

## Case Study

# The Death of Female Protestor Thu Thu Zin

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 7 March 2022 (Updated: 08-March-2022)

**Warning: This report contains graphic images**

- **Location of incident:** ■ Mandalay, (21.951859, 96.081151)
- **Date/Time of incident:** ■ July 27, 2021 at around 12pm
- **Attribution:** Myanmar Security Forces
- **Myanmar Witness conclusions:**
  - By utilising open source investigative techniques, Myanmar Witness has verified the location in which Thu Thu Zin was killed during an anti-military protest.
  - These coordinates were identified through the analysis of User Generated Content (UGC) alongside satellite imagery, and the comparative analysis of eye-witness testimony alongside news and social media imagery.
  - The death of Thu Thu Zin continues a worrying trend of individuals being both injured and killed in protest events against the Myanmar Military.
  - No information was identified which would indicate Thu Thu Zin to have been engaged in violent protest activity, or that she was armed.

■ Geolocated only  
● Chronolocated only  
■ Verified location and time



## Executive Summary

**This report documents the circumstances of the death of female protestor Thu Thu Zin in Mandalay on July 27, 2021. In its investigation, Myanmar Witness found no evidence to suggest that Thu Thu Zin was involved in violent protest activity, or that she was armed. Myanmar Witness has confirmed that Thu Thu Zin was shot and killed while partaking in a protest. This continues to suggest that non-violent protesters have been fatally attacked by the military since the February 2021 coup. Further, this report is one of many by Myanmar Witness documenting violence against women in Myanmar and demonstrates the violence used against civilians exercising their right to freedom of assembly and association. Media reporting indicates that Thu Thu Zin's body was taken by the military after the event, but was not returned to her family. A small funeral service was held for Thu Thu Zin in the days following her death, using her personal belongings in place of a body.**



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## Introduction

The information collected and archived by Myanmar Witness indicates that Thu Thu Zin was part of a small pro-democratic, anti-coup protest movement in Mandalay. The same group would often march in crowded areas in suburbs or markets in Mandalay, showing the flag that can be seen in Figure 1 below. Images of the group can be seen on social media on May 22, 2021, June 19, 2021 and July 26, 2021 featuring a woman who looks strikingly similar to Thu Thu Zin.



*Figure 1: Image of the protest movement and their distinct flag (Mya Taung Strike Front).*

Although there were occasions where the group was seen burning flags (Figure 2, July 25, 2021), User Generated Content (UGC) identified by Myanmar Witness did not show indications that the group were armed or violent.



*Figure 2: Image of the Myanmar Army flag being burnt at protest events connected to Thu Thu Zin and other protestors.*

Interviews with Thu Thu Zin's relatives in [Progressive Voice](#) describe her involvement in the protest movement, and how her family tried to prohibit her from taking part in these protests for her own safety.

## Analysis of Thu Thu Zin's Death

### Geolocation

It is reported [through interviews with friends and family](#) that Thu Thu Zin was at the head of the Mya Taung protest column in Mandalay on July 27, 2021, carrying a flag. Thu Thu Zin's location in at least one piece of UGC collected from July 27, 2021 has been reconstructed through a comparative analysis with satellite imagery below (Figure 3). Thu Thu Zin can be seen in the nearest image wearing a Winnie the Pooh t-shirt.



Figure 3: Thu Thu Zin heading the Mya Taung protest column with a flag. White lines indicate the line of sight from the photo, showing Thu Thu Zin at the point where the lines converge.

When the protest column reached the eastern gate of Mahamuni Pagoda at around 12pm, eyewitness testimony in [Progressive Voice](#), [Myanmar Now](#) and [KhitThit News](#) reported that she was shot in the head and killed when security forces opened fire at the protestors. Two other protestors were also reported to have been shot as part of this incident.

Open source verification (Figure 4) based on shadow angles indicates that the last identified piece of UGC which depicts her was taken between 11:00am and 12:30pm on July 27 2021.

