

First convictions in 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy

Victims vow to fight 'paltry' sentences

By JUNE KELLUM
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Nearly 26 years after a deadly cloud of gas escaped from a pesticide factory and smothered the community of Bhopal with poisonous fumes, an Indian court declared eight Indian nationals guilty of negligence on Monday.

The accused, one who is now deceased, face fines and maximum sentences of just two years in prison. The court made no mention of prosecuting American Warren Anderson, the chairman of Union Carbide Company (UCC), which owned the plant at the time of the disaster in 1984.

Anderson was one of nine people accused by the Indian government in 1987. He fled to the United States and refused to appear in court. Attempts to extradite him have been unsuccessful.

The verdict has drawn indignation from human rights groups. Amnesty International has called on the U.S. and Indian governments to take measures for more comprehensive justice. The International Campaign for Justice also condemned the light sentences.

"We feel outraged and betrayed. This is not justice. This is a travesty of justice," said Hazra Bee of the Bhopal ICJ in a press release.

"The paltry sentencing is a slap in the face of suffering Bhopal victims," said Bee, pledging that survivors will challenge the court's decision.

"The convictions of the Indian accused in this case are clearly not enough—the governments of India and the U.S. must ensure that the foreign accused, including UCC, are also made to face trial," Audrey Gaughran, director of Global Issues at Amnesty International, said in a release.

But former Supreme Court Chief Justice A. H. Ahmadi on Tuesday defended the sentences, saying there is no law in India to deal with disasters



Keshub Mahindra (C), former chairman of Union Carbide India Limited, leaves a courthouse in Bhopal on June 7. An Indian court has sentenced the former top managers of the company blamed for the massive Bhopal gas leak to two years in prison. AFP/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

such as the Bhopal gas leak.

"One has to work within the system, within the framework of law," he told The Economic Times. "There is no concept of vicarious liability. If my driver is driving and meets with a fatal accident, I don't become liable to be prosecuted under 304-II."

NEGLIGENCE

The Bhopal gas tragedy is considered the worst corporate disaster in history. In the early hours of Dec. 3, 1984, 40 tons of the highly toxic and volatile chemical methyl isocyanate (MIC) leaked from storage containers in a factory owned by Union Carbide India Limited, a subsidiary of American UCC.

The company was storing MIC

in much greater quantities than recommended, and in an effort to cut costs had turned off the refrigeration around the chemical, which should be stored at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, according to ICJ.

The gas killed between 7,000 and 10,000 people immediately, with untold numbers continuing to suffer.

Cancer, blindness, lameness, mental retardation, numerous birth defects, and reproductive difficulties continue to afflict the people of Bhopal. The ailments are the result of the gas leak and contamination of ground water from other toxic chemicals released by the factory, according to the Bhopal Medical Appeal.

UCC participated in immediate relief efforts and paid a settlement of CA\$492 million. UCC claims that the leak was the result of deliberate sabotage, a claim that was never proven, according to ICJ.

Michigan-based Dow Chemicals, which bought UCC in 2001, denies any further responsibility for the disaster, claiming all cases have been settled.

A statement on the Dow website quotes an Indian media source from 2006 saying, "All cases of initial compensation claims by victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy have been cleared... With the clearance of initial compensation claims and revision petitions, no case is pending."



President-elect Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino celebrates after becoming the 15th president of the Philippines, at the House of Representatives on June 9 in Manila. DONDI TAWATAO/GETTY IMAGES

Aquino officially named Philippine president

By JASPER FAKKERT
Epoch Times Staff

A month after voters went to the polls in the Philippines, Benigno Aquino has been declared the official winner of the presidential elections. He won by a large majority with promises to curb poverty and fight corruption that marked the years of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's presidency.

Although it took a month for the votes to be officially counted, a preliminary count right after the election had already shown that Aquino won by a landslide.

Aquino has been a member of parliament for 12 years and had previously kept a low profile, which was used by his opponents during

the election campaign to argue that he lacked experience. He quickly won voters' hearts, however, with his straight-talking and plain communication style that contrasted with the style of his two major opponents.

U.S. President Barack Obama called Aquino to congratulate him on his election, according to the White House.

"The president described the May 10 elections as a model of transparency and positive testament to the strength and vitality of democracy in the Philippines," a White House statement said.

Aquino is the son of democracy icon President Cory Aquino, who was assassinated during the years of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship.

US places sanctions on Europe's lone dictator

By ANDREY VOLKOV
Epoch Times Staff

The United States has extended sanctions against Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko and other top officials for one year due to a lack of progress in democracy and human rights in the country, according to a White House statement.

The United States and European Union imposed sanctions to seize Lukashenko's property in the United States in 2006 accusing him of falsifying presidential election results. Lukashenko is Europe's only remaining dictator.

In 2008 Washington called back its ambassador and cut its mission to Minsk as part of the sanctions. Minsk also called back its ambassador from the United States.

The EU has imposed visa sanctions against Lukashenko and other

top officials. Brussels will decide this fall whether the sanctions will be lifted or prolonged.

"Despite the release of internationally recognized political prisoners in the fall of 2008 and our continuing efforts to press for further reforms related to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus, serious challenges remain," President Barack Obama said in a statement.

