

IU students remember tragedy at Bhopal

By Lanetta J. Williams
Hoosier Times

BLOOMINGTON — In 1984, a poisonous gas lay over the city of Bhopal like a blanket, suffocating those beneath it.

Yogesh Simmhan, a member of the IU chapter of the Association for India's Development, said people bled from the inside out, not knowing what was happening to them. It turned out that methyl isocyanate gas had leaked from a Union Carbide factory in Bhopal on Dec. 3, 1984. It killed between 3,000 and 7,000 in the first week and is blamed for the deaths of 15,000 to 20,000 more people.

Simmhan stood with about 10 other Indiana University students in front of the Sample Gates at Kirkwood and Indiana avenues Saturday in remembrance of the 22-year-old disaster. They held signs depicting a baby half-buried beneath rubble and stood next to mock corpses wrapped in white cloths.

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Sunday 3rd December, 2006
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Association for India's Development (AID), Indiana University
www.indiana.edu/~aid aid@indiana.edu

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"They were out on the streets, suffering and dying like dogs," he said. "Union Carbide ran out of the country and they didn't clean up the place."

The group, also called AID, held the event featuring a reenactment of a funeral procession from the disaster in remembrance of victims and to raise awareness for the grassroots effort to clean up the contaminated site, provide compensation and medical treatment for victims and hold

someone accountable for what happened.

"We want them to give them medical support and face trial," Simmhan said. "Twenty-five thousand people are dead, and not a single person has faced trial."

Their target is also Dow Chemical Co. The Midland, Mich.-based firm acquired Union Carbide in 2001. The students want Dow to finish the cleanup of the chemicals, which continue to sicken people and cause genetic deformities, Simmhan said.

"This thing is in memory of the 25,000 victims of Bhopal and the ones that are still sick," he said. "We are fighting for the survivors, and we want

Dow to do the right thing, to take responsibility."

Attempts to reach Dow media contacts Saturday were unsuccessful.

The company's Web site says Bhopal was "a human tragedy that should never be forgotten" but that legal issues were resolved in 1989, when Union Carbide agreed to pay \$470 million into a trust managed by the Indian government. The government also took charge of the cleanup, it says.

For Dow to take further action on Bhopal, it says, "would not be appropriate or consistent with our obligation to protect our shareholders' interests."

Similar protests were held in

other cities around the world on Saturday including Baltimore and Detroit, Mich. A march to a bus named for the victims was also held in Michigan.

Association for India's Development's Ramya, a doctoral student at IU, said the protest was raising awareness and that students can do more.

"Dow has a responsibility on this campus, and we want students to do something," she said. "Protest has had an impact and it will have an effect."

Reporter Steve Hines contributed to this report.