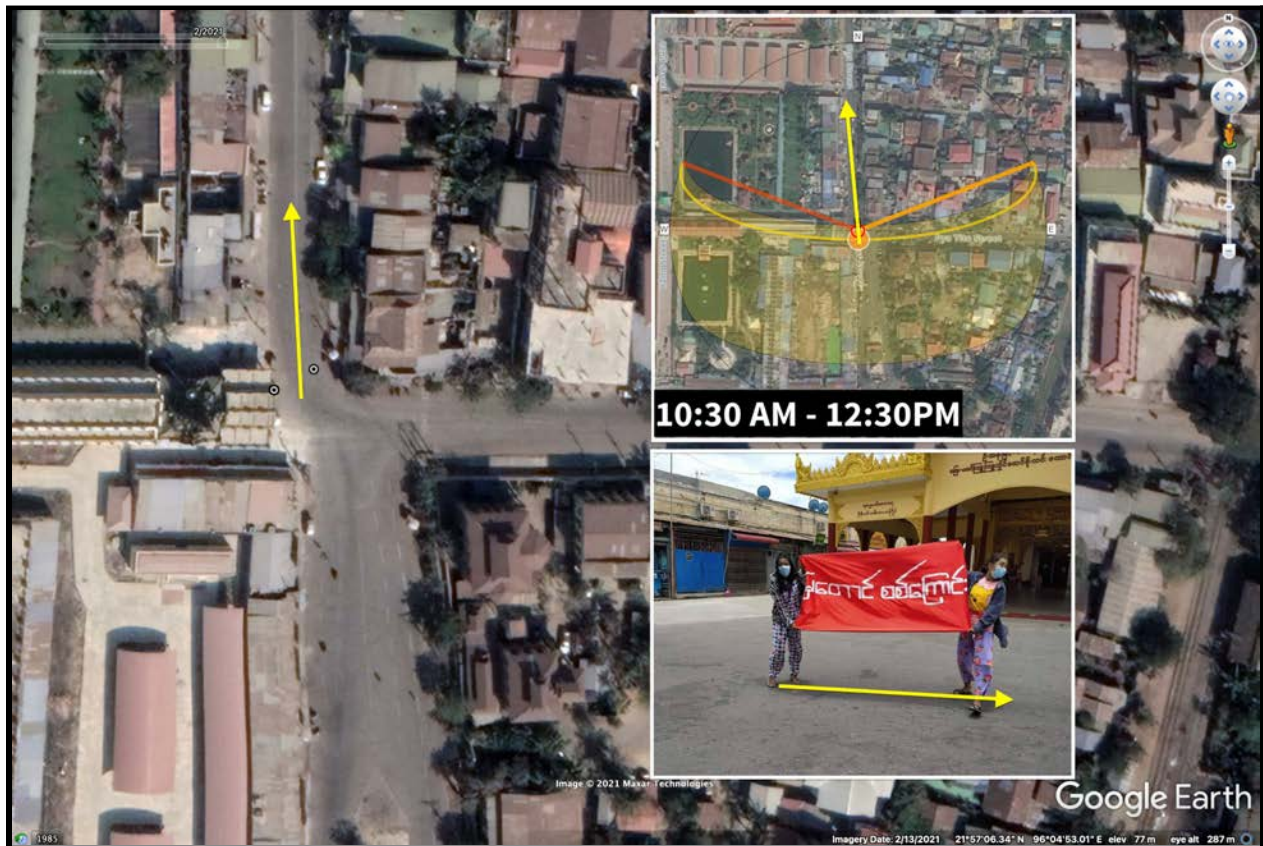


Figure 4: Last known image and location of Thu Thu Zin alive. The yellow lines indicate the shadows that were used to chronolocate the image. Top image insert: Screenshot from SunCalc, used to determine time from sun position.

According to [Myanmar Now](#), Thu Thu Zin’s family initially heard that she had been shot and detained, but only found out about her death when they saw a picture of her body on social media (Figure 5, left).

Note that the clothing on the body appears to match the clothing of the person seen in the above image, holding the flag at the column of the protest. The thanaka paste also matches the above person’s paste. This match can be further noted in Figure 5 below.



Figure 5: Thu Thu Zin's body on the left ([Khit Thit media](#)). On the right is the last identified image of Thu Thu Zin alive.

[Khit Thit News](#) interviewed a monk from the Mandalay Sangha Union who said that the site where Thu Thu Zin and other protestors were shot, near the eastern facade of the Great Pagoda, was covered with sand by security forces. Figure 6 shows sand thrown over a dark stain on the ground, matching both the location where Thu Thu Zin was noted to have been active in the protest area and the monk's description of events and locations.



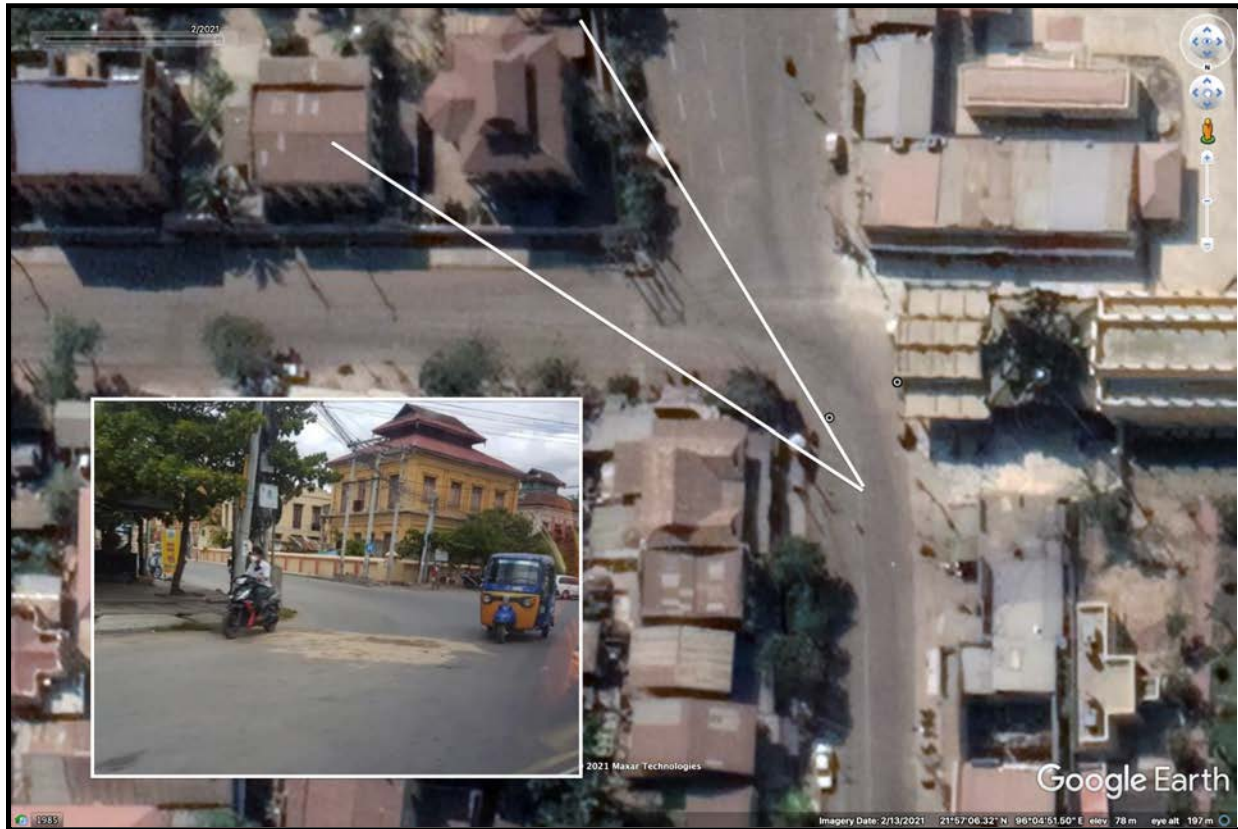


Figure 6: Image showing sand covering a dark stain on the ground in Thu Thu Zin's last known location [21.952024° 96.081111°]. The white lines show line of sight from the photo, converging at the point where the sand was thrown.

Eyewitness testimony from [Myanmar Now](#) reports that the body of Thu Thu Zin and the other felled protesters were dragged into the pagoda compound.

Identified UGC from July 27, 2021, geolocated to the area where Thu Thu Zin was shot (see Figure 7a), shows the presence of security forces (in red boxes) in front of the pagoda, loading heavy objects into a tuk tuk (in blue boxes).



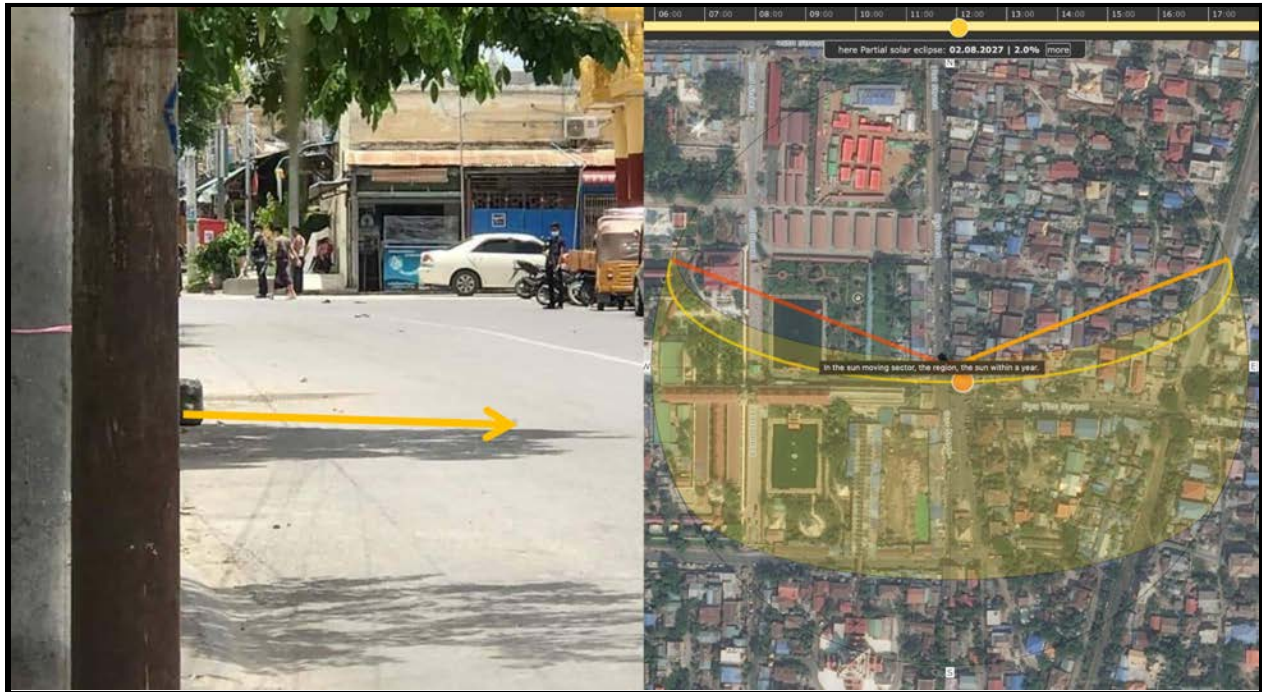
Figure 7a: Identification of armed figures on July 27, 2021 at the location where Thu Thu Zin was active and killed (same date).



