

## **Operation Blue Star and White Paper on Punjab Agitation**

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On 3 June 1984, the leader of the Akali Dal, Sant Jarnail Singh Longowal made an announcement for launching a state-wide morcha to prevent movement of food grains. This date coincided with the Martyr day of Guru Arjan Dev. As it was expected that the religious congregation would create chaotic conditions, the Central Government deployed large Army forces in the Golden Temple complex. This led to the gun battle for 7 hours between the militants under the control of Bhindranwale and the security forces. This enabled the armed forces to flush out the militants hiding in the Golden Temple and other religious places. According to the report by the Government revealed that the death toll during the operation as 92 soldiers, 554 civilians and militants. Operation Blue Star was followed by Operation Wood Rose that was undertaken after a few months of Operation Blue Star with the objective to clear the rural areas from militant elements. The Dal Khalsa was established in India on 13 April 1978 with the objective of creating an independent sovereign Sikh state based on the ideas of Giani Bakshish Singh, a pro-Naxalite leader of Birmingham, United Kingdom (UK). This outfit advocates in usage of violence to achieve its objectives. This outfit was responsible for hijacking an Indian Airlines aircraft to Lahore on 29 September 1981. It was declared on 1 May 1982 as an unlawful association under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

This outfit has branches in United Kingdom and in West Germany. In May 1983, in a meeting held at London by the Dal Khalsa, United Kingdom and the Babbar Khalsa, Vancouver, this association found fault with the Shiromani Akali Dal for its willingness to hold talks with the Government of India. According to Dal Khalsa, the Indian Constitution was a worthless document for Sikhs and the Dal Khalsa proposed to seek the help of International Court of Justice and the United Nations to put pressure on India 'to quit the Sikh Homeland'. In a meeting held on 12 June 1983, Thakedar of the Dal Khalsa claimed responsibility for killing Lala Jagat Narain and Atwal, DIG. He further warned that he would take similar revenge on the police officials for the death of those killed during the Akalimorcha. In July 1983, in a meeting held at Southhall United Kingdom, Thakedar said that Dal Khalsa was getting ready for an armed struggle in Punjab and that many people in high places in Punjab expressed their support to Dal Khalsa and even Army officers were prepared to revolt.

Thakedar has written a book in Punjabi and released for sale in United Kingdom in the first week of November, 1983, it was mentioned that the Dal Khalsa was committed to establish 'Khalsa Raj'. It planned to create a religious consciousness amongst Sikhs and cooperate with similar communities in the world they are fighting for independence; and that a new organisation, namely 'Thakhat Khalsa' would be formed to cleanse the Khalsa Panth. The struggle against the government for freedom and the struggle would be similar to that of the Jews. It is also mentioned in the book that political power could be secured only through physical efforts, guerrilla warfare and armed revolt. Dalkhals announced Jaswant Singh Thakedar as Defence Minister, Man Mohan Singh Bajaj as Home Minister and Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgir as Foreign Minister.

Akhand Kirtani Jatha is a religious group, started in 1978, it extends support to all Sikh political groups and extremist outfits. Among the active members of the group are Bibi Harsharan Kaur and Bibi Amarjit Kaur widow of Fauja Singh who was killed in the Sikh-Nirankari clash in April, 1978. According to this group, the Sikhs would be able to maintain their purity if only when they are able to achieve an independent state. This group has branches in United Kingdom and Canada.

Babber Kalsa established in India in 1978, it has branch in Canada, started in 1981. It perceives Pakistan as the natural and cultural neighbour of the Sikhs who are ready to help their movement against the machinations of India. It stresses the point that members of the Sikh community abroad would have to play an important role in the 'liberation of Khalistan'. In the Operation Blue Star carried out on 5 June 1984 between the Indian Army and the militants, about 1000 Sikh militants and 200 Army men lost their lives. This incident shocked the Sikhs and there was a demand for a White Paper that gave the factual position that led to the Operation Blue Star. In order to meet the said demand, Government of India issued a White Paper on the Punjab Agitation on 10 July, 1984.

Many factors that combined to produce a complex web of violence and terror that threatened to undermine the social, political and economic stability of Punjab. The Shiromani Akali Dal sponsored agitations from Punjab to the entire country. In support of demands while the negotiations between the Akali Dal and the Government were in progress. In the meantime the communal and extremist movement that degenerated into open advocacy of violence approval for heinous crimes against innocent people and the State. In addition, secessionist and anti-national activities with the objective of establishing an Independent State for the Sikhs with

external support; and involvement of criminals, smugglers and anti-social elements as well as naxalites who took advantage of the situation for their own ends.

