

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### Cornering the terrorists in Punjab

*The government is readying police action, but the long-term solution depends on a change in development policy.*

The Indian government's April 3 decision to seal the border between Pakistan and the two provinces of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir is part of a tough law-and-order package to tighten the noose around the Sikh terrorists in Punjab. To block escape routes, the Jammu and Kashmir government has also banned the movement of vehicles at night in areas bordering Punjab.

At this writing, the details of the strategy to crush the terrorists have not been released. Press leaks say that special army-trained units will be sent in. At the end of March, the government put through parliament a constitutional amendment that will allow it to declare a state of emergency in Punjab on grounds of "internal disorder."

The action has been prompted by a new surge of terrorist violence. During the last two months in particular, the terrorists have gone berserk. In March alone, more than 200 people lost their lives in indiscriminate attacks on whole families and large groups.

New weapons have also surfaced. Police sources believe that the terrorists are now in possession of a large quantity of the Soviet-made RPG-7 rockets, first used in March. Rocket attacks have continued, the latest on the home of a leader of the moderate wing of the Sikh Akali Dal party. Among other sophisticated weapons used are Chinese-made AK-47 rifles and YE-36 grenades.

It is unclear why the terrorists have stepped up killing in the recent period. It is evident that the killers are becoming more and more isolated from the

mainstream Sikh population, and are taking revenge on those who have refused to cooperate with them. It may be a desperate move to provoke the authorities to lash back.

The militant Khalistan Council, which demands a separate Punjab state ("Khalistan") and which has a base in the holy Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, has issued a warning against killing Sikhs. Though it is not yet clear how deep the fissures actually are among the militants, it is this apparent splitting and isolation of the terrorists which is the basis for the governments' recent political initiatives in Punjab.

Eliminating the terrorists' killing power by cutting off the flow of arms and confining their movements is crucial to the success of these initiatives.

The largely unpatrolled border between India and Pakistan, along Punjab and the disputed Kashmir area, has provided the terrorists with the opportunity to cross over into Pakistan whenever they were under pressure. Similarly, the heroin grown and refined in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province has been the main "currency" for purchase of the weapons put to use in Punjab.

Indeed, some of the leading terrorists began their careers as drug smugglers—Harjinder Singh Jinda, the alleged killer of General Vaidya, the former Indian Army Chief of Staff, is a case in point.

Police action is crucial, but a lasting solution still depends on spurring rapid industrial development in the state.

For the more than five years that

Punjab has been in turmoil, countless analyses have been circulating, most of which center on sociological and ethnological rationales for the terrorism. Some, citing the Soviet practice of equating ethnic identity with nationality, have argued that India must adopt the same approach, that is, become a country of "nations." It is essential that this false and racist approach be defeated, because it is part of the problem.

The solution to Punjab's problem lies not in labelling the Sikhs a "nationality," but in quickly *industrializing* the state. Punjab has a very successful agricultural sector, whose productivity has released a large number of people from the land. But that large manpower pool has remained underutilized because of a dangerously counterproductive security policy by which strategically sensitive areas are to be kept free of industry.

As a result, the cities of Punjab lack industry and have decayed. The disparity in income between the hard-working farmers and the underemployed urban dwellers is increasing daily. The unemployed youth in the urban centers are still the leading recruiting ground for the terrorists today.

Rapid industrial development is the key. Punjab, for example, needs power and has been asking for a nuclear power plant for almost a decade. Since available coal is a distance away, it makes sense to build nuclear power plants in Punjab. In addition, Punjab's groundwater management must be worked out in such a way that agricultural productivity continues to rise. The state has been ready for an agro-industrial revolution for some time.

If the government provides Punjab with these "weapons," the arms in the hands of the terrorists will become worthless.