

Defeat & Anger Hang Heavy Over Bhopal Verdict

Bhopal: (IANS) The gloom is unrelenting in the colonies near the Union Carbide plant. This should have been a day of retribution but is one of resignation, residents said a day after seven accused in the world's worst industrial disaster got away with two years imprisonment and immediate bail.

They are the residents of Shahid Nagar and Karon Colony, amongst those colonies that have come to be known simply as 'gas-hit localities' since that night of Dec 2-3, 1984 when methyl iso-cyanate and other lethal gases leaked out killing 3,500 people instantly and maiming several thousand others for life.

An estimated 15,000 people have died over the years with some activists claiming that the figure is closer to 25,000.

The verdict from a local Bhopal court convicting eight people, including one who has died, of criminal negligence is another disaster, say the victims.

"What we had demanded was justice and this is what we have got in return. Endless wait and no punishment to those who ruined our lives," said A.P. Shukla, who lives in Karon Colony, just a kilometre away from the now shut Union Carbide plant.

Shukla, who lost his two brothers and parents in the toxic leak, said: "We were first deceived on the compensation front, then there was no economic rehabilitation, and now the government cannot even ensure that the guilty are punished."

Tarannum of Shaheed Nagar is equally furi-

ous.

"Our judicial system seems to acknowledge Americans and America more than Indians and India...," said Tarannum, whose father died almost seven years ago from ailments caused by the gas leak.

Warren Anderson, who headed Union Carbide Corp, the parent company of Union Carbide, is now 89 and lives in near seclusion in the US. He has never been prosecuted and was not amongst the eight accused.

And the anger runs deep.

"Should we go to court or should we take law in our hand? This is the question in our mind after this shameful judgement," said Aziza Sultan, a survivor who lives next to the Union Carbide plant.

She survived and regrets she lives to tell the tale.

"Those who survived the gas are the unlucky ones like me. The lucky are those who died that night. It would have been better if I too would have died then. I would have not seen this day at least."

Said Mazhar Abbas, who was not in Bhopal that night: "It is a shame to award two years im-



prisonment to those eight accused... Is it money power or political connections that have come to the relief of the accused?"

"Had it been any other country, the culprits would have been either shot or hanged. Are Indian not humans?" I.H. Siddique, a retired bank official, asked. "Just imagine if Union Carbide were an Indian company located in the US. What would the US have done?"

Siddique said he had seen his relatives die a slow death over the years. Another relative has three daughters who have suffered

gynaecological problems after being exposed to the gas; now, no one is willing to marry them.

According to retired insurance official Narendra Sharma, Monday's ruling is a "cruel and inhuman" decision for those who had lost everything in the fight for justice and were only clinging on to the hope of appropriate punitive action against those responsible.

"Think of the families who lost everything. Think of the ones who don't exist anymore. The justice system is terrible in India. Now it's up to the media and the people to make a difference."

Tarannum, Aziza, Mazhar, Narendra... voices of anger, dejection and defeat. They have spoken out for the last 25 years and there is no rest yet.

Union Carbide Still Operates In India

New Delhi: (IANS) Though it broke and defied the law of the land, the US multinational Union Carbide Corporation continues to do business in India, though by proxy after its takeover by Dow Chemicals Limited. Dow too faces a probe into the allegation of bribing government officials.

Even as the Bhopal trial court declared Union Carbide chairman Warren Anderson a fugitive and a proclaimed offender after Indian government failed to extradite him to face trial for his criminal liability in causing the world's worst industrial disaster in Bhopal, the firm sold one of its patent technology to a Gujarat based gas refinery and continues earning royalty for its technology, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials said.

After Dow Chemicals expressed its intention to take over Union Carbide, the Bhopal gas tragedy victims sent it a legal notice warning it that it would also be inheriting the criminal liability of the US multinational, said social activist Satinath Sarangi.

Dow Chemicals, however, ignored the warning, he added.

Dow Chemicals took over Union Carbide in February 2001, after which the Bhopal gas victims moved the city's chief judicial magistrate's court for trying it for sheltering Anderson, "a fugitive from justice", a CBI official said.

On Bhopal gas tragedy victims' plea, the court did issue summons to Dow Chemicals in January 2005, but the firm challenged the summons before the Jabalpur bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, and got the summons suspended as the CBI refused to oppose Dow's pleas.

The investigative agency did not challenge the high court's order suspending the summons against Dow Chemicals, said CBI sources.