By lessening its persecution of opposition politicians and parties, Belarus has made some progress in democratic standards. American lawyer Emanuel Zeltser, who was accused of business espionage was also released.

However, Minsk criticizes the West for violating a promise to restore mutual political dialogue. Belorussian officials have said they will reopen full diplomatic relations after all sanctions have been lifted.

The American dream a hard sell in Europe

By KREMENA KRUMOVA
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Compared to Americans and Chinese, Europeans are less likely to start their own business even if they obtain a windfall inheritance. Entrepreneurs are also more highly esteemed in the United States and Asia compared to how they are viewed in Europe.

These are among the findings in a recent survey by the European Commission, aiming to find ways to promote economic development on the old continent.

According to the survey, 45 percent of Europeans would prefer to be their own boss if they could, while 49 percent would still be willing to work as employees. That rate is lower than in the U.S. where 55 percent would prefer

to engage in private business. However, even in the U.S. that preference is six points lower today than it was in 2007.

"The entrepreneurial potential in Europe is not fully exploited: 45 percent of all Europeans would like to become their own boss if they could, but only an average of 10 percent are actually self-employed today," European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship, said in a statement.

"If we could raise this percentage, we could have millions of new innovative and creative enterprises, which would rejuvenate Europe's economic basis, make it more robust, more job-generating, and more resilient to stormy economic times," Tajani said.

The difference in willingness to

become self-employed also reflects differences in how people look at the entrepreneur.

For example, in China where the survey was done for the first time this year, 71 percent of the population has a positive attitude toward entrepreneurs, while in Japan people have the weakest inclination for private business. In the U.S., 73 percent view those in business favorably, but in Europe the figure is only 49 percent.

Experts say the different attitudes toward private business can be explained by objective, economic conditions as well as cultural realities on different continents.

In Europe, entrepreneurship is seen as being stifled by strong institutions that strive to protect shareholders, resulting in lower GDP and higher

unemployment. European entrepreneurs are looked on more as exploiters, according to the EC research.

Europe is also known for the huge influence of trade unions, monopolistic banks, and highly political environments, where creativity and entrepreneurship are suppressed.

In Asian countries, those in business are seen as drivers of social prosperity and poverty elimination. That is why third-world countries strive to empower and promote individual entrepreneurship.

In the U.S. by contrast, entrepreneurs are regarded as job creators. The American dream depicts entrepreneurs as the symbol of wealth and creators of bright ideas. The idea of success in business is deeply embedded in the American psyche.

BP oil spill data released to the public

By SHAHRZAD NOORBALOOCHI
Epoch Times Staff

Following a long period of uncertainty over the actual amount of oil spilling into the Gulf of Mexico, the government has made all data—including schematics, results of diagnostic tests, and other information on the malfunctioning of the blowout preventer—available to the public on an online website.

According to a Department of Energy (DOE) press release, the available data will keep the public informed about operation results, oil flow rates, and other crucial information on the oil spill situation. The data was also made available to enable experts from universities and private institutes to have access to the same data as BP and the government, when making recommendations and reviewing BP's containment methods.

"We want to make sure that independent scientists, engineers and other experts have every opportunity to review this information and make their own



Workers clear the beach as oil residue washes up on Pensacola Beach from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico on June 7 in Pensacola, Florida. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

conclusions," said U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu in a press release.

The data available include a description of the system and the configuration

of the well, a timeline of recent key events as well as those that are unfolding, and a description of the various containment systems used to cap the oil spill, including the Lower Marine Riser Package

(LMRP).

The LMRP, which was BP's last—and potentially successful—attempt at containing the spill, is now reportedly containing half of the oil leaking daily.

BP has repeatedly said it was unclear on the amount of oil leaking into the ocean during its failed attempts to contain or end the spill. Concrete measurements regarding the volume of the oil leak have been brought to the forefront, after the LMRP partially contained the rupture.

Government organizations such as the EPA have been calculating air and water quality in regions affected by the oil spill since the disaster started, suggesting that they had access to such data prior to its release today. It was unclear whether this data was intentionally kept from the public or whether the data used were mere estimations, which have been available to the public all along.

The data on the Deepwater Horizon oil leak can be found at <http://www.energy.gov/open/oilspilldata.htm>.

Russian soldiers admit taking credit cards from Polish crash victim

SOLDIERS CONTINUED FROM P1

Polish officials reported Sunday that several Russian security force soldiers who had secured the crash site had been detained. Russia at the time denied the statement and Poland apologized for the "mistake."

According to Russian investigators, three of the four conscripts have prior records for crimes including forgery and theft. All four have admitted to stealing the cards.

In early June, the Polish government released the transcript of the black box from the cockpit of the president's plane that crashed on April 10, killing all 95 on board.

The transcript revealed that the pilots ignored repeated warnings from the plane's automatic warning system that it was on a dangerous collision course with the earth.

A Polish delegation including President Kaczynski and his wife was heading to Russia to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the mass execution of Polish elite during World War II in the Katyn forest near Smolensk, 19 km from the site of the tragedy.



CRASH SITE: A Russian Interior Ministry soldier stands guard near the wreckage of the Polish government Tupolev Tu-154 aircraft that crashed on April 10 near Smolensk airport. NATALIA KOLESNIKOVA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES