

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

New base for the Khalistan plot?

Jagjit Singh Chauhan's rendezvous with prominent Ecuadorians in London raises questions.

On July 26 Dr. Carlos Arosemena, former President of Ecuador, arrived in London for a series of meetings with Jagjit Singh Chauhan, the self-proclaimed president of "Khalistan"—the Sikh terrorists' name for the Indian state of Punjab which they have waged a bloody war to break away and declare an independent "nation."

The rendezvous has prompted speculation that Britain, under pressure from India for harboring the Khalistani separatist nest, is maneuvering, with the likely assistance of the Israeli Mossad, to find a more convenient base of operations for Chauhan and his terrorist consort.

The schemers could anticipate a crucial nod from the new U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Elliot Abrams, a "human rights" instigator identified by Sikh separatists in the U.S. as one of their most important backers.

"I am fighting to give some land to the Sikh people," Arosemena told one of the enthusiastic crowds of Sikhs assembled by Chauhan and Co. "Come to Ecuador; it's a good land for the Sikh nation. We can take 20 million."

Arosemena reportedly went to London to negotiate the transfer of a sizable chunk of land in Ecuador to the "Khalistan nation." His visit followed the Ecuadorian Foreign Minister's May pilgrimage in search of increased British investments.

Chauhan claims that Ecuador has promised to recognize a Khalistan "government-in-exile," but this is adamantly denied by Ecuadorian government spokesmen in both London

and Washington who retreated behind claims that the Arosemena entourage was on a strictly private visit.

As a former President and politically active, Arosemena is no ordinary Joe. Accompanying him in London, say some reports, was one Dr. Cristóbal Montero, a former Ecuadorian ambassador to Canada and Argentina and today associated with the foreign ministry, and a private attorney, Dr. Patricio Buendig.

Arosemena was also accompanied by one Atma Singh Khalsa, a.k.a. Mr. Adelberto Callegari, Ecuador's sole Sikh resident who was born in Milan, Italy and converted to Sikhism after migrating to the Americas. "Anyone can become resident in Ecuador by investing \$6,000," Atma Singh Khalsa" told the Sikhs in Britain.

The overseas Sikhs are a notoriously wealthy community, and the Khalistan crowd's recent accession to the international drugs-and-terrorism elite has brought new assets.

Like the typical "banana republic," Ecuador is up for sale with powerful private international mafias controlling the bidding. Besides "virgin jungle land"—which is producing increasing quantities of cocaine for export—Ecuador sells oil and bananas. Falling oil prices and depressed commodity markets have put a premium on the cocaine trade.

While the 1984 cocaine crop was estimated at 1,000 hectares, with a yield of one metric ton of leaf per hectare, according to a U.S. State Department report, the 1985 crop looks to be as much as 5,000 hectares at

triple the average yield.

Part of what Ecuadorian President León Febres Cordero calls his government's "painstaking" attempt to develop agriculture involves Cuban assistance, reportedly in developing cattle breeding, replete with personal visits by Fidel Castro's brother, Ramón. Cuba's curious role in the dope trade was highlighted recently when Castro acknowledged that Robert Vesco has found a safe haven there.

But there is another even less speculative element. Ecuador is well known on the continent as the "headquarters" for the Israeli Mossad. The relationship is deep and longstanding.

In particular, one Rehavam Ze'evi, adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister on "Warfare Against Terrorism" from 1974-77, left official government service in 1977 to fly to Ecuador and become an advisor to the government. Ze'evi's sidekick Betsalel Mizrahi, like Ze'evi himself, has been accused in Israel of being the Israeli mafia's godfather. Ze'evi and Mizrahi are alleged to have offered to arrange arms deals for Ecuador just months after the Pentagon had vetoed Israeli defense ministry attempts to sell the Kfir jet to that country.

In August 1980, immediately after the Argentine Navy, in collaboration with the Israelis, overthrew the Bolivian government and installed the "cocaine colonels," the same Ze'evi negotiated a huge arms package with that regime, which has since become a prominent dope exporter.

Not surprisingly, terrorism is alive and well in Ecuador. Now only does Ecuador has its own terrorist movement, but in early May the Cordero government was heatedly denying that it intended to grant political asylum to eight members of the Spanish terrorist group, Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA).