

Verlautbarung des führenden Mitglieds der *Free Burma Coalition*, Dr. Zarni vom 22.04.2005

Quotes of the Day:

"..the evidence (of Burma Army's use of chemical weapons) mainly rests on the testimony of the Karen fighters themselves plus the examination six days later of a doctor based in Thailand. He was so concerned about the condition of the men that he contacted the international human rights group Christian Solidarity Worldwide that you just mentioned. Now they do a lot of pro democracy campaigning in Burma."

- Mike Thomson, BBC Radio 4 Reporter

"There is no information that Myanmar [Burma] is using chemical weapons... I think the ethnic minority group is making this noisy complaint to draw attention from the international community."

- Maj-Gen Thanongsak Apirakyothin, commander of a Thai-Burma border security force

This FBC Posting contains:

- 1). The Today Programme Radio 4 (BBC)
- 2). Burma Likely Used Chemical Weapons—Rights Group
- 3). BURMA CHEMICAL ATTACK CLAIMS, SBS
- 4). Compiler's Remark: 'Truth Doctoring', Freedom-fighting and Victimhood

TRANSCRIPT

Programme(s) The Today Programme Radio 4 (BBC)

Date & time Thursday 21st April 2005 0641

Subject / interviewee Burmese Chemical Weapons - Mike Thomson

Sarah Montague: A human rights group has accused the Burmese Army of using chemical weapons against Karen fighters on their border with Thailand. Our reporter is Mike Thomson and Mike what evidence have they got of this?

Mike Thomson: Well the evidence mainly rests on the testimony of the Karen fighters themselves plus the examination six days later of a doctor based in Thailand. He was so concerned about the condition of the men that he contacted the international human rights group Christian Solidarity Worldwide that you just mentioned. Now they do a lot of pro democracy campaigning in Burma. They sent their President, an Australian GP called Martin Panter, to the region and he examined the soldiers and he claims their condition is synonymous with damage from some sort of chemical weapons and they're complaining of all sorts of awful things such as vomiting blood and blisters, severe diarrhoea, pains in their noses, throats and most of them have said they were unable to walk.

SM: And they're saying this happened as a result, after they were shelled by the Burmese, Burmese troops?

MT: That's right, they're saying it came at the end of a long bout of shelling by the Burmese Army and this all happened just inside the Burmese border about ten miles west of the Thai town of Mae Hong Son, and it's claimed that these shells landed. They were, they were dispersed amongst others normal shells but these particular ones had some sort of strange yellow vapour and when this was inhaled around twenty of the Karen and Karenni rebels found themselves in big trouble.

SM: What is, is, what is the Burmese Government saying about it, if indeed anything?

MT: Well we've contacted the Burmese Embassy in London several times over the last couple of days with many phone calls and faxes but they've so far declined to comment on the allegations and Burma is of course a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention by the way. I have spoken though to the Foreign Office and a spokesman there told me that they are very concerned about any reports of chemical weapons being used and aim to be examining the evidence very thoroughly, what evidence there is. Now Christian Solidarity Worldwide is due to publish the full details of its findings within the next

couple of days so the first stop for that will be the Foreign Office.

SM: Just briefly Mike do you get the impression that the international, there's any will in the international community to do something about this?

MT: Well Britain's been very outspoken against human rights abuses in Burma and so, in fact has the EU and the biggest thing people are hoping that can happen is more pressure will be put on the various South East Asian nations who form ASEAN, a sort of economic and political grouping, and hoping that that'll prevent Burma taking up the chairmanship when it's due to next year.

SM: Mike Thomson thank you.

//end text//

+++++

Burma Likely Used Chemical Weapons—Rights Group
By Associated Press
April 22, 2005

Burma's junta likely used chemical weapons in a recent attack against ethnic rebels near the Thai border, an international human rights group said Friday.

London-based Christian Solidarity Worldwide said it has "circumstantial evidence" that Burma's troops fired an artillery shell that emitted yellow smoke and a "highly irritating odor."

Within minutes of the Feb 15 shelling, five ethnic Karen guerrillas near the explosion were stricken with lung and skin irritations and severe muscle weakness, said a report by CSW's Dr Martin Panter, who interviewed and examined the rebels last week.

"Strong circumstantial evidence exists for the use of chemicals, particularly nerve agents, pulmonary agents and possibly blister agents," said the report on the group's Web site.

The junta's officials weren't immediately available for comment.

Rimond Htoo, secretary general of the Karenni National Progressive Party, said the attack occurred at his group's camp about 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) inside Burma, near the Thai border town of Mae Hong Son.

"Five of our soldiers ... suffered strange injuries from the mortar shell," he told The Associated Press. "It was strange because of the sound of the explosion and the smoke."

