

Sikh mutineers will be hanged, general says

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From Reuter and Associated Press

BOMBAY — Any of the Sikh troops who mutinied because of the army's storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar will be hanged if found guilty, a top Indian general told a news conference yesterday.

Lt.-Gen. T. S. Oberoi, chief of southern command, said the army took a dim view of the mutiny.

"The mutineers will be tried and, if found guilty, will be hanged. No one dares revolt in the Indian Army," he said.

A Ministry of Defence spokesman said the mutiny has been quelled, and that there were no new desertions yesterday.

The United News of India news agency said about 1,200 Sikh deserters from Bihar state have

surrendered in neighboring Uttar Pradesh state and given up their efforts to reach Punjab. UNI said all major groups of deserters have been accounted for, although a few smaller groups are still at large.

Military sources said at least 2,000 Sikh soldiers deserted their army bases in eastern, northern and western India last weekend and headed for Punjab state and New Delhi to protest against the army attack on the seventeenth-century shrine.

At least 46 deserters were killed in gun battles with military and police pursuers, 600 were arrested and most of the others surrendered, said the sources, who spoke on condition they not be identified.

Thirteen rebel Sikh soldiers

were reported killed and 33 seriously wounded in a pitched battle yesterday with loyal troops in Agartala, in the northeastern state of Tripura.

Rebel soldiers captured near Bombay disclosed they had planned to take over the airport in the western port city, prompting Indian Airlines to alert all stations against possible hijack attempts.

In Amritsar, soldiers were reported still removing bodies from the temple grounds and cremating them in mass funeral pyres. Sources said the death toll from last week's battle at the Golden Temple compound has risen to 1,220 and is likely to reach 1,300.

Sikhs in Toronto said they had talked to relatives in the Punjab who told them true toll is closer

to 3,600. The Canadian Sikhs, who spoke on condition they not be identified, said they were told that hundreds of Sikh troops were mowed down when they were forced at gunpoint to lead the assault on the Golden Temple.

Military sources in India said the desertion of 2,000 troops should not be regarded as a widespread insurrection. Sikh soldiers represent about 10 per cent of the 1.2-million-man Indian Army, the world's fourth-largest.

The army was reported intensifying efforts to capture suspected Sikh terrorists throughout Punjab. Soldiers have arrested more than 6,500 suspected extremists in raids on villages since Monday, the sources said.

The Government also arrested two moderate leaders of the Sikh Akali Dal party yesterday. The two Sikhs, Prakash Singh Badal and Surjit Singh Barnala, had previously advocated unity between Sikhs and Hindus but refused to call for communal harmony after the army assault on the Golden Temple. Sikhs are the majority in Punjab, but most Indians are Hindus.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, addressing troops at Srinagar in Kashmir state, said unidentified foreign countries were trying to destabilize India and soldiers should be ready to defend the country's borders.

"The country today is faced with its greatest threat ever," she said. "Whatever has happened in Punjab should not be celebrated as a victory."