uniform found at the scene bearing a distinctive [insignia](#), which Myanmar Witness identified as belonging to the [Engineers Corp](#) of the Myanmar military. In another image posted on social media ([VKontakte](#)), the insignia is shown with writing underneath that reads: “စစ်အင်ဂျင်နီယာ ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူးရုံး”, which translates as “Military Engineering Administration Office”. This also provides an explanation as to why the suspects were driving a truck with a bulldozer on a trailer.



Figure 4: [Left and Middle] Photos from the Facebook post showing the crowd searching through items found in the vehicles. A uniform with a distinctive insignia was among the items found (source: [Facebook](#)). [Right] The insignia from an image identifying different Burmese military units (Source: [VK](#)).

~0030: According to social media posts from individual accounts, an hour later at around 0030 on 9 March, police and military returned to the area and went from building to building, arresting civilians. Photos and videos posted on social media at the time can be geolocated to 2nd and 3rd Streets, Lanmadaw.

~0041: A video posted to Facebook at 0041 local time shows approximately 15 police officers at the top of 2nd Street, filmed from the south-side of Anawrahta Road (Figure 5 Top Left). Shots are audible in the video but do not appear to be coming from the police in frame.

~0110: Images and videos released on social media provide multiple angles of the police and military on 2nd and 3rd street. For example, a video posted to Twitter at 0110 local time, shows men in police and military uniform breaking down a barricade before entering the street, firing as they walk down the road (Figure 5 Top Right). Police and several men in military fatigues can be seen at the top of the street (Figure 5 Bottom Left and Bottom Right).

