

Mass detentions at student protests

Report 2: Mass detentions following the February 2021 coup (report series)

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 3 March 2023

Key Event Details

- **Location of Incident:** Tamwe township (တာမွေမြို့နယ်), Yangon (ရန်ကင်းမြို့)
[16.802583, 96.174917].
- **Date/Time of Incident:**
 - 3 March 2021
- **Alleged Perpetrator(s) and/or Involvement:**
 - Myanmar Military
 - Myanmar Police Force
 - Lon Htein (Riot Police)
- **Summary of Investigation:**
 - This case study documents the mass detention of protestors at a march organised by the University of Yangon Students' Union and the All Burma Federation of Student Unions.
 - Myanmar Witness has verified eight pieces of user-generated content (UGC) from the incident, including Facebook Live Streams, that enable a precise time for the events to be established. All content described below is fully verified unless indicated otherwise.
 - [Myanmar Now](#) reported that 389 people were detained. While Myanmar Witness could not verify this number, footage showed 40-50 protestors being loaded into a single truck (of a multi-truck convoy).
 - Through an analysis of the security forces uniforms, Myanmar Witness can verify that personnel from both the Lon Htein (Riot Police) and Myanmar military were present and actively detaining protestors.

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.

Over 100 individuals were arrested at each of the three protests investigated by Myanmar Witness. In all three cases, there is no evidence to indicate that the protests were anything but peaceful. Myanmar Witness has analysed, verified and triangulated multiple pieces of footage to develop a detailed timeline and map of events leading up to and including the detention of the protestors. Sound grenades, teargas and live ammunition were used on the protestors.

This report looks at the detention of protestors in Tamwe, Yangon, on 3 March 2021, organised by the University of Yangon Students' Union and the All Burma Federation of Student Unions. Social media outlets claim that 389 individuals were arrested.

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.

The student march

On 3 March, a large march took place in Tamwe, Yangon, organised by the University of Yangon Students' Union and the All Burma Federation of Student Unions. Hundreds of students were detained by the Myanmar security forces, with [Myanmar Now](#) putting the figure at 389 detainees.

Myanmar Witness identified multiple pieces of UGC showing the events as they unfolded in the area. Once verified, these videos and images were used to reconstruct the events occurrence and to identify the security forces involved in the mass detention of protestors.



Figure 1: Location of the protest and crackdown identified by the red lines. Junction of Banyardala Road and Kyaik Ka San Road, Tamwe Township, Yangon [16.802583, 96.174917].

On 12 March 2021, [Al Jazeera](#) reported that the students had been taken to Insein Prison and had not been given access to lawyers or the chance to contact their families. On 17 March 2021, [Myanmar Now](#) also reported the students had not been able to contact families for two weeks and had been charged under section 505a of the Penal Code. On 24 March, according to a [local journalist](#), the detained students were among 628 released from Insein Prison. Myanmar Witness has been unable to verify these allegations.

The investigation: a chronological breakdown

This section provides a detailed chronological breakdown of events which occurred at the student-led protest on 3 March in Tamwe, Yangon. By analysing multiple verified videos posted to social media, Myanmar Witness was able to reconstruct the protest.



Figure 2: Overview of events in Tamwe on 3 March 2021 [16.802583, 96.174917].

1115: A large crowd of several hundred protestors gathered at the junction of Banyardala and Kyaik Ka San Road. A video posted on [Facebook](#) and verified by Myanmar Witness shows a line of protestors facing south down Banyardala Road (see Figure 3). At around the 02:20 minute mark, the video shows protestors rushing to form a line on the right side (northwest) of Banyardala Road. A few minutes later the line was extended across the road.

At the 07:00 minute mark, the protestors facing northwest can be seen releasing smoke canisters.



Figure 3: Still images taken from the [Facebook video](#), [left] showing the protestors forming a line facing south down Banyardala Road; [middle] showing protestors forming a line on the northwest of Banyardala road; and [right] showing protestors releasing smoke canisters.

1122: At the 07:30 minute mark of the [Facebook video](#), shots can be heard, causing the filmer to retreat from the line. The video shows the line of protestors facing both south and east down Thin Ga Ha Street, where smoke is visible. The filmer then retreats further down Kyaik Ka San Road to the southwest of the junction. Continuous firing can be heard and police are visible at the junction. The filmer and protestors are seen shouting and screaming at police from behind cars.