Meanwhile, the ideological underpinning for the demand for a Sikh State was provided by certain members of the Sikh Community from foreign countries and secessionist activities in India were fuelled by the inflammatory talks of Amrik Singh, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and a few others. The ambiguity on the part of Akali Dal on the concept of Sikh separatism provided a cover for subversive and anti-national forces. The militant groups employed tactics systematic campaign to create hatred between Sikhs and Hindus. They practiced indoctrination in the ideology of separatism; training in the usage of modern weaponry; militants targeting police and administrators; making of hit lists of dissenting people. They started random killing of people of another community to create terror and instigating communal violence; procuring and supplying arms for looting shops and homes. Sacred places of worship including the Golden Temple in Amritsar had been misused to commit murder, arson, looting etc. These actions plunged Punjab into disorder and anarchy. Conditions of insurgency were emerging fast, seriously threatening India's unity and integrity. The essence of the problem was maturing of a secessionist and anti-national movement, with the active support of a small number of groups operating from abroad

The Akali Dal leadership allowed the initiative and control over their agitation to pass out of their hands. Negotiations were frustrated even when the prospects for settlement were within the reach; and that the position of Akali Dal was more rigid than before when the Government made a last-ditch effort before the Operation. On the face of the escalated terrorist violence, the subversive activities inside the Golden Temple complex assumed menacing proportions. In the context of India's security environment and the influence of external forces with deep-rooted interest in the integration of India, only way open to the Government is to call the Army.

Meanwhile, discussing the demands of Akali Dal has stated that the proposition contained in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution on Centre-State relations are at total variance with the basic concept of unity and integrity of the nation as expressed in the Constitution and these could not be accepted even as a basis for discussion. The common people clarified that the people of India did not accept the proposition that India is a multi-national society. The People's opinion highlighted the position that Indian People constitute one nation.

The violence associated with the sectarian feud between some fundamentalist Sikhs and Nirankaris was the starting point of the tragic events in Punjab. The incidents highlights the killings in the clashes of April 1978 that climaxed with the assassination of Baba Gurbachan Singh, the head of the Nirankaris on 24 April, 1980 and the aftermath wherein dogmatism and extremism were prevailing along with terror and violence that overwhelmed the political life of Punjab.

Subsequently, even before the Akalis submitted their demands to the government, the AISSF and other similar organisations were holding rallies and processions in Amritsar, wherein slogans of 'Khalistanzindabad' were raised and communal tension was deliberately generated. A cult of random killing by motorcycle borne people had plagued Punjab for about three years. On 29 September 1981, Sikh terrorists hijacked a plane belonging to Indian Airlines was hijacked to Lahore in Pakistan and the terrorists were never returned by Pakistan to India .The Akali Dal, created the tension ang agitation suited the militant groups. The group known as Dal Khalsa claimed responsibility for the sacrilege against Hindu temples carried out on 26 April 1982. On 1 May, Dal Khalsa and the National Council of Khalistan were declared as unlawful associations. Amrik Singh, the President of AISSF and a few others were arrested on 19 July 1982 in

connection with an attempted murder and a morcha was started for their unconditional release. By this time, Bhindranwale shifted his headquarters from Chowk Mehta to Golden Temple.

From 4 August 1982, Akali Dal intensified its agitation and called it 'Dharam Yudh', which was followed by two incidents of hijacking of Indian Airlines planes. An attempt on the life of the Chief Minister of Punjab, Darbara Singh Singh was made on 20 August 1982 in Jalandhar District. In an unmanned railway crossing at Jalandhar, some Akali Dal workers were killed on 11 September 1982, which was projected as a deliberate attempt to kill the Akalis. The religious rites of the dead culminated in violent demonstrations on 11 October 1982 before the Parliament. The arrested Akalis were later released as a goodwill gesture in order to facilitate talks. However, the Akali leadership directed them not to leave the jails and the provocative speeches made by them led to fresh violence. On 26 October, 1982, hand grenades were thrown at a Ramnavmi - a Hindu religious festival procession.