Sarangi said that Dow Chemicals is also facing a CBI probe into the allegations that it paid bribes amounting to \$200,000 to officials of the Central Insecticide Registration Board and its parent ministry (agriculture) for clearance for the sale in India of its three insecticides and pesticides, banned in the US.

This is an admitted fact as the American Security and Exchange Commission had imposed a penalty of \$350,000 million on it for bribing Indian officials and the firm had paid the fine to US corporate regulator without a protest, Sarangi added.

Is Counting Caste Good Or Bad? India Is Divided

New Delhi: (IANS) Is it good to ask the Indian his or her caste? The political class is divided although a vast majority of Indians carry their caste firmly etched in their names.

Ever since the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) ignited a storm by demanding that caste identity be included in the national census, political parties have been locked in a war of words.

The government's initial reported decision to bow to the demand and then ask a panel of ministers to study the issue — effectively keeping the caste-count from the mammoth national census now under way — has added fuel to the fire.

The Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the two biggest parties in parliament, are divided within their ranks.

But Samajwadi Party's vocal MP Dharmendra Yadav knows his mind. "Various welfare schemes of the central government use caste as a yardstick to provide benefits to weaker sections," Yadav told IANS. "It is important to get a proper enumeration of castes to get accurate data about their numbers."

Those who want to put the caste back in the census — it was tabulated way back in 1931 when India was under British rule for the first and last time — say there is nothing wrong in counting the caste since Indians are asked their religion anyway.

However, there are dissenting voices.

Ajay Maken, a junior minister in the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government, has warned that a caste-based census would lead

to demands from communities to be categorized as OBCs (other backward classes) — to gain official benefits available to people who are socially backward. He is mobilising younger and progressive MPs to lobby as a pressure group against caste-based census.



India's Hindu community is home to hundreds of castes and sub-castes. The caste system forms the basis of a strict hierarchical society where the lower castes have been economically and socially oppressed for long, though this division is disappearing among the surging middle class as it pursues expanding professional and economic aspirations and integrates socially.

Some of Maken's ministerial colleagues, including Law Minister M. Veerappa Moily, want caste to be included in the headcount of India's population.

Opinion among MPs is divided.

BJP leader Arjun Munda, a former Jharkhand chief minister, said any decision on a caste count should be taken after thoroughly analysing its impact on politics, especially the experience of the past 20 years. "Having caste census has its merits and demerits. I am against caste politics and feel that an enumeration will accentuate caste identities and hence will have a negative impact," he said.

Madhu Goud Yaskhi, a Congress MP from Andhra Pradesh who left a flourishing legal practice in New York to join politics in India, argued that India was a caste-based society anyway.

"One cannot avoid the caste system. Political parties give ticket on the basis of caste. They

look at caste equations in a constituency. Caste is a factor in giving job and education opportunities to weaker sections."

Like others, he said lack of reliable data on castes was a problem.

So why was his party colleague Maken opposed to Indians being asked their caste? Yaskhi replied that the minister belonged to the upper caste and could be addressing his own constituency.

The Communists are clear: cast away the caste. Said Anup Kumar Saha, a Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) MP from West Bengal: "We are not free from the problem of casteism. A caste census will only complicate matters."

Saha said even if the government wanted to get data on caste, such information should not be put in public domain as it would only strengthen caste identities.

Pawar Not Involved In IPL Pune Bid: NCP

New Delhi: (IANS) The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) recently said the City Corporation company, in which its chief and union Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar and his family members have equity, had resolved not to bid for Indian Premier League's (IPL) Pune team.

The party denied that Pawar and members of his family had any role in an unsuccessful bid for an IPL team as the March resolution by the Pune-based company made it clear that it will not take part in the bid.

Reacting to reports in the media that board of directors of City Corporation, in which the Pawars have 16.22 percent stake, had authorised their managing director Anirudh Deshpande Jan 31 this year to bid for

Pune IPL franchise on behalf of the company, NCP spokesperson D.P. Tripathi said the January decision had been cancelled by the resolution passed by the company in March.

"The March 17 resolution passed by the company cancels January 31 decision. The March 17 resolution said that the company was not involved in the Pune bid," Tripathi told IANS.

He said that Deshpande had attached a sheet of paper with his bid which said that he will raise money through a new consortium if his bid was successful. Pawar has maintained that no member of his family

was part of any IPL team nor had they taken part in the bidding process and Deshpande had made the bid for the Pune team in his individual capacity.