He said the soldiers were sent to a hospital in Thailand after they vomited blood and fainted. Three have recovered, but two remain ill, he added.

"We do not know whether it was a chemical weapon," said Rimond Htoo. Thai authorities were skeptical of the group's report.

Maj-Gen Thanongsak Apirakyothin, commander of a Thai-Burma border security force, said "there is no information that Myanmar [Burma] is using chemical weapons."

"I think the ethnic minority group is making this noisy complaint to draw attention from the international community," he told reporters.

CSW also called on the international community to step up pressure on the regime in Burma to improve its human rights record and block it from assuming the rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations next year.

+++++

BURMA CHEMICAL ATTACK CLAIMS

22.4.2005. 11:21:34

An Australian doctor has told SBS the Burmese army has used chemical weapons, possibly mustard gas, in an attempt to end a 50-year revolt in the country's north-west.

Dr Martin Panter, a Queensland physician and president of human rights group Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said he clinically assessed five of the Karenni soldiers last week.

"It seemed that all the symptoms they had and the description of the device was completely consistent with a chemical weapons device of some sort," Dr Panter told SBS.

They told him they vomited blood and could not walk after the Burmese military attack on their camp near the Thai town of Mae Hong Son on February 15th.

Dr Panter found the soldiers had lost weight and had tender livers.

An examination by a colleague five days after the attack showed they suffered a severe discolouration of the skin, blisters, diarrhoea and irritated throats.

The Burmese embassy in Canberra has not responded to SBS's enquiries.

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs said it cannot confirm the attack but deplors any reports of human rights violations.

However critics of the regime say the allegations are another example of Burma's appalling record on human rights.

Australian Greens Senator Kerry Nettle said it is not the first time.

"There have been instances, around five or six years ago, in the same part along the Thai Burma border where the Burmese military used gas against their own people and it was the Karen people who were again the victims of this," Senator Nettle told SBS.

The fresh allegations come as Burma faces intense pressure to speed up democratic reforms.

The US and the EU are objecting to Burma's bid to chair meetings of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

But Australia, an aspiring ASEAN member, is more circumspect, and said the chairmanship of ASEAN is an internal arrangement within ASEAN.

"To have the Australian government saying they won't comment on blatant human rights abuses occurring in Burma, because they are seeking to become a member of ASEAN, is just not acceptable," Senator Nettle said.

The government says it is asking the Australian embassy in Rangoon to look into the allegations.

Dr Panter will launch his report in London on Friday and will send his findings to the UN for further investigation.

+++++

Compiler's Remark:

The new generation of 'truth tellers' has arrived on the Burmese scene. They come equipped with a doctor, in literal sense, selected stories of 5 Karenni soldiers, a worldwide network of conservative, evangelical Christians, convinced of the need for military intervention by the West in our country. The audience is a wild flock of vindictive extremist exiles who would not be satisfied with anything short of generals' heads.

To be sure, atrocities committed by the Burma Army are to be denounced and condemned in no certain terms. Rape, gang-rape of ethnic minority women by Burma Army troops drawn from different ethnic groups has been taking place for decades. All armies in conflict engage in all types of despicable and unspeakable acts. The Russian Red Army raped and gang-raped German civilians as it captured Berlin. The UN Peace-keepers attacked girls as young as 12 on African continent. The CIA investigators subjected even male prisoners of wars or, if you prefer, 'enemy combatants' different forms of sexual abuses. Bosnian troops used rape as a weapon of war. Once fellow human beings have been dehumanized any act is possible, conceivable, justifiable, within an ideological framework, within the internal strategic logic of a military operation. It is the most tragic aspect of conflict. Burma Army is no exception and its behaviors must not be exceptionalized.

This is in no way to condone rape or atrocious behavior the Burma Army has been engaged in - in our country's protracted and traffic conflict. Nor is my intent to gloss over burning of villages, forced relocation of communities, wanton killings of innocent civilians in conflict zones.

In spite of being an urbanite Burmese, I should know these things.

For I have trekked in these armed conflict areas with the Karen National Liberation Army. I once hid in a small village - made up of 9 households/families - when our escort sent us SSB message that a Tatmadaw military operation was within 1 hr's walk from where we were on our trail, saw a Karen soldier who face was freshly blown up in a land-mine explosion or was informed of a fellow trekker who lost his legs in yet another land-mind explosion hours after we said good-bye to each other.

But we must not rush to embrace "means-justifies-end" logic and cheer on anyone and any group that will clobber our opponents in power with any conceivable charges of depravity. As the Burmese saying goes, we don't want the kind of prescription drug that will kill the patient altogether or Ana htet hsay ga lei de.

The killings in Burma are not racially or even ethnically motivated, generally speaking. The Burmese may feel chauvinistic toward the rest of the country.

