



Bhopal Gas Tragedy

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Why in News

Recently, a research study on congenital deformities in children born to women exposed to the 1984 gas leak in Bhopal was stopped from being published by an expert committee on the grounds of methodological flaws, poor design and inconclusive findings.

Key Points

- The study found out that babies born to women exposed to gas were significantly more likely to have “**congenital malformations**” than those born to women unexposed to gas.
- The findings came in response to a question under the Right To Information Act and were made public by an association of activists fighting for those affected by the leak.
- The Supreme Court has admitted a curative petition, which demands more compensation for those affected by the disaster. Data on congenital defects in children were important in bolstering the case for compensation.
- The expert committee consisted of scientists from the **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi**; the **National Institute for Research in Environmental Health (NIREH), Bhopal**; and the **Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR)**.

Congenital Malformations

- These can be defined as structural or functional anomalies that occur during intrauterine (within the uterus) life and can be identified prenatally, at birth, or sometimes may only be detected later in infancy.
- These are also known as birth defects, congenital disorders or congenital anomalies.

Background

- Post-midnight on December 3, 1984, **Methyl Isocyanate (MIC) (Chemical formula- CH_3NCO or $\text{C}_2\text{H}_3\text{NO}$)** leaked from the **pesticide plant of Union Carbide (now Dow Chemicals)**, an **MNC**, in Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal.
 - It is estimated that about **40 tonnes of gas and other chemicals** leaked from the Union Carbide factory.
 - Methyl isocyanate is **extremely toxic gas** and if its concentration in the air touches **21ppm** (parts per million), it can cause death within minutes of inhaling the gas.
- It is one of the worst chemical disasters globally and still continues to have its ill effects on the people of the affected areas.
- After the tragedy, the government of India enacted a **Public Liability Insurance Act (1991)**, making it mandatory for industries to get insurance the premium for this insurance would contribute to an **Environment Relief Fund** to provide compensation to victims of a Bhopal-like disaster.

Source: TH