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## New panel to rehabilitate Bhopal gas tragedy victims to be set up

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A file-photo of Manmohan Singh

New Delhi, May 29 (IANS) Smiles and hugs, signifying a part of the battle won, were exchanged Thursday among the Bhopal gas tragedy victims, who are protesting in the capital, as one of their key demands for setting up a commission had been met. They were, however, not completely satisfied. In a statement issued by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's office, the first of their demands – setting up of a commission to carry out medical, economic, social and environmental rehabilitation of the Bhopal gas victims – was readily agreed to.

“The central government is in ‘in principle’ agreement with this demand,” said the statement read out by Prithviraj Chauhan, minister of state in the prime minister's office.



A file-photo of Manmohan Singh

While the central government will work on setting up a commission, “the government of Madhya Pradesh is also being asked to prepare a detailed action for rehabilitation schemes of the Bhopal gas victims and the funds required”.

The statement added that on the demand of provision of clean drinking water in 14 localities near the former Union Carbide plant, a project under the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission has been sanctioned at an estimated cost of Rs.141.8 million.

Although the protesters, some of who marched all the way from Bhopal to Delhi and have been camping at the capital's Jantar Mantar area, are happy with one of their demands being met, they are not satisfied with the fact that other key demands have not been mentioned.

“Legal action against Union Carbide and Dow Chemicals, the main culprits of the gas tragedy, has not yet been decided,” complained Satinath Sarangi, an activist.

The PMO's statement said that the matter of legal action against Dow Chemicals on environment and health of the surviving victims is still pending before the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

“The department of chemicals and petrochemicals has already filed an application requesting the court to direct Dow Chemicals and associated companies to deposit Rs.100 crore (Rs.1 billion) as an advance for environmental remediation,” the statement added.

“Union Carbide and its former chairperson Warren Anderson, both of whom face charges of culpable homicide and grievous assault, are absconding from Indian courts since 1992. No fresh attempts have been made by the government to enforce their appearance in court.

“Then the Union Commerce Ministry approved collaboration between Reliance Industries and Dow for the transfer of Union Carbide-owned and patented technology, which is not legal and should be revoked. To these demands the Prime Minister’s office has assured us that a meeting will be held June 3 and a conclusion on these demands will be made,” Sarangi said.

The Bhopal gas leak holocaust, frequently cited as the world’s worst industrial disaster, took place in 1984. A Union Carbide pesticide plant leaked over 40 tonnes of methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas, killing at least 3,800 people and affecting many more in Bhopal.

The PMO’s statement said that the Union Ministry of Family and Health Welfare will be asked to continue research work on the adverse effects of the gas leakage on the health of the surviving victims through the Indian Council of Medical Research.

The protesters said Thursday they would discuss the PM’s response and decide whether they will continue their dharna in the capital.

“But we will fight till all our demands are met,” said Sarangi.