But they don't live racial or ethnic hatred toward ethnic minorities or non-Bama ethnic nationalities. The tragedy of modern Burma is this: deeply political conflict has become ethnicized and 'religionized'. This development has much to do with groups such as the Christian Solidarity Worldwide. Recently someone of Indo-Karen extract has been quoted in Irrawaddy opposition magazine as saying Burma's problems are "self-inflicted." "That woman" got it only half-right. The other half - the involvement of foreigners and outsiders, especially Christian missionaries of the most conservative kind - has a long and despicable history, dating back to the 17th century. Bible-and-sword diplomacy is well and alive.

In this latest sordid episode, some key members of this Christian group has been beating the drums for 'military intervention' in our country by the West.

The late Walter Cronkite, the dean of American journalism, is said to have remarked that 'all governments lie.' And not without pains, I will have to add, 'so do political oppositions' when butchering of truths and twisting facts suits their/our ultimate mission.

It is cliché to say that 'the first casualty of war is truth.' A confessional tale may be told here.

As a Burmese native, I was myself involved in the butchering of truths, believing and operating out the paradigm that 'regime change' in Rangoon was the only and best option left for the Burmese opposition.

Several summers ago, my then Karen National Union colleague who later got fired guilty of challenging the

old Karen men's political wisdom at a KNU CEC meeting and and, I suspect, her collegiality with me - and myself,drove over 600 miles - from San Francisco to San Diego. We were to hold a press conference on Burma's political developments on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the Asian American Journalist Association - a large gathering of several thousand journalists from different countries.

We showed a brief footage of Burma Army Privates who were shot dead in an deadly enbush by Shan State Army - South patrols. There were found some Yaba or speed pills in their sacks. That was our proof that the Tatmadaw was involved in drug trade.

We also showed the footage of SSA-South company firing rounds of heavy artilleries at what appeared to be a Burma Army point at a distance. It was exciting although no one seemed hurt. This was an image of the on-going large scale 'civil war' that has been raging on since the British Raj left us, the "ungovernable" Burmese. We had a total of 5 reporters in the room at San Diego Sheraton, including a Radio Free Asia reporter who wisely omitted this strong showing of media interest in Burma. The best always came at last.

We knew that no story was going to be a good sell, unless there is blood, sex, controversy - or something trendy like death of an anti-Communist papal figure.

The talk of the day then - as now - was weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

We were smart - or stupid - enough to know the story had to respond to the larger media and propaganda template. Stories have to be finessed to fit this template. These templates include stories of black-and-white, the good-versus-the-bad, the-beauty-and-the-beast, the-villain-and-the-evil, the-freedom-fighters-and-the-evil-doers. Villians need to be punished and heroes need to be celebrated. Ideologized or deeply propagandized men (or women) still live in these childhood fantasy boxes. We were no exceptions.

We were both stateless exiles, so we didn't have a nation to take to war on specious ground - such as 'was-never-there' WMDs in trailers or mobile labs. That didn't stop us from making a bold claim that our reviled government in Rangoon was out to acquire WMDs, which includes biological, chemical and atomic/nuclear weapons.

So at the San Diego Press Conference, we provided soft anecdotal evidence of Burma Army's use of fertilers to destroy crops in the KNU-controlled areas and claim that the Burma Pharmaceutical Industry (BPI) in Insein, Rangoon had active research programs on biological and chemical weaponry.

Our good friend from the Radio Free Asia who flew from Washington, DC to San Diego just to cover our press conference was delighted that we were creative and had 'evidence' of the SPDC possessing or intending to possess WMDs. We did what the media studies scholars call 'framing'. Yes, we were trying to frame Burma issue in a way that would sound an alarm and put the country on the radar screen of policy makers. Human rights, in the final analysis, doesn't really drive policies - let alone propel international agencies and national governments in the West to action - intervention. But weapons of mass destruction does, especially in countries where the WMDs are still a distant dream. Once it's been acquired, the big guys are check-mated. North Korea is a classic example. So we framed that Burma was 'rogue' state ruled by the mad crowd who must not be entrusted with WMDs or allowed to even entertain the possibility of WMD dreams. That would be a threat to peace and security of the region.

To give another, more brilliant and successful example, on the eve of the first, justified American-led war against the Iraqi agression in Kuwait, one 'Kuwaiti girl' who escaped Saddam occupying army in her native country testified before a US Congressional Committee and jerked tears with her first-witness accounts of the inhumanity of Iraqi soldiers who threw Kuwaiti babies into ovens. Sounds like these guys were SS reincarnates born into Iraqi families? You bet.