Figure 7b: Satellite image and graphic representing the perspective of Figure 7a.

## Chronolocation

According to the shadows on the above image, it was taken around midday on July 27. This is likely to be moments after Thu Thu Zin was last photographed alive.



*Figure 7c: Chronolocation of image showing the presence of security forces at the location where Thu Thu Zin was killed. Arrows show the direction of shadows*

[Progressive Voice](#), [KhitThit News](#) and [Myanmar Now](#) report that Thu Thu Zin's body and/or ashes were not returned to her family, and that a funeral service (seen here on [July 29, 2021](#)) was held without her body.

## Hypothesis of order of events

[Progressive Voice](#) and Myanmar Now documents more information on how Thu Thu Zin joined the protests, became an activist, and details her death through interviews with Thu Thu Zin's friends and family. They state: *"friends and relatives who knew her said that the military's attempted seizure of power transformed her into an activist who became devoted to resisting the junta. She quit her job to dedicate herself fully to the anti-dictatorship movement in her city."*

Interviews with friends and family, as seen in media reporting, claim:

1. Thu Thu Zin joined the well-known Mya Taung protest column headed by monks - [Progressive Voice](#)
2. The day she was shot dead, she was holding a flag at the front of the protest column, shouting chants, her friend said - [Progressive Voice](#)
3. The last time Thu Thu Zin was seen, she was stumbling to the ground in front of the eastern gate of the Mahamuni pagoda after the military fired three shots at the crowd - [Progressive Voice](#)
4. "I saw her fall as soon as I heard the gunshots. We couldn't do anything for her as we were running for our lives as well. We couldn't even get her body back," - [Progressive Voice](#)
5. Without warning, junta forces in plain clothes opened fire with live ammunition, shooting two men and a woman as they attempted to flee - [Myanmar Now](#)
6. One of the victims, 25-year-old Thu Thu Zin, was shot in the head and died instantly. It was unclear if the two men, one of whom was shot in the neck, were still alive - [Myanmar Now](#)
7. "According to some vendors in front of the pagoda who saw everything, it's very likely that all three were fatally shot. They were dragged into the pagoda compound right after they fell" - [Myanmar Now](#)
8. While police confirmed that same day that the young woman had been killed, troops from the 910th Engineering Battalion—occupying Mandalay Palace and the hills to the east—would not return her body or her ashes to her family - [Progressive Voice](#)
9. The family initially heard that Thu Thu Zin had been shot and detained, and only found out about her death when they saw a picture of her body on social media - [Myanmar Now](#)
10. A hushed burial was held at dawn in Mandalay's Aye Yeik Nyein cemetery on Thursday, with personal effects that belonged to 25-year-old Thu Thu Zin placed in the grave where her body would have been - [Myanmar Now](#).



## Conclusion

Myanmar Witness highlights that none of the content relied upon in the formation of this report indicated Thu Thu Zin to be engaging in violent protest activities, or that she was armed. This continues to suggest that non-violent protesters have been fatally attacked by the military since the February 2021 coup. Further, this report is one of many by Myanmar Witness documenting violence against women in Myanmar and demonstrates the violence used against civilians exercising their right to freedom of assembly and association. While the UGC fell short of depicting the military actually shooting at the protestors, it can be concluded with reasonable certainty, based on the verifiable information and witness statements, that this shooting can be attributed to them.