

300 activists rally for justice

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 20: After failing repeatedly to drive their points home to the concerned authorities on the pain and suffering of the Bhopal gas tragedy victims, over 300 students and supporters got together in the Capital today to express solidarity with the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy. They had begun their 800 km arduous march on foot all the way from Bhopal. The people in the *padyatra* included survivors of the 1984 Union Carbide gas disaster and communities living in the vicinity of the abandoned Union Carbide factory where the soil and ground water had been contaminated for the last 20 years.

Supporters organised a photo exhibition on the ongoing disaster in Bhopal, pictures of the second generation affected children

and people relying on contaminated water. Distributing pamphlets on the Bhopal disaster and the march to Delhi, they appealed to people to support the survivors. A signature campaign was also launched to urge

the Prime Minister to keep the promises he made to the survivors after their *padyatra* and hunger strike in 2006. Placards marked 'Prime Minister Walk Your Talk' received a huge response as people signed in large numbers. Supporters demanded that a special commission be set up on Bhopal and legal action be taken against Dow Chemicals, the current owner of Union Carbide.

Abhinav, an IIT Delhi student, said, "It is absolutely shameful that the Indian

government is extending support to the culprit rather than its own people. Dow must be made to pay for the clean up of toxic wastes in Bhopal and the four pesticides including Durban that it launched into our country

Bhopal gas tragedy

by bribing its way, must be banned."

On 17 April 2006 after 55 people walked from Bhopal to New Delhi and sat on a fast for seven days, the Prime Minister promised to do everything within his power and legally possible to help the victims of Bhopal to punish Union Carbide and Dow Chemicals. Yet, two years down the line, survivors are forced to walk again. Samar from Delhi University was outraged, "No economics can ever equate some billion dollars

worth investments with the lives of our own people. It is shocking that the survivors of the Bhopal disaster are forced to undertake this march which could have been avoided if only the Prime Minister had kept his promises."

The supporters resolved to ensure that Bhopal is not replicated anywhere else. They read out the stories of survivors and sang songs in solidarity. Bubbling with energy, young supporters were determined to drum up greater support for the victims of Dow-Carbide's poisons.

"Twenty-three years is long enough. Soon, I shall be of the same age as the Bhopal struggle. Don't you think it's time we live with our heads held high and celebrate justice for Bhopal, Mr Prime Minister?" questioned Neha, a student of Lady Sri Ram College.