Two more Facebook live streams provide additional angles of the protest. By analysing the three videos together, Myanmar Witness has been able to chronolocate the footage by matching crowd movements, the use of smoke canisters by protestors, and the sounds of shots from police.

The second Facebook livestream, verified by Myanmar Witness, shows the incident from the crowd at the junction (source redacted due to privacy concerns). The stream starts at 1120 and shows the protestors releasing smoke canisters, while the sound of shots firing starts at the 02:30 minute mark (1124).

A third Facebook livestream (source redacted due to privacy concerns), verified by Myanmar Witness, provides a view from the northeast of the junction. The same protestors seen in the first video can be seen releasing smoke canisters. At around the 00:50 minute mark, shots are audible and the crowd begins to retreat and disperse as firing intensifies. Police can be seen running into the junction at the 2:12 minute mark, chasing the fleeing protestors. More police and police vehicles follow.



Figure 4: Capture (01:30) from the third video showing crowds fleeing as police advance (source redacted due to privacy concerns).



Figure 5: Capture (03:25) from the third video shows vehicles moving into the junction, one unmarked (source redacted due to privacy concerns).

1137: An 18-minute [Facebook Live video](#), timestamped as 1137, shows a long line of detainees with their hands held-up behind their heads being loaded into trucks by the police. The crowd appears to be predominantly male, although women can be seen among the detainees.

The three trucks visible in the Facebook video appear to be military. Individuals in military fatigues are standing alongside the police near the trucks. Approximately 40-50 people are loaded into the first truck. After 10 minutes, the second and third trucks have also been filled; however, additional detainees remain standing next to the trucks and many more are sitting at the side of the road.



Figure 6: [Left] Still image from the Facebook video (00:03) showing a line of protestors being loaded into trucks. [Right] Still image from the Facebook video (13:33) showing police trucks reversing to the site of the trucks.

1455: A video posted on Twitter and geolocated by Myanmar Witness shows a convoy of around 15 vehicles, including trucks that appear to match those at 1137 (Figure 2.2; source redacted due to privacy concerns). The convoy is seen travelling north on the flyover above Kyaik Ka San Road, known as East Horse Race Course Road, towards the race course and sports complex. Although difficult to chronolocate precisely, Myanmar Witness is certain that the footage was taken at or prior to 1455 local time when it was posted.

Social media posts from activists and subsequent witness statements given to media agencies (for example, the [Associated Press](#)) claimed the detainees were taken to the Kyaik Ka San Basketball Stadium – approximately a 10 minute drive away from the protest location – where they were allegedly interrogated and badly beaten. Myanmar Witness has been

unable to verify these claims through OSINT methods. However, sightings of the trucks on the road leading to the sports complex lends credence to these claims.



Figure 7: [Left] Image showing a convoy moving north up East Race Course Road (source redacted due to privacy concerns). [Right] Map of the area showing the sighting of the convoy and alleged interrogation site at Kyaik Ka San Basketball Stadium. The possible route of the vehicles is shown in red.

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) and the Myanmar military. For example, the patch visible on the personnels' right arms signals membership of Lon Htein, and the red scarves tied around their necks provide further identification. The Lon Htein are renowned for their brutality and Myanmar Witness has reported on their activity within the Police and Harassment series. Myanmar Witness can not fully verify the Battalion Number due to the angles and low resolution of the video footage.



Figure 8: Images showing the Lon Htein (riot police) at the location of the protests. Sources redacted due to privacy concerns. Image geolocated to: 16.802709, 96.175077.



Figure 9: Myanmar military personnel standing near the arrested area. Image geolocated to: 16.802321, 96.174824.

Conclusion and future monitoring

This detailed reconstruction of events at the student-led protests in Tamwe, Yangon on 3 March, demonstrates the mass detention of protestors. On this day 389 protestors were said to have been arrested. While Myanmar Witness could not verify this number, footage showed between 40-50 protestors being loaded into a single truck (of a multi-truck convoy). Through an analysis of the security forces uniforms, Myanmar Witness can verify that personnel from both the Lon Htein and Myanmar military were present and actively detaining protestors.

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, however the military continue to crackdown on dissent. Myanmar Witness continues to monitor the deprivation of civilian liberties.