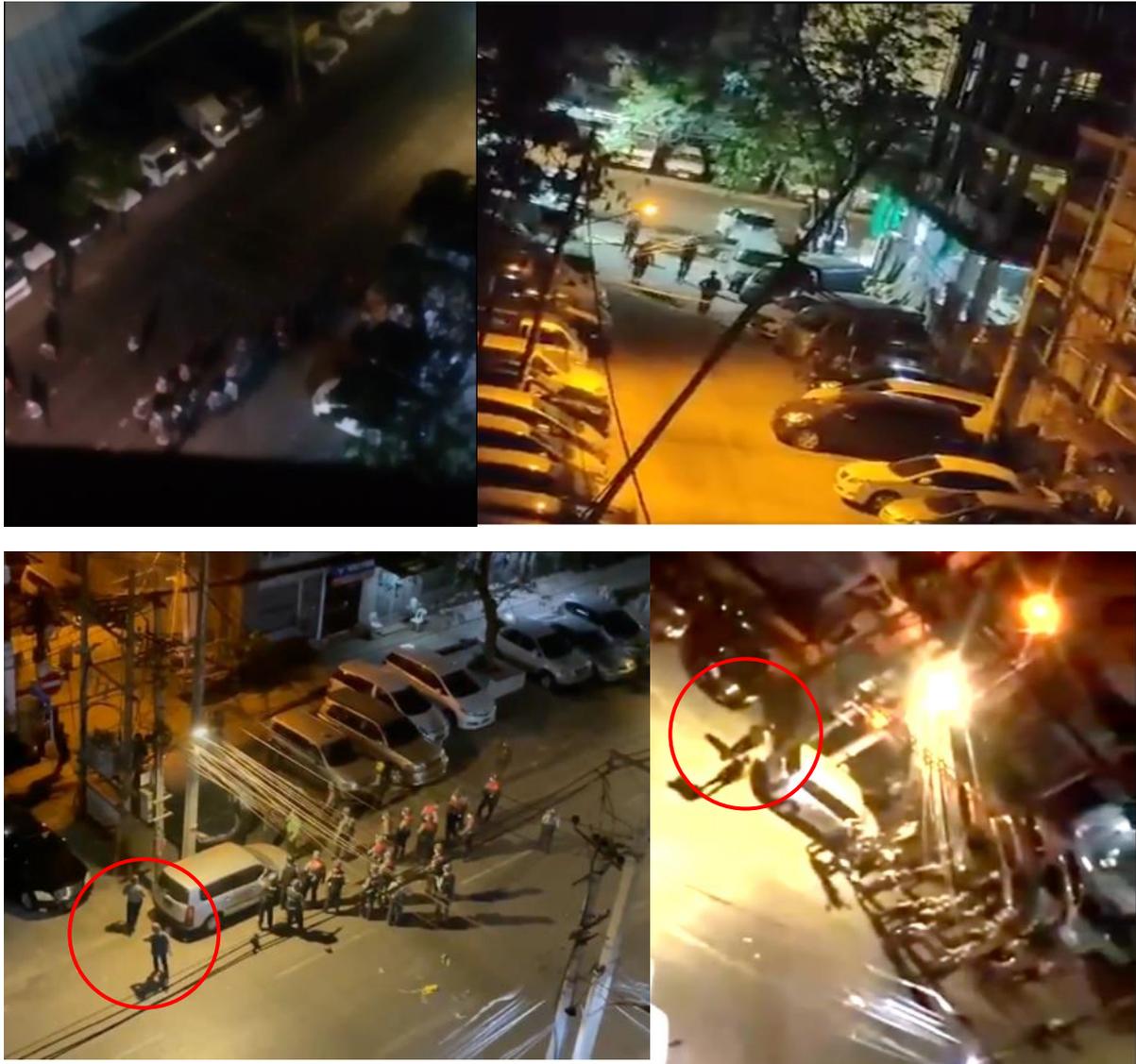


Figure 5: [Top Left] Capture (01:48) showing police at the top of 2nd Street. The footage was posted at 0041 (source: link has since been removed, but Myanmar Witness archived it). [Top Right] Capture (00:37) showing police and military moving down 2nd Street (source: redacted due to privacy concerns). [Bottom Left] Capture (00:18) of a video shows a group of police arriving at 2nd Street (source: redacted due to privacy concerns). [Bottom Right] Capture (00:11) shows a second video angle of the police (source: redacted due to privacy concerns).

~0114: A photo posted to [Twitter](#) and timestamped at 0114 shows five men lying on the ground face down with their hands behind their back (Figure 6). While the photo is difficult to geolocate from the tight angle, the vehicles match those seen briefly in the 15-minute Facebook live stream analysed above, and the videos of police arriving at the end of 2nd Street (Figure 5 Bottom). As a result, Myanmar Witness was able to geolocate these events to the north end of 3rd Street.

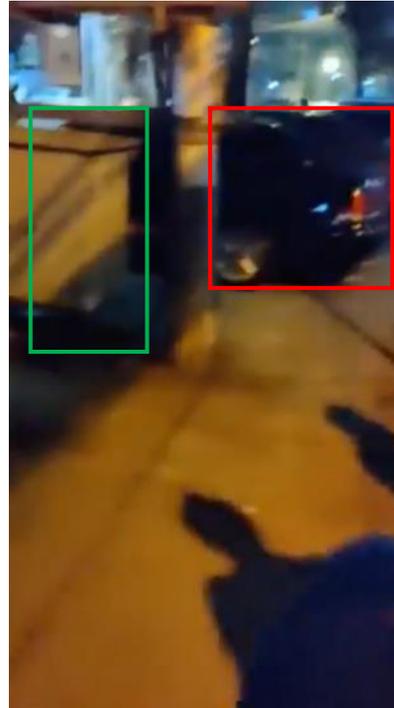
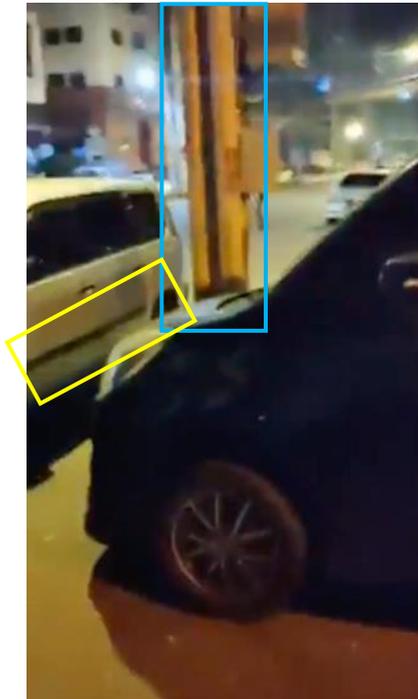


Figure 6: [Top] Photo showing men detained. Military-uniformed men can be seen in the background (Source: [Twitter](#)). [Bottom Left] Capture (12:20) from the Facebook Live Video showing white vehicle with black band (source: the link has since been removed, however this content was archived by Myanmar Witness). [Bottom Right] Capture (13:34) from the Facebook Live Video showing the rear of a black saloon (source: the link has since been removed, however this content was archived by Myanmar Witness).

