

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Terrorist siege in Punjab ended

With resolute government direction, the Indian army has removed this deadly cancer threatening India's integrity.

At this writing, the people of India are breathing a collective sigh of relief. The nightmare of wanton killings in one of the country's premier states has been dealt a decisive blow. The spectacle of the Sikh religion's holiest shrine—the Golden Temple at Amritsar—being used as an ammo dump and headquarters for the plotting of terror and deployment of convicted thieves and murderers has ended.

After more than a year of government concessions and patient efforts and appeals to resolve outstanding issues with the Akali Dal at the negotiating table—while the death toll mounted—Prime Minister Gandhi's government called the army into Punjab on June 3. It was truly the "eleventh hour"—many feared the government had lost the nerve to take strong action—and the move met near-unanimous support across the political spectrum.

The strategic border state was completely sealed off, a curfew was imposed, and all foreigners in the state were ordered out. The army took up positions surrounding the major Sikh temples called *gurdwaras*, including the pivotal Golden Temple. For two days the army broadcast appeals to those pilgrims trapped when the action began, as well as to the terrorists there, to come out. At no time was any ultimatum issued.

From within the Golden Temple, fortified with sandbags, the terrorists fired machine guns, mortars, and even rockets and missiles. By the end of the second day, with the appearance of the

heavy weaponry, the army made its first move into the temple complex, and took over most of the buildings adjacent to the temple proper.

In the first major victory of the operation, two top Akali leaders including Sant Longowal were captured alive. In simultaneous operations around the state, some 40 *gurdwaras*, several Hindu temples, and one mosque were cleaned out. In all some 700 were arrested, and large quantities of arms and ammunitions were removed from the religious centers.

By Wednesday evening, the army was in possession of the entirety of the Golden Temple with the exception of the innermost Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib sanctuaries. By mid-day Thursday, it was announced that the army had also taken these, and killed or arrested the terrorists. Bhindranwale, the extremist terrorist leader, together with two of his top aides, including the president of the All India Sikh Students Federation, Amrik Singh, were identified among the dead.

Preliminary figures are that 450 terrorists were arrested from within the Golden Temple and 250 killed. There were about 60 army casualties. Throughout, the army had been under the extraordinary order to prevent—"as much as humanly possible"—any damage to the religious structures. This the soldiers did at the cost of very high casualties in their own ranks.

The army is still engaged in mopping-up operations at this writing. Security is being maintained around most of the major *gurdwaras* in surround-

ing states, and vigilance will continue. The next few weeks are critical in the effort to completely eliminate the terrorist secessionist threat.

The army action commenced following refusal by the Akali Dal leadership to call off its agitation plans to halt shipments of grain from the state and to prevent the flow of river waters—whose distribution is disputed—into the states of Haryana and Rajasthan. On June 5, terrorists succeeded in breaching one of the main canals of the Bhakra dam complex, cutting off the supply of agricultural and drinking water to those states.

As this column has reported, the terrorist-separatist operation was no spontaneous outgrowth of the Punjab countryside, much less of the Sikh religion. The London axis running through Pakistan and Switzerland, which runs fundamentalist terrorism on several continents and, somewhat less, the Washington connection epitomized by the silly Senator Jesse Helms, are among the most prominent "foreign hands." The recovery of Soviet made Kalashnikov rifles and Israeli bullet-proof vests testifies to the terrorists' connection to traditional terror and gun-running.

While the Indian government has been careful to point out that the object of the army action was strictly secular—that is, to halt the terrorism and bring the terrorists to bay—sections of the Western media have openly tried to fan the flames of communalism.

Most strident has been the BBC, broadcasting from London, where the practice of engendering communal warfare was invented and made into an art. The now-dead terrorist Bhindranwak was a strictly religious leader, his BBC cheerleaders have been asserting. He has a large following among Sikhs, they lie, in a blatant effort to martyr the dead terrorists.