When the dust settled, and Saddam's invading army was pushed back - or buried alive under the desert sand - the truth surfaced. That tear jerking Kuwaiti girl turned out to be a daughter of a senior diplomat from Kuwait's mission to the United States, based in Washington, DC. This was a brilliant, if regrettable

performance of some Public Relations firm on K Street, that infamous Washington street lined with public relations and lobbying firms where 'truth doctors' and 'spin-miesters' congregate, conspire and connive – against or for anyone, any group, any company, and any government - for exorbitant retainer's fees, sometimes on sliding scales, sometimes fixed prices.

Spin-doctoring wasn't an American invention on K Street. The craft has been around for centuries since printing press was created in Gottingam.

In the days leading up to the annexation of the Court of Ava or Kongbaung in Mandalay in November 1885, the London Illustrated, a large circulation newspaper at the time, carried a front page caricature of King Thibaw, depicting him as an toad, drunk 24/7 and ruthless like a crocodile. He was a tyrant, never mind that the poor guy was too weak to control his sharp-tongued, but idiotic girl-queen, let alone rebellious populations and conspiratorial ministers of various ranks.

The drum-beats of invasion and annexation were maintained through popular media. Thibaw was an incompetent, ruthless, drunken bastard whose subjects longed to be rescued by the British and taught lesson 101 in Civilization, so went the official White Hall story. The burden was on the White Man of course, and the pleasure was 'the natives'."

Having done its propoganda work at home the White Hall finally acted on its foregone conclusion that Upper Burma was to be annexed, preempting the Franco-Burma alliance which the Burman Court was quietly - and desperately - trying to establish.

Truths can be prostituted for political and financial gains. Just simply take your pick: pro-NLD, pro-sanctions and pro-isolation, pro-engagement, pro-secession, pro-Burman chauvinsim, pro-hardlines, pro-MIs,pro-armed struggle, pro-non-violence, and the list goes on.

On the other side of the fence,the state media apparatuses including Myanmar TV, the New Light of Myanmar, and an array of publications, are also engaged in disinformation, misinformation, etc. The regime in Rangoon would round up dissidentts, legitimate opposition members and NLD sympathizers and throw them in jail on trumped up charges.

My uncle Dr. Htay Kyway, senior medical officer from North Okkalapa General Hospital was arrested and locked up on charges that he was making illegel professional referral to his NLD friend's girlfriend who needed to abort her pregnancy. He was arrested on the same day - and in connection with - Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's most respected colleague and advisor - journalist Hanthawaddi U Win Tin. U Win Tin was arrested on the ground that he allowed his deputy – NLD U Soe Theinn - to use his home phone to call my uncle and made that fatal request for help with his girlfriend's abortion. I don't know what other charges have been made to keep U Win Tin behind bars since 1989.

Butchering of truths is a time honored, if despicable political practices.

Parties in conflict are driven primarily not by their desire to establish truth or persue reconciliation. Once conflict deepens we can forget all about noble principles and truths. Winning is the name of the game. The longer and the more protracted conflicts get, the nasties and more ruthless parties in conflict become, the less tractable the conflict becomes.

It doesn't matter what ideology one is subscribe to - Left, Right, Center. Or it doesn't matter what one's modus operandi - democrats, autocrats, tyrants. Parties in conflict, by definition, for the kill. Go for the jugular. Why stop at a few soft punches, if you can claim 'off with your head'?

Stories are told only in episodes - and sequencing is an art. But story-tellers have their own motivations, interests and agendas. SPDC has multiple reasons to tell the Burmese public their stories, called news, or official stories. They do so through text books, speeches, and press conference. And whisper campaigns. Psych-War department in Rangoon has been in operation since early 1950s. Many leading literary icons including the late Min Thu Wan, brilliant satirist Maung Htin made their contributions to such anti-Communist magazine as Myawadee while the lesser talents also participated in this

propaganda process.

Now Christian Solidarity Worldwide has stepped up and told its 'truth'. There will be more.

The question for the Burmese is this:

are we to get excited each time our opponents get clobbered in the media by specious allegations, when the neighboring Thai army generals feel compelled to stay what a non-sense the allegations of the use of chemical weapons

Both the Thai and Burmese armies train on mutual suspicions, mutual deep distate and historical animosities. Even the Thai 'adversaries' of our country's Tatmadaw find this Christian group's claim less than credible, why should we beat our chest and continue to play this poor victim role which the outsiders want us to play?

Let the Christian Solidarity Worldwide save those in Darfur or Zimbabwe or Tibet or Kashmire or North Korea.

As Burmese we will do well to remember that our mission is to reclaim our country so that we can rebuild it and find ways to reconcile amongs ourselves, with our current opponents in power, and with those from different ethnic backgrounds. We don't need to destroy it in order to save it.

We must ask ourselves the following question:

Are we fighting for our country's freedom and national interests? Or are we playing 'victim' in the eyes of the 'civilizing' West?