Image 17: Photo from social media showing the detained men. A grey vehicle is visible on the right ([Twitter](#))

~0116: A second photo released in the same [Twitter](#) post, timestamped at 0116, shows another group of men lined up with their hands behind their heads. The dark image is difficult to geolocate, even after brightening with photo-editing software. The width of the street and parking is consistent with 3rd Street and the vehicles are possible matches with those seen at the top of 3rd Street in the Facebook live stream. The timestamp is also consistent with the previous image. While Myanmar Witness cannot verify with absolute confidence, it is likely that the image was taken near the north end of 3rd Street.



Figure 7: [Left] Image posted on twitter (source: [Twitter user](#)). [Right] Capture (13:39) from the Facebook Livestream showing a possible match for the vehicle near the top of 3rd Street (source: the link has since been removed, however this content was archived by Myanmar Witness).

Additional footage posted on social media provides two more angles of these men being marched along Anawrahta Road. One, shot from the south side, shows at least 13 men being marched along the street. A second short video from the north shows the same group being taken towards waiting trucks, which were out of shot in the first video. From the movements of the group, we can confirm that the two clips are shot seconds apart. It is not known what happened to these men after they were detained.



Figure 8: [Top] Capture (00:03) of a video showing men being marched along Anawrahta Road. [Bottom] Capture (00:01) of a video showing another angle of the detained men being led to the waiting trucks. (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

Attribution to the Lon Htein (Riot Police) and Myanmar military

By analysing the uniform of the officers involved in this event, Myanmar Witness was able to identify them as members of the Lon Htein (Riot Security Forces) by the red scarves tied around their necks. Due to the darkness and limited imagery, Myanmar Witness was unable to determine which battalion. The Lon Htein are renowned for their brutality and Myanmar Witness has reported on their activity within the Police and Harassment series.

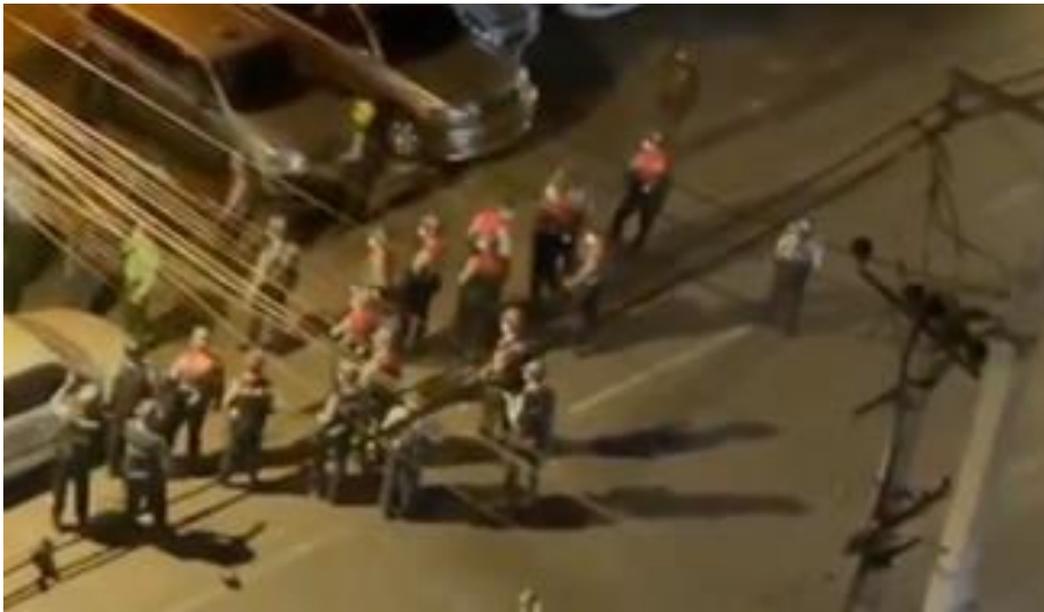


Figure 9: Zoomed in image shows the red scarves around the necks of the police officers (source: redacted due to privacy concerns).

Conclusion and future monitoring

This chronological reconstruction of events shows the lead up to, and detention of, at least 13 individuals following a police raid in Lanmadaw. It is not known what happened to the men after they were detained.

This series of case studies documents a number of early incidents involving violence against protestors and the deprivation of liberty of those who opposed the coup. As these case studies show, in the months following the coup, sound grenades, teargas, and live ammunition have been used on protestors and hundreds were detained.

Two years have passed since these events occurred in Yankin, Tamwe, North Okkalapa and Lanmadaw, and the military continues to crackdown on dissent. Myanmar Witness will continue to monitor the deprivation of civil liberties in Myanmar.