

# Picking up the pieces in India's Punjab

by Susan Maitra from New Delhi

While the Indian army is still occupied with mopping up terrorists in Punjab following "Operation Blue Star"—the code name used for the army assault on the Sikh Golden Temple—the country is slowly coming to grips with the gory details daily coming to light of an insurgency movement that was directed at separating Punjab from the rest of India. Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi and President Zail Singh have launched a powerful campaign to "heal the wounds" and present what has happened in the proper perspective. However, voices of dissent, particularly of those eager to make political gains out of a tragedy, can be heard trying to portray the extremist-run uprising as a battle between the Sikh minority and the Hindu majority.

Following the army action that killed the Sikh fundamentalist Samt Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, along with many other extremists and army personnel within and outside of the Sikh shrine at Amritsar, a great deal of debate has been raised in this country analyzing the course of action taken by the government. While most of the analysts, Sikh and Hindu alike, agree that the government had no other choice under the circumstances, some have squarely condemned the government action as unnecessary and certain to create confusion and polarization between Hindus and Sikhs. More than 1,000 Sikh soldiers belonging to the Indian army, instigated by a few among them, left their barracks to join their brethren "defending the Sikh community." Another case in point is the outburst of a well-known Sikh journalist, whose home is reportedly stacked with pornographic materials; he promptly returned a high award from the President of India in protest against the army action. It is evident that some, like this journalist, are using the emotionally charged atmosphere to gain a political footing in the Sikh community which they never had before.

## Virus of opportunism

Such irresponsible and entirely opportunistic behavior has also become commonplace among some political opposition leaders. Their tactic at this point is to implore the government to withdraw the army—although it is exceedingly clear that a large number of insurgents are still at large in the distant villages and congested cities of Punjab and neigh-

boring states. They are also pressing the government to begin a "dialogue" immediately with the Akali Dal leaders—the same leaders who quietly supported the arms build-up and killing both inside and outside the Golden Temple, or looked the other way.

The five major opposition parties have called once again for a "political solution" in the Punjab. Among these "peacemakers" are most of the communist parties, whose record on matters of national interest and integrity is dubious. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) originated in the cause of defending China in its war against India in the 1960s. The Communist Party of India (CPI) distinguished itself in the late 1940s, right after independence, by directing an insurgency in Andhra Pradesh to separate part of the state from India.

So far, the Akali Dal leaders—many of whom were inside the Golden Temple complex while the extremists were carrying out the armed fortification, and who witnessed the reign of terror of the last ten months and the build-up of fiery rhetoric in support of Bindranwale's murderous intent—have failed to condemn the terrorist movement, even though they were virtually rescued from the Golden Temple where the extremists held them literally as hostages and simultaneously exploited their political clout. These leaders have joined the voices now trying to polarize the situation. One of these so-called moderate voices is Prakash Singh Badal, who was arrested in February in the act of burning tuition with great fanfare in front of the Indian Parliament; he had managed to stay away from the Golden Temple. Badal has demanded that the President—who belongs to the Sikh religion caste—as well as Sikh ministers, members of Parliament, members of state assemblies, and old Sikhs holding appointed and elective positions resign in protest against the army action.

## The foreign hands

A great deal of activity has also been observed abroad, particularly among the Sikh secessionists based in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has seized the opportunity to echo the tradition of the Raj's days, fanning the flames of ethnic and communal conflict in service of balkanizing the subcontinent. The BBC gave its airwaves to the demented "Khalistan" leader Jagjit Singh Chauhan, to broadcast his message that a commando squad has been formed to eliminate the Indian Prime Minister, her son, and the President. In spite of Indian government protests, no action has yet been taken by British authorities against Chauhan.

Meanwhile, a wealthy Washington-based Sikh, Ganga Singh Dhillon, who is deeply involved in the secessionist movement and a personal friend of Pakistani President Zia ul Haq, is actively mobilizing liberal Democrats such as Sen. Alan Cranston to form yet another anti-India lobby among the politicians in the United States.

It is also clear that other London-based secessionists such as the Naga leader Phizo and the so-called Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, as well as Muslim fanatics run by Libya's Qaddafi, Algeria's Ben Bella, and the Nazi-linked Swiss banker now based in Libya, François Genoud, are consolidating their collaboration with Chauhan and other secessionists. This crowd's British gurus, such as Neville Maxwell, are providing the litany of historical and sociological justifications for Punjab's secessionist struggle, and India's "inevitable" fragmentation.

### Facts speak for themselves

Be that as it may, the facts that have come to light in recent days in the wake of Operation Blue Star speak for themselves. It has become clear to the Indian citizenry that the so-called Sikh resistance had nothing to do with the Sikh community. Inside the Golden Temple under the very eyes of the Akali Dal leaders, the terrorists had amassed a huge supply of arms. The army has reported that it has collected 49 light machine guns with Chinese and Pakistani markings, 2 German rocket launchers, 2 medium machine guns, 74 self-loading rifles, three hundred and seventy-two .302 recoilless rifles, 34 carbines, many other small weapons, and a large quantity of ammunition. A large stock of drugs, such as white heroin, brown heroin, and opium, has also been discovered. The Akali leaders had also witnessed the systematic maiming and killing of innocents—anyone who defied the terrorists' orders—inside the holiest of holy shrines. Such activity was not confined to the Golden Temple, but took place in many other temples and villages throughout the Punjab countryside.

There is a broad understanding within Punjab and outside the state that the way ahead is defined by new requirements. First, these nests of terrorists and their weapons stockpiles must be cleaned up once and for all. Second, the Akali Dal leaders must explain why they allowed the secessionist movement to grow and flourish and to take such a deadly form. Without fulfilling these two conditions, any discussion of a "political solution" with the Akali leaders is not only fruitless but also extremely dangerous for the nation.

Both Prime Minister Gandhi and President Zail Singh have clearly stated the government's intentions in this matter. The President himself visited the Golden Temple immediately following Operation Blue Star to offer his prayers, and then addressed the nation emphasizing that "never again should we allow such circumstances to develop which create disunity among us." Prime Minister Gandhi, who has since met with the opposition leaders, local press and foreign journalists, has repeatedly called for "healing the wounds."

When asked by a Radio Canada interviewer how such a process of healing would start, Mrs. Gandhi said: "It has to come from the people themselves. We can only help it along and see when something is happening that is hampering it. We can only see how we can remove the obstruction. But basically, it has to come from the people."

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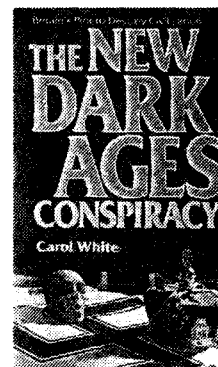
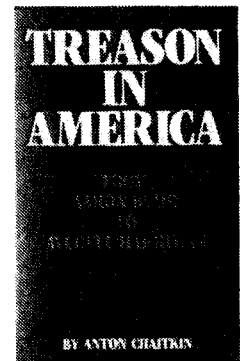
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