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# A Cloud of Death

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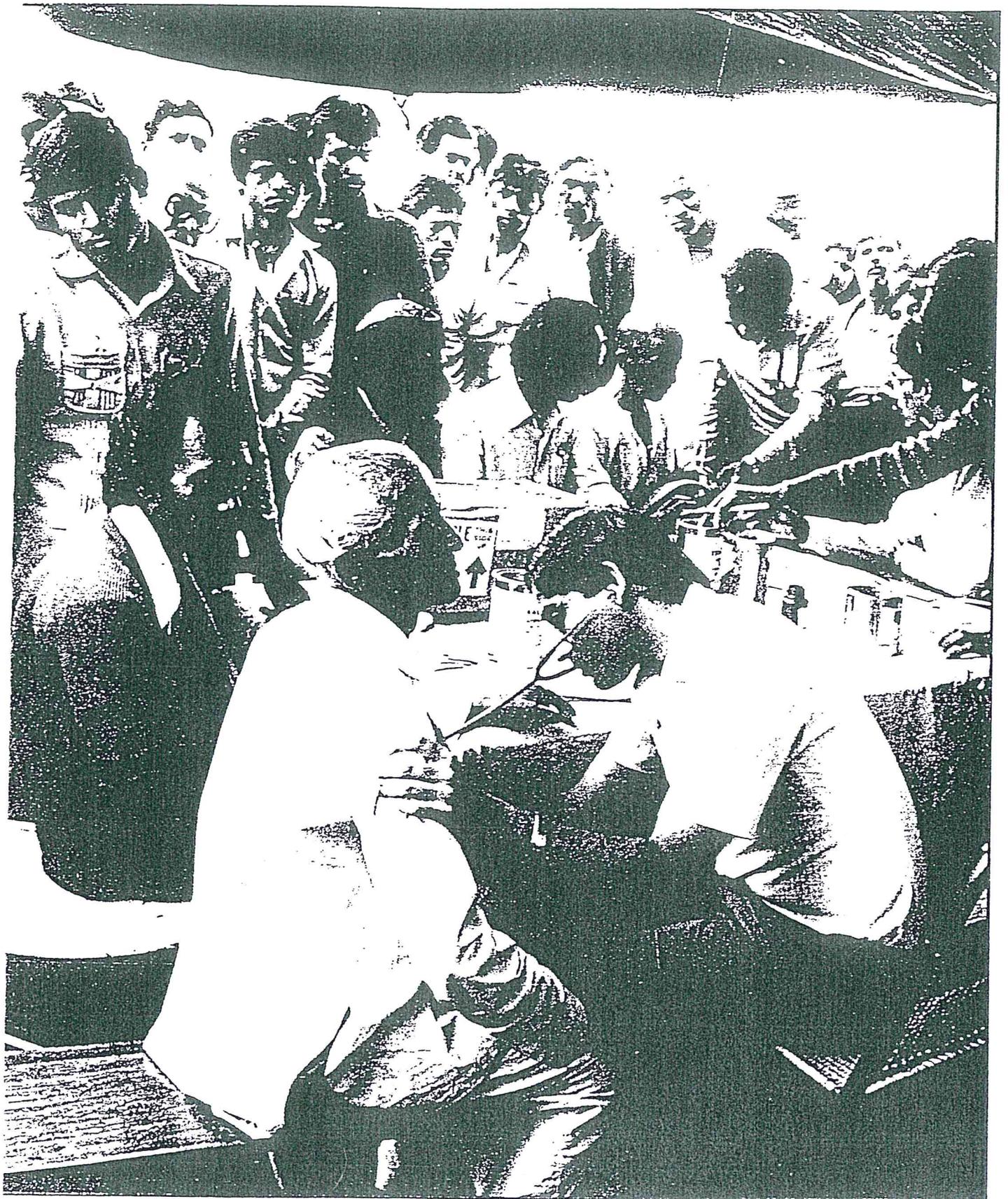
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**T**he cloud hit Bhopal, India, at one o'clock in the morning. At that hour, most people were asleep. The night air was cool. The streets were empty. A calmness hung over the city of 900,000 people. Suddenly, the calmness was **shattered**.

Some people awoke with watering eyes. Others felt sharp pains in their chests. Still others felt a stinging in their noses. Within minutes, everyone was suffering the same **agony**. A huge white cloud of poison gas came down upon the city. Before the night was over, it would bring pain and death to thousands of people.

