

## Bhopal a grim reminder for the world

Dato' Dzulkifli Abd Razak

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Twenty years ago last week, on Dec 3, 1984, one of the world's worst industrial disasters took place and it still remains a nightmare for thousands of its victims, and the world at large.

The Bhopal disaster involving the company, Union Carbide Corporation, has left not only scars on the surviving victims, but also on the environment.

Reportedly those who survived the gas remain sick, while the poisoned water supply is causing an epidemic of cancer, birth defects, and afflictions.

Due to the gravity of the incident, some dubbed the incident as the "Hiroshima of the chemical industry" – after the horrific bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, where victims are still suffering till today.

Other likened it to the Vietnam War, where tens of thousands of Vietnamese people were doused with toxic chemicals.

In the case of Bhopal, half a million people were left severely disabled – of whom about 20,000 have since died.

About 7,000 died within days of the tragedy. Most were gassed as a result of a catastrophic chemical leak at the pesticide plant where all safety systems at the plant were non-functional.

This came about seemingly because the company tried to cut corners on safety and maintenance to save money, according to company's purportedly own internal documents.

The nightmare worsened when the victims were refused funds for adequate – treatment. Neither were they properly compensated.

To add insult to injury, no one has been held accountable for the carnage.

Those responsible refused to stand trial in Bhopal where the company faces criminal charges of culpable homicide (manslaughter).

In fact, the industrial "terrorist" have escaped these charges for the past 12 years, literally getting away with murder.

Amnesty International ( [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) ) in its impeccable and graphic report *Clouds of injustice : Bhopal disaster 20 years on* to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal tragedy, wants an immediate clean-up of the site and full remedy for the victims.

It calls for the acknowledgement of the harm suffered, compensation, rehabilitation and for those responsible to be held to account.

Bhopal is a good reminder for Malaysia going by the finding of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants' independently sponsored survey recently.

It noted with concern that only 10 per cent of the 600-odd companies listed on Bursa Malaysia are involved in social and environment reporting in 2003.

Such companies' failures can easily expose Malaysians to a Bhopal-like nightmare where safety and maintenance are compromised.

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