In the Meantime, the Akali Dal declared that if its demands were not met by 21 February 1983, the fight would be taken to streets and Sikh masses were exhorted to do-or-die and a recruitment drive to recruit Shaheedi volunteers (suicide squad) was initiated. The government appealed to the Akali leadership for resumption of talks; the Akalis responded to it by announcing a 'rail roko' (stop trains agitation) on 17 June 1983 and a 'Kamroko' (stop work) agitation on 29 August 1983. The militants were attacking the police officers who were exercising their duties. A.S. Atwal, DIG, Jalandhar Range was murdered by the militants on 25 April, 1983 while he was coming out of Darbar Hall after his prayers. The assailant who came from within the Golden temple after the dastardly act ran back to his shelter.

Subsequently the Militants planned a new dimension given to the escalating violence in September 1983. Militants started targeting Hindus. On 28 September 1983, the militants fired

indiscriminately on morning walkers in Jagraon (Ludhiana district). Later, a bus was hijacked on 5 October 1983 near Dhilwan (Kapurthala district), the Hindu passengers were identified and murdered in a cold-blooded manner. In a derailment orchestrated by the militants, 19 passengers of Sealdah-Jammu Tawi Express died. 4 Hindu passengers of a bus were killed in Amritsar district. Consequently, the resignation of the Chief Minister, President's rule was promulgated with effect from 6 October 1983. Following this, a number of measures were undertaken by the State such as proclamation of the Punjab Disturbed Areas Ordinance, 1983 and the Chandigarh Disturbed Areas Ordinance on 7 October 1983, the Armed Forces (Punjab and Chandigarh) Special Powers Ordinance, 1983 on 15 October 1983. These ordinances were later replaced by Acts. Additional forces were deployed in the State. On 15 December, 1983, Bhindranwale moved from the Guru Nanak Niwas to the Akal Takht with his armed men. The militants were targeting and killing those Sikhs who objected to the anti-national activities. A large number of police personnel, politicians, religious and spiritual leaders were killed by the militants in order to frighten the law-abiding citizens. Meanwhile, Akali Dal decided on 26 January, 1984 to burn Article 25 of the Constitution of India. On 14 February 1984, the government convened another tripartite meeting. This occasion was also accompanied by heightened violence in Punjab. This time, Haryana also witnessed violence. Many innocent lives were lost during violence, which includes killing of 8 Sikhs at Panipat in Haryana on 19 February 1984. The militants were on a killing spree, killing a number of people. There were attempts on the lives of Ved Pal, Deputy Speaker, Haryana and Darbara Singh, former Chief Minister of Punjab. H.S. Manchanda, President of SGPC, Delhi was shot dead in Delhi on 28 March 1984. Dr. V.N. Tewari MP, a professor at Punjab University who contributed to Punjabi Literature was shot dead on 3 April, 1984 at Chandigarh.

As a result, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal gave a new call for 'Panth Azad Week' to start from 2 April, 1984. After the Union Home Minister gave an assurance that Article 25 could be amended, this call was withdrawn. Between 1 October 1983 and 31 May 1984, 34 banks were robbed. Between the period 4 August 1982 (when the Akali Morcha was announced) and 3 June 1984, 293 persons lost their lives and over 525 persons were injured in over 775 incidents. According to the White Paper, the events of April and May 1984 were significant as they highlighted the real character and designs of the terrorists. During this period, a principal of a college in Ferozpur was shot dead (1 April 1984); the AISSF with the objective of preventing the examinations indulged in widespread violence; and a former MLA and a BJP leader, Harbans Lal Khanna was shot dead inside his shop. The killing of Surinder Singh Sodhi on 14 April, 1984 created a tension between Akali Dal leaders and Bhindranwale. During this period, a number of Sikh religious leaders were murdered and priests were intimidated to accept Bhindranwale's directions. Terrorists were attacking the camps of security forces with automatic weapons. On 11 May 1984, a 'karseva' vehicle registered in the name of Bhindranwale was searched and it yielded in recovery of sten guns, arms and ammunition. The terrorists started extorting money from the people and it was found that Bhindranwale was summarily deciding land disputes and personal matters. There were reported clashes between the persons loyal to Bhindranwale and Sant Longowal. There were reports received by the Government, indicating that Bhindranwale was instigating the killing of Hindus of Punjab in order to set in motion exodus of Hindus from Punjab. According to the White Paper, a situation of insurgency in defiance of legally constituted authorities was building up. Unmoved by the orgy of violence in April and May 1984, the Akalis went further by calling another agitation starting from 3 June, 1984. The Akali leadership was cajoling the people to prevent movement of food grains from Punjab by force and to stop



