SOMETHING VERY SHAMEFUL is happening in Bhopal and hardly anyone knows about it.

Children are being born deformed and malformed in numbers not seen since the spate of horrific births that followed the gas catastrophe of 1984.

A spate of monstrous births

On the freezing night of December 3rd, a leak of deadly gas from a pesticide factory owned by Union Carbide killed thousands in a few hours.

Almost half the pregnant women exposed to Carbidene’s gases on that night abruptly aborted. In the months after the disaster rumours began flying around the city about strange and terrifying births taking place in secret.

“My baby was greenish-black,” a woman said. “It had a soft head, its eyes were not quite connected to the sockets. It looked like an alien but the heartbeats were normal. I was torn between love and revulsion as life limped on in this creature I had borne and did not know whether to hope it lived or died.”

Official statements sought to downplay the crisis. Senior doctors would not talk to the media. When pregnant women, too terrified to give birth, came to a hospital with unusual symptoms, begging to be teted to make sure their babies were normal, they were driven away by police with batons.

Unbelievable though it sounds, this is all on record. You may look up the sources on bhopal.org.

In July 1985, Sunday magazine reported “Hospitals awash with junior hospital staff, midwives and nurses who insist they have never seen any birth-and-death cycle like this before.”

The demon factory

After the gas leak Union Carbide’s factory was shut and abandoned with its lethal pesticides still inside. Nearby, tens of thousands of tons of toxic waste lay dumped in huge “eyes” lakes. The whole site was so toxic that no one dares go near it.

A dozen years earlier, Carbide’s own US design engineers had expressed fears that the leaks would leak and contaminate communities.

They were ignored. What’s more, documents relating to the building of the lakes reveal that Carbide would accept some leakage if it saved money.

Over the next four years after the gassing of Bhopal, Carbide learned that soil and water at its plant site were lethally contaminated. But even when locals complained that their water supply was being tainted, few people were falling ill, babies were being born damaged, Carbide issued no warning and did nothing to clean up the factory.

The wetland plant was regarded by many as a sleeping demon that one day would again rise up and snatch away their lives and happiness. “Demon” is not a scientific term, but the people were right.

Destroyed in the womb

In 1999, a Greenpeace study found many wells contaminated with heavy metals and chemicals known to cause cancers and birth defects.

Further studies found the same toxins in the blood and milk of women unfortunate enough to live downstream of the factory.

In 2006, a team of doctors visiting contaminated areas started to discover that almost half the children they examined were brain damaged. They had never before seen so many cases of cerebral palsy and birth defects within a single population.

Still nobody knew how the situation was.

Some injuries are too harrowing to show, like the eye engulphed by a raw tumour that left a small girl in permanent agony until she finally killed her.

With the authorities still trying to deny rather than solve the problem, no one has ever bothered to find out how many people have been sick, or how many children have been born damaged.

Gassed, poisoned, left to die

With nobody else willing to do the work, the Bhopal Medical Appeal funded a huge, rigorous study covering more than 100,000 people exposed to gas, to poisoned water, and to birth, as well as an unmonitored control population.

The work is almost finished. Results have to be confirmed and, although they are consistent, we know that many families have been poisoned twice, first by Carbide’s gases, then by contaminated water.

In poisoned areas birth defects are occurring at rates many times the Indian average.

Thousands of children are damaged but get no government help. Union Carbide and its owner Dow Chemical say the dumped wastes, poisoned water and human pain are nothing to do with them.

Well, that’s that then. No one is responsible. It is nobody’s duty to help the children damaged. Certainly, it’s not our affair We can look away.

‘Savages are always cruel’

So said Dr Johnson, one of the apostles noted by Boswell, adding, “We may have uneasy sensations from seeing a creature in distress, without pity for we have no pity unless we wish to relieve them.”

He was talking about horses, but what savagery treats sick children with such brutal indifference?

The Bhopal Medical Appeal is an initiative of thousands of British newspaper readers from the Telegraph, Guardian, Times, Independent and others.

Outraged by the injury and injustice to innocent people, and finding excuses unable just to watch them suffer, we came together to offer our friendship and support their efforts to help themselves.

We fund two award-winning clinics in Bhopal. Both were founded by the survivors themselves and are the only places in the city where families poisoned by the water can get free-of-charge care.

We know (in two cases) all the children in these pictures, because they came to our Children’s Clinic for physiotherapy and speech therapy, social skills training and basic education. Each day we treat about 150 children and many blighted young lives are transformed. Sunkin, the boy with the bat were a poem wild with joy. Read the poem and the stories on our website, www.bhopal.org.

To those who have read this far

If you are reading this, you are one of a very few – most people won’t read a word of this appeal. This makes you special, a bright hope to families who have much to do with the friends like you.

In front of you is the chance to help.

Will you join us in our work? Of all the things you can do the quickest is to make a donation, but whatever you do, please don’t just turn the page.

TO DONATE NOW PLEASE FREEPHONE 0800 316 5571, OR VISIT www.bhopal.org/donate