

Burma killed by tyranny

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The vultures are circling over Burma's dead. Hey, isn't that fat one Al Gore? Sure is. And - flap, flap, plop - there he lands, the first to go picking over carcasses for scraps to feed his great global warming scare campaign.

What the world should be learning from this terrible loss of at least 60,000 people in the cyclone that hit Burma last week is that tyrannies kill more surely than any freak of weather.

But Al Gore, who won a Nobel "Peace" Prize for terrifying people with his error-riddled *An Inconvenient Truth*, wants you to blame instead his pet bogeyman. Tremble, sinners, before the wrath of a hot planet!

In an interview on America's NPR on Tuesday, Gore claimed Cyclone Nargis was actually part of a pattern. "Last year a catastrophic storm . . . hit Bangladesh. The year before, the strongest cyclone in more than 50 years hit China, and we're seeing consequences that scientists have long predicted might be associated with continued global warming."

This cyclone that hit Burma is a "consequence" of global warming? Gore should die of shame to peddle such self-serving deceptions.

Fact: The world has not warmed in a decade, says the Hadley Centre and two of the three other institutions that measure its temperature.

Fact: Any link between hurricanes and warming is highly disputed by scientists, with "evidence both for and against", says the American Meteorological Society.

Fact: The data is "insufficiently reliable to detect trends on the frequency of extreme cyclones", says a recent paper in *Science* by world authority Chris Landsea.

Fact: The cyclone that hit Burma was just a category three storm - not a category five - and less deadly than worse cyclones that struck Bangladesh in 1970 and 1991. What's more, Gore concedes the record breaker was 50 years ago, before the world got this gassy.

So there's no recent warming, no agreed link with cyclones, no trend of worse cyclones, and nothing unusually strong about the one that hit Burma. Yet there goes Gore - caw, caw, caw - flogging the warming scare that has made him so fantastically rich. The great Profit of Doom.

Par for his course, I know, given a British judge last year ruled that Gore had likewise exaggerated the link between global warming and the category three Hurricane Katrina that helped to breach the crumbling levees of New Orleans. But what's worse this time is that Gore's blundering attempts to blame global warming for Burma's agony distracts attention from the real causes of this catastrophe - despicable causes we may at least hope to do something about.

If Cyclone Nargis had struck not Rangoon, but Melbourne or Tokyo, it is unlikely more than a few dozen people, if that, would have died. And that's because we are free, and rich - as free people tend to be with capitalism. Even Bangkok would have survived this far, far easier.

But in Burma as many as 100,000 are now feared dead - victims not of global warming, but of a tyranny that has left them poor and defenceless.

Burma, a former British colony, was once the rice-bowl of South-East Asia, but in 1962 a bunch of generals took over with a misty-eyed plan to impose on their 50 million people the "Burmese Way to Socialism". Their brand of politics was of the kind still distressingly popular at RMIT and Victoria University, and produced exactly the misery it's inflicted from Cuba to Russia.

The economy collapsed, and Burma went from bread-basket to basket-case. No wonder so many people today still live in shacks and shanties that were no protection against last Friday's high winds and storm surge.

Whenever the Burmese people tried to protest against this junta-made poverty, and to demand democracy, they were shot - so often and in such numbers that China is now about the only ally the junta has left. In this way does resource-ravenous China, Olympics host, export its tyranny to the world.

Now consider how this junta - so brutal, unaccountable, incompetent, tyrannical and isolated -- has handled this latest disaster. Two days before Cyclone Nargis hit, India's Meteorological Department warned the junta's minions it was coming, and where. But Burma's state-owned media, one of the crudest propaganda outfits I've seen, issued no mass alerts. Indeed, illegal Voice of America broadcasts probably did more to warn Burma's civilians to take shelter than did Burma's own radio station.

At first, the full scale of the disaster was kept from the world. Perhaps even the junta itself may not have known it, given there are no journalists free in that country to report what they see, and no untapped phone lines or internet to tell the world the truth.

Even now, the junta is killing people with its paranoia. Disaster assessment teams and helicopters from the United States have been blocked from coming in to prepare a huge rescue, and foreign aid teams not already in-country had their applications for visas stalled and aid shipments stopped.

Foreign journalists, whose reports would help raise appeal money, have been banned. The UN is now "intensely" negotiating with the junta to let in aid workers and ease customs regulations on aid - literally begging the junta to let the world save its people.

So slow has the junta been to let in help, that French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, founder of aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres, suggested the UN Security Council adopt a resolution allowing aid to be flown into the country by force. China, naturally, is against such interference in the affairs of its "friend". True, the junta has let in some shipments of aid, and is particularly keen on being given cash rather than kind - which even the patsies of the European Union, not being completely insane, resist.

Why hand cash to thieves? I've seen for myself, on one of my trips to Burma, military heavies in shades openly demand bribes from Australian aid workers who were giving blankets to disaster victims. In Mandalay, I saw a Red Cross ambulance, given by Japan, refitted for use as a taxi for military officials. The junta even today charges import duty on foreign donations. With such tyrants in charge, the toll from Friday's cyclone - already horrific - can only keep rising.

Let us not be sidetracked. These are people killed not by Gore's global warming, or even by Friday's Cyclone Nargis - but by a filthy band of rapacious dictators who have left their people beggared and blinded, at the mercy of even the wind and waves.