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## Breathing Fire

The poison gas which formed the cloud was **methyl isocyanate**. It was one **chemical** used in a nearby Union Carbide **plant**. Plant workers kept the chemical in a sealed 45-ton tank. But on December 3, 1984, the tank sprang a leak. The chemical escaped. It formed a **deadly** cloud of gas that covered Bhopal. The gas mixed with **moisture** in people's bodies. It burned their eyes and their lungs.

"It was like breathing fire," said one man.

"It was like a big gas chamber," said another.

## A City in Pain

People did not know what had happened. Many thought a war had broken out. As many as 200,000 people poured into the streets. They ran for their lives. The streets were soon packed. Hundreds of people died as they tried to run away. Those still standing were too blind to see where they were going.

Some people did make it to the train station. But the trains could not move. No one could run them.



Railroad workers lay on the ground in pain. They too had breathed in the poison gas.

By the next morning, the deadly cloud had broken up and vanished. But the damage was done. About 2,500 people lay dead. Over 100,000 were badly injured. Some suffered kidney infections. Others had brain damage. Thousands lost their eyesight. And many were left with terrible lung problems.

At nearby hospitals, doctors did what they could. But there wasn't much they could do. There is no known cure for methyl isocyanate poisoning.

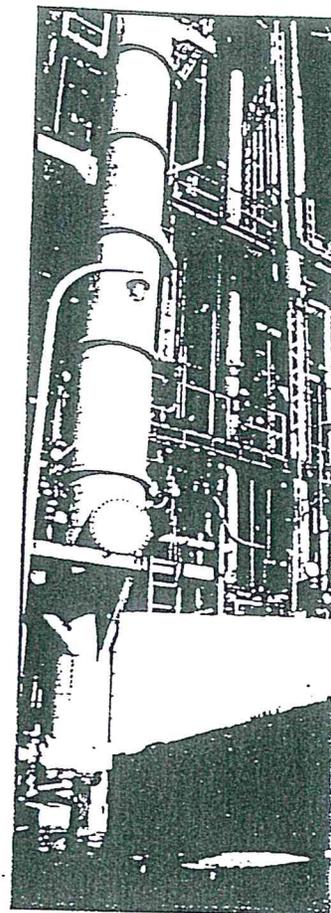
### Searching for Answers

Back at Union Carbide, officials tried to find out what had gone wrong. Why had the giant chemical tank sprung a leak? And why hadn't workers been able to stop it? They found that the leak was caused by a broken **valve**. Safety measures to deal with a leak had not worked.

Some workers tried to control the leak after it began. But they were not able to seal the tank. Tons of the deadly chemical **billowed** into the air. Nearly an hour passed before the tank was finally sealed.

The Bhopal disaster alarmed people around the world. Many questions were raised. What was to keep such an accident from happening at other chemical plants? How safe were the people who lived near these plants? How could safety systems be improved?

These questions were not easily answered. Union Carbide agreed to pay \$470 million to the people of Bhopal. But money could not repair the damage. Bhopal serves as a sad reminder of the dangers of **technology**.



The Union Carbide plant that is in Bhopal, India.

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## Do You Remember?

■ In the blank, write the letter of the best ending for each sentence.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When the deadly gas hit Bhopal, most people were  
a. at work.      b. on vacation.      c. sleeping.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The poison gas came from a nearby  
a. chemical plant.      b. school.      c. hospital.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. People tried to  
a. hide.      b. run away.      c. talk about it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The leak in the tank was finally sealed in  
a. twelve hours.      b. an hour.      c. a day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. By the next morning, the deadly cloud was  
a. bigger.      b. moving south.      c. gone.

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## Critical Thinking – Cause and Effect

■ Complete the following sentences.

1. People awoke in the middle of the night because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. The chemical escaped because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. The trains could not move because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Doctors could not do much to help because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring Words

- Use the words in the box to complete the paragraph. Reread the paragraph to be sure it makes sense.

agony	plant	moisture	chemical	technology
valve	deadly	billowed	shattered	methyl isocyanate

Most people in Bhopal were sleeping when a cloud formed. The cloud (1) \_\_\_\_\_ the calmness of the night. The cloud was formed by a (2) \_\_\_\_\_ called (3) \_\_\_\_\_ . It (4) \_\_\_\_\_ out of a Union Carbide (5) \_\_\_\_\_. The (6) \_\_\_\_\_ gas leaked out when a (7) \_\_\_\_\_ broke. The poison gas caused the people of Bhopal much (8) \_\_\_\_\_. The gas mixed with (9) \_\_\_\_\_ in their bodies. People everywhere were reminded of the dangers of (10) \_\_\_\_\_ .

