

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

What can you expect from friends?

The Soviets and the East bloc are emerging as the key patrons of the largest espionage ring in Indian history.

The Indian intelligence team pursuing the far-flung spy case that erupted into public view on Jan. 17 with the arrest of more than 10 top government bureaucrats is on a trail that gets hotter and more interesting every day. It is impossible to predict exactly what lies at the end of the trail, but it is a fact that the business-as-usual political equations in the country are getting a healthy jolt.

In a 15-page confession, businessman Coomar Narain named East Germany and Poland, in addition to France, as the main beneficiaries of his efforts. Narain was the apparent manager, in New Delhi at least, of the spy ring's "supermarket of secrets."

According to Narain, classified material was also channeled to the KGB in Bombay through a Punjab businessman, Ashok Kumar Jaithka, who has now been arrested.

But Narain claims he is not the "kingpin" of the operation. The probe entered a new phase with the arrest of Yogesh Maneklal, owner of the Bombay-based S.L.M. Maneklal Industries, Ltd., and Narain's boss. The company has a string of small manufacturing facilities and is also engaged in technology transfer. Maneklal represents several East bloc countries in India, including East Germany. Investigators expect Maneklal to disclose some "big names" in coming days.

Two attachés in the Polish and East German embassies have been asked to leave India, and there are reports that several Soviet nationals have

also been deported. While official government spokesmen are scrupulous in refusing to name the countries involved in the spy case, high-level sources are leaking the relevant information to the press in a controlled manner.

In a refreshing departure from diplomatic rituals, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made a point of discussing India's displeasure over Polish involvement in the spy ring with Prime Minister Jaruzelski during his recent five-day state visit to India. As a result, the Polish head of state was barraged with questions on the subject at his press conference in New Delhi.

According to press reports of Narain's confession, he disclosed that the "NATO pool" allegedly serviced by expelled French military attachée Alain Bolley was interested in all Indian defense deals as well as the country's military hardware production programs. The KGB, he said, was mainly interested in the diversification of defense purchases undertaken by the government in the last four years.

Narain also confessed that he had been asked to supply information about the prime minister's security setup, the first significant indication of a possible tie-up between the spy ring and the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

The course of the spy scandal has left ideologically inclined pundits tongue-tied. With the exposure of Bolley, the left jumped at the chance to launch a new round of U.S.-bashing. Notwithstanding rumors that a Soviet military attachée had been asked

to leave fully a week before Bolley, the view that the espionage racket was a Western ("CIA") operation stood up until Narain's confession.

Just days before the confession, the *Hindustan Times* asked on its front page: "Was Bolley a Double Agent?" The paper quoted "reliable sources" saying that Bolley was passing classified information to the intelligence agencies of both superpowers. The paper went so far as to speculate that Bolley might be a KGB agent working inside the French government.

The Soviet involvement is something of a shock to the Indian elite, if the press is any indication. *Times of India* editor Girilal Jain wrote in a lengthy editorial: "Only innocent children could believe that, in spite of our friendly relations with the Soviet Union, they don't 'spy' in India, but thank goodness, unlike that monster the CIA, the KGB does not involve itself in hard 'ground' operations in India."

Recent reports indicate that the investigation of Indira Gandhi's assassination has been reorganized, and those concerned with the earlier part of the probe dumped. It is now focused on the interrogation of Jaseir Singh and S.S. Mann. The former is slain Sikh terrorist leader Bhindran Wale's nephew. S.S. Mann, who was captured several months ago attempting to cross the Nepal border, was a police officer in Punjab. He played a pivotal role in the Punjab developments and went underground shortly after the government assault on the Golden Temple. Investigators suspect that in the months prior to the assassination, Mann was operating out of a hideout in West Bengal, where he had close ties with some of the police officers and political protection from the Communist Party-Marxist state government.