

Radicals' claims sparked bloody Sikh temple raid

NEW DELHI (AP-Reuter) — India's decision to storm the Golden Temple, holiest shrine of the Sikh religion, has its roots in longstanding religious differences — and agitation by some Sikhs for a homeland and greater autonomy.

The Indian government said the attack, which claimed hundreds of lives of Sikhs, including militant leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and at least 48 soldiers, was a last resort.

It was triggered, they said, by militants who refused to surrender, attacked Hindus, attempted to disrupt grain shipments from Punjab and tried to sabotage power and water supplies.

In all, Sikh militants are

blamed for terrorist acts that have claimed nearly 400 lives in the past four months, not including yesterday's fighting.

The Golden Temple in Amritsar, 400 kilometres (250 miles) north of New Delhi, has been used by the militants as a command post, a sanctuary for wanted criminals and as a warehouse for weapons, the government said.

The white marble temple with a copper dome covers an area of about 12 city blocks where about 3,000 Sikhs live. It is surrounded on all sides by a lake where worshippers bathe to wash away their sins.

Sikh moderates were eclipsed by Bhindranwale, a fiery barefoot preacher who told Sikhs they were enslaved by majority Hindus and ordered them to buy guns and kill their enemies.

Bhindranwale took over the Akal Takht, the seat of the Sikh religion, and surrounded himself with machinegun-carrying bodyguards.

Swamped by Hindus

The Sikh religion was founded 500 years ago in northern India as a monotheistic alternative to Hinduism.

Some Sikhs complain that they are being swamped by the Hindu mainstream and categorized as a Hindu sect instead of a separate religion.

India's 13 million Sikhs make up 2 per cent of India's 700 million population, but they comprise 52 per cent of Punjab's 17 million people. Punjab is India's breadbasket and home of its green revolution.

Sikhs traditionally are warriors and farmers, and they make up a large percentage of the armed forces. They have complained, however, that they are suffering from job discrimination and that their numbers are being reduced in the armed forces.

They also say they are overtaxed in Punjab and underpaid for their wheat. They want a greater share of interstate river waters,



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Temple watch: Armed Akali Sikh sentinels watch over pilgrims entering the Golden Temple in this photograph taken before a government raid that left hundreds dead. The temple is the holiest shrine in Sikh religion and was the headquarters of militant Akali leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

which are being diverted to neighboring states of Haryana and Rajasthan.

Sikhs also want a constitutional amendment classifying them as a separate religion rather than a Hindu sect.

The Indian government has conceded most of their 44 demands, has agreed to refer the river dispute to a tribunal and said it would consider a constitutional amendment.

But it has refused to hand over Chandigarh without reciprocal territorial concession by Punjab to neighboring Haryana.

The Indian government has said it would never grant independence to Punjab because that would encourage separatist movements now boiling in the north, northeast and south.

The militant Sikhs are represented by the Akali Dal political party and its leader, Harchand Singh Longowal. But Bhindranwale emerged as the most powerful Sikh leader with an enormous populist appeal to millions of "born again" young Sikhs.

The Indian government considered Bhindranwale a key figure among the terrorists, and he faced 11 murder-conspiracy charges in connection with ter-

rorist attacks when he died in yesterday's army assault on his headquarters.

Bhindranwale's followers support all the Akalis' 44 demands and many want much more, including death for Hindu "oppressors" and a separate homeland.

Events leading up to the storming of the Sikh's Golden Temple at Amritsar began in August, 1982, when the Sikh's main political party began campaigning for concessions in India's Punjab state. Here are the major events, starting in April, 1983:

□ **April 4:** At least 21 people die and 200 are injured as police clash with members of a voluntary Sikh force that had been organizing a 24-hour road blockade as one of several peaceful protests under Akali chief Longowal.

□ **April 5:** Gandhi's son Rajiv receives a death threat from a Sikh extremist group.

□ **April 25:** A senior policeman is shot dead outside the Golden Temple. Police demand that his killer and other extremists believed to have taken refuge in the temple be handed over to authorities.

□ **October 6:** Presidential rule is imposed on Punjab and Gandhi

dissolves the state government after Sikh extremists drag six Hindus from a bus and kill them.

□ **March 5:** The government introduces emergency powers in Punjab, allowing police and paramilitary forces to arrest suspects and search premises for arms and explosives without the usual permits.

□ **April 25:** Government passes a bill allowing suspected extremists to be detained without trial for up to two years.

□ **May:** The deaths of two Hindu politicians and a journalist increase the pressure on the government to take tough action.

□ **June 1:** In a fierce seven-hour gunbattle around the perimeter of the Golden Temple complex, 11 people are killed.

□ **June 2:** Curfew is clamped on all towns in Punjab, the press is restricted, communications are cut, state borders closed and transport prohibited. The army is sent into Punjab.

□ **June 3:** Crack troops surround the Golden Temple.

□ **June 5:** Armed Sikhs in the Golden Temple precincts exchange mortar and machinegun fire with the Indian army. Then the troops attacked.

Golden Temple complex raided