payment of taxes due to the government. An appeal by the Prime Minister through a nation-wide telecast to stop agitation was spurned by the Akalis. Many secessionist Sikh outfits were operating abroad: principal among them were, the National Council of Khalistan under Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, active in UK, West Germany, Canada and USA, the Dal Khalsa acting from UK and West Germany, Babbar Khalsa, operating mainly from Vancouver and the Akhand Kirthani Jatha which was having units in United Kingdom and Canada..Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, a leader of the Khalistan movement started his public life through the student wing of the Communist Party. The slogan of 'Khalistan' was raised by him in the press conference in London in September, 1971. He announced the formation of 'National Council of Khalistan on 12 April 1980 with himself as the President and Balbir Singh Sandhu as its Secretary-General. Three months later, he proclaimed formation of Khalistan from London with simultaneous announcement in India by Balbir Singh Sandhu. Jagjit Singh Chauhan was known for his anti-India gimmicks like issuance of Khalistani passports, postage stamps and currency notes. He appealed to the authorities of USA to stop sale of wheat India. He stated that Pakistani military personnel disguised as Sikhs were at Bhindranwale controlled Guru Ram Dass Sarai in Amritsar. He issued a map outlining boundaries of the so-called Khalistan state. Realising the situation, on 2 June, 1984, the Government decided to call Indian Army to aid the Punjab Government and it was assigned the responsibilities of checking and controlling the extremist, terrorist and communal violence in the State and Chandigarh, provide security to the people and restore normalcy and augment the capability of the Border Security Force on the Indo-Pakistan border to stop smuggling and unauthorised cross-border traffic. The control of the Central police forces deployed in the State and the State armed police force were kept under the Army. The entry of foreigners into Punjab was prohibited under the Foreigners Act on 3 June 1984. Publication and

transmission of material may have the effect of inflaming communal violence and it was prohibited under the Punjab Press (Special Powers) Act. A 36-hour curfew was imposed in the state of Punjab and the Union territory, Chandigarh with effect from 3 June 1984. The terrorists had converted the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar into a fortress for mounting attacks on the security forces. Training had been provided to the terrorists by ex-army personnel and battle plans had been drawn up by the terrorists with ingenuity. From the afternoon of 5 June, 1984 onwards, appeals were made through the public address system to the terrorists to lay down their arms and surrender to the authorities. At 7.00 PM on 5 June, 1984, the Army commenced its preliminary operations to secure the dominating buildings on the periphery of the occupied area under the control of the terrorists.

From 5 June, 1984 onwards, the Army units commenced moving into the Golden temple precincts. Since the area had been barricaded by the terrorists, the movement of the Army was gradual with casualties and despite casualties, the troops gradually closed in and commenced movement into the Temple area. The security forces faced intensive fire from the Akal Takht, which stood like a fortress, covering all the entry points with fierce fire force causing heavy casualties.

On 6 June 1984, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal and 350 people surrendered near Guru Nanak Niwas although the terrorists opened fire on them in order to prevent them from surrendering. This action of the terrorists killed 30 women and 5 children. Among those killed were Gurcharan Singh, who was a vocal critic of Bhindranwale. Room to room fighting continued in the Akal Takht till it was cleared on 6 June, 1984. The Army tackled the resistance from the ground floor and the basement of Akal Takht during the intervening night of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1984. This resistance was overcome and the bodies of Bhindranwale and Amrik Singh

were found along with 34 other bodies on the ground floor of the Akal Takht. A large quantity of weapons, ammunition and explosives were recovered including automatic and anti-tank weapons. A small factory for the manufacture of hand grenades and sten guns was also found within the precincts of the Golden Temple complex during the operations.

The Army action against the terrorists hiding in religious places had resistance in the gurudwaras at Moga, Muktsar, Faridkot, Patiala, Ropar and Chowk Mehta. Major recovery of arms and ammunition was made from the religious places at Chowk Mehta, Patiala and Ropar. The last such operation of the Army was carried out in the Gurudwara Muktsar on 6 June, 1984. In fact, The Government of India had realized that the terrorists were receiving active support from certain foreign sources.

**References**

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5. India Today, dated 31 August 1982.
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7. The Hindu, dated 7 June 1984.
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