

Malaysia VX case (170725)

About the murder of Mr. Kim Jong Nam with VX nerve agent in Malaysia, comparing to the VX cases by Aum Shinrikyo.

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1. About myself

My name is Tomomasa NAKAGAWA, and I am an ex-Aum Shinrikyo member. Now I'm on death row in the Tokyo Detention Center.

In 1962, I was born in Okayama, Japan. I graduated from a medical school in 1988. In the same year, I was converted into Aum Shinrikyo. I worked as a physician.

Between December 1994 and January 1995, Aum Shinrikyo murdered a man and injured two men with VX nerve agent (the Aum VX cases). A skillful chemist in Aum Shinrikyo synthesized the VX. I was involved in the cases because we had to prepare for potential accidents in which Aum Shinrikyo members were contaminated by VX or VX-related substances.

In March 1995, Aum Shinrikyo attacked the Tokyo subway with nerve gas, sarin. In May of the same year, I was arrested. In 2011, my death sentence became finalized.

I'll briefly write what I think about the case in which Mr. Kim Jong Nam was murdered by VX in Malaysia (the Malaysia VX case).

2. Where did the VX come from?

If the North Koreans handed the VX to the two female perpetrators, I believe that it was synthesized in North Korea and that it then was conveyed to Malaysia.

Technically, making VX is far more difficult than making explosives, illegal drugs, and sarin.

And there are many other challenges to producing it in a makeshift laboratory. It's almost impossible for the North Koreans to produce VX secretly in Malaysia.

On the other hand, conveying VX isn't very dangerous or difficult. Though I don't know how the North Koreans obtained VX entry into Malaysia, I think that they were able to carry enough VX for Mr. Kim's case in a small container, perhaps in a perfume or eye drops vial made of glass.

I'll point out another possible way of getting the VX to Malaysia. It is possible that not the VX itself but two liquids were carried from North Korea to Malaysia. Carrying them is easier than carrying VX since they are less toxic. When the liquids are mixed, VX will be generated immediately. This method is called binary technology.

3. Why did they select VX?

I think that they intended to disguise the murder as a sudden death by sickness.

Based on my experience, few doctors know even the name of VX. So, diagnosis of VX poisoning is impossible for them. In the Aum VX cases, no doctors thought that crimes were committed. The first diagnoses of the three cases were a stroke, a heart attack, and pesticide poisoning. The second victim died and others recovered. Correct diagnoses of VX poisoning were made after the perpetrator had made a full confession to the police. The North Korean Ambassador to Malaysia objected to the examination of the body and, without showing any evidence, strongly insisted that the cause of death was "a heart attack," which is similar to the initial and incorrect diagnosis of the second victim in the Aum VX cases. Cases in which VX is actually used are very rare. I'm afraid that North Korea researched the Aum VX cases and selected VX to use against Mr. Kim Jong Nam.

4. Why was the cause of death discovered?

Because the Malaysian police suspected that Mr. Kim was murdered by the women with poisonous liquid. The plan of the North Koreans fell through. I'll enumerate three points.

(1) Images of the female offenders and North Koreans were recorded. The way of the

attack made by one of the women is most significant. From the images, the poison seems to be liquid and to be absorbed through the skin. Since nothing has happened to the people in the airport except Mr. Kim, the volatility of the liquid is considered to be low. Such poison with extreme toxicity is very rare. And it has been said that the North Korea Army has VX. One who knows VX will suspect that the perpetrators might use it. When I saw the image, I wrote a letter to Dr. Anthony T. Tu, the world's leading toxicologist, in which I pointed out the probability that VX was used. In the Aum VX cases, there were no images.

(2) Mr. Kim told the airport officer that liquid was put on his face and that he felt pain. In the Aum VX cases, there was no such information from the victims.

(3) Mr. Kim died immediately. The VX must have been absorbed not only through the skin but also through the eyes, where it penetrates more easily and rapidly. As a result, Mr. Kim died in 20 minutes or so, before boarding a plane, and his body, the most important evidence, had remained in Malaysia. From my experience, when VX is absorbed only through the skin, the victim will gradually develop difficulty in breathing within an hour or so after initial exposure to VX.

5. Is it possible that the female offenders died?

Yes, I think they may well have died. News stories reported that one of them vomited. I'm sure that it was one of the symptoms of VX poisoning. In one of the Aum VX cases, a victim vomited and subsequently developed difficulty in breathing.

In the Aum VX cases, we were very careful not to get VX directly on our skin. When we used VX, the perpetrator splashed several drops of VX from an injector without needle. In the Malaysia VX case, the women treated VX on their hands and smeared it on Mr. Kim's face. Whether they put on gloves or not, that was a kind of suicide attack because the other parts of their bodies were not protected.

6. Why didn't the female offenders die?

I'll point out two reasons.

(1) One is a very probable and important reason. According to the news stories, they washed their hands just after the attack. That reduced the quantity of VX which penetrated their skin. I once got a little drop of VX on my hand accidentally. I felt burning pain within a minute. I soon washed it away. I think that, whatever they knew the toxicity of VX or not, they couldn't help washing the VX away because of the pain if VX was on their skin. From my experience, it takes at least several minutes for VX to go through skin.

(2) The other reason is also possible. The above-mentioned binary technology might be used. I mean, two liquids may have been put on Mr. Kim's face. One of the women could use both of the liquids or each of the women could use one of the liquids. When the second liquid was smeared after the first liquid, they were mixed with each other and VX was thereby generated on his face. In this method, the offenders are safer than when VX itself is used, although I can't say it is completely safe. And the method will leave little physical evidence because the offenders don't have VX itself.

It is said that they might have used the antidote for VX and survived. But I don't think so. The antidote must be injected under careful observation. I believe that they couldn't do so by themselves. If they had had such knowledge and technique, they would choose another way of attack, not the one which they actually used. Though I don't know whether the female perpetrators knew the toxicity of VX, I do not believe that doctors from North Korea were ready for the suicide VX attack by the expendable women.

7. My apology

I wonder if the North Koreans studied the three VX cases committed by Aum Shinrikyo. I must apologize to the three VX victims of Aum Shinrikyo and their families again. I also pray for Mr. Kim Jong Nam's soul: may he rest in peace.

Tomomasa NAKAGAWA,
Ex-Aum Shinrikyo member