

CORRUPTION AND MISUSE OF GAS RELIEF RESOURCES

The condition of Bhopal's gas victims remains dire and critical 21 years after the disaster, not just because of the callous and criminal behaviour of Union Carbide and its owner Dow Chemical, but also because of the equally callous, contemptuous, and negligent behaviour of local politicians. Thoughtlessness, corruption, and greed have characterized the approach to the necessary medical infrastructure for gas victims in Bhopal – and the end result has been rich politicians and sicker, poorer gas victims. The continued suffering of gas survivors is as much attributable to the apathy and neglect of the government as to their exposure to Carbide's toxic gases.

MISMANAGEMENT

- The Bhopal gas disaster, the world's worst industrial disaster, affected over 500,000 and permanently debilitated up to 200,000. Official responsibility for their medical needs was split between the Central government and the state government of Madhya Pradesh. The central government provides 75% of the funding for these services, and the state government, although only paying 25% of the bill, is responsible for the execution of these services and the health of the gas victims.
- Official records show that in the last five years about 4,000 persons have visited government hospitals everyday, yet there is no record of the treatment offered to these people and there is no information on the efficacy of treatment. Despite the uniqueness and seriousness of methyl isocyanate exposure, no treatment protocols have been developed over twenty-one years to help gas victims heal, or to deal with their chronic problems. Treatment is symptomatic, and largely the same as it was in the emergency situation in the immediate aftermath. This lack of research betrays a complete disinterest by the government in healing the survivors.
- A study undertaken by the International Medical Commission on Bhopal in 1994 confirmed that therapies prescribed for the ailing survivors are aimed at temporary symptomatic relief rather than the long term amelioration of chronic disease processes.
- In 1990 a study of 522 patients at two government hospitals meant for gas victims found that over 35% of patients were prescribed irrational or unnecessary medicines as well as medicines known to be hazardous, having been banned in other countries.

"Corruption isn't a natural disaster -- it is the cold, calculated theft of opportunity from the men, women, and children who are least able to protect themselves."

- Transparency International - Global Coalition Against Corruption

CORRUPTION

- Over Rs 150 crores have been spent from the public exchequer on the provision of medical care to the survivors, yet the health of the survivors has deteriorated rather than improved. Instead of putting money into research and community based care that would have benefited the gas victims, the state government has chosen to pursue general hospital projects that can provide lucrative kickbacks to those involved in the construction.
- In addition to the already existing hospitals with a total of 275 beds, five additional hospitals with a total of 740 beds have been built. Little attention has been paid towards appropriate medical care in these hospitals -- actual medical care is incommensurate with the resources put into construction.

- The 150-bed Indira Gandhi Hospital for women and children completed in 1994 is yet to be made functional. The contract, worth an estimated Rs. 239 lakhs was awarded to a contractor in April 1989 with stipulated period of construction of 24 months. The work was completed only in June 1994 at a cost Rs 598.76 lakhs.
- The construction of the 540-bed Kamla Nehru Hospital began in 1987. It is yet to be completed, despite the expenditure of nearly three times the budgeted amount. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General has pointed out gross irregularities in the financial administration of the hospital constructions and mentions misappropriation of huge sums of money.
- To this day, the Pulmonary Medicine Centre that was completed in 1994 and is meant to provide specialized medical care to persons suffering from respiratory disorders remains without provisions of permanent staff.
- Almost half the equipment in the government hospitals and clinics is dysfunctional. The majority is in need of some kind of repair.



The Pulmonary Center for gas victims remains without permanent staff or provisions



WHAT IS NEEDED

The negligence of the state government has allowed Rs. 150 crore to be extorted from the taxpayers for callous, fraudulent purposes those exposed to Union Carbide's gases in 1984 and their children wait for help they desperately need but never get. The misappropriation of relief resources in Bhopal is a crime against humanity. The government is obligated to correct and punish this corruption and mismanagement, and must begin this process by publishing a white paper on expenditure.

WE DEMAND that the central government set up a National Commission on Bhopal with the necessary authority and access to present a White Paper on expenditures made, programs carried out and results obtained in the last twenty years with regard to the relief and rehabilitation of the survivors; end the corruption and misappropriation of resources, and to initiate prosecution against those who are guilty. This commission must have active participation of non-government experts and representatives of survivor's organizations.

**This padyatra is our march for justice and dignity. We shall struggle until our last breath.
21 years is enough!**

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