

The Punjab Conflict: Failure of the Rajiv Gandhi - Longowal Accord

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Speaking to the nation on January 5, 1985, after his overwhelming election victory, the new Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi assigned "top priority" to a peaceful settlement of the Punjab conflict. After a surprisingly short period of negotiations with the Akali Dal leadership he succeeded in signing an accord with Sant Harchand Singh Longowal on July 24, 1985, and announced state assembly elections in order to replace President's Rule in the state by a civil government. In spite of Longowal's assassination on August 20, 1985, the elections were held on September 25, 1985, and returned to power an Akali Dal government under Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala.

The critical moment came on Republic Day 1986 when the first significant provision of the accord was due for implementation, namely the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab. January 26, 1986, however, did not introduce the first phase of the accord's implementation but a re-assertion of the Sikh extremists. On April 30, 1986, less than two years after Operation Bluestar, Barnala was provoked by the extremists to send again the police into the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Since then, Barnala's government was continuously weakened due to various factors and was finally dismissed on May 11, 1987. President's Rule was re-imposed on a state which is now on the brink of political, social and economic disintegration.

To a large degree, Rajiv Gandhi gained his impressive mandate in the December 1984 General Elections because he was perceived by the electorate as the most trustworthy guarantor of the nation's unity.⁽¹⁾ Two and a half years later, the nation's predicament is such that it is faced with a much more militant threat than ever before of turning Punjab into independent Kalistan. What went wrong with the accord?

The Centre's political initiative

To reach a political solution was dependent on a determined, yet concessional attitude of the Centre as well as on a strong, yet moderate leadership of the Sikhs. The latter would have to convince the various political factions to achieve a compromise on the set of Sikh demands.

On the part of the Congress (I), the strategy and the scope of concessions were under pressure from a number of hardliners. The strongest

advocates of a tough stance were Buta Singh and Darbara Singh. Buta Singh, Union Minister, had been declared "tankhaiya" (guilty of a religious offence) by the five head priests of the Golden temple in September 1984 for his support of the Centre-sponsored restoration of the Golden Temple and was excommunicated from the Sikh religion on April 2, 1985. His strained political relations with the priests and the Akali Dal leadership were accentuated by a class and caste conflict. While the religious and political leadership of the Sikhs belonged to the Jat caste, Buta Singh originated from the "mazhabis", the low castes of the Sikh community. In the later phase of Barnala's term of office, Buta Singh's role became visible. When he was appointed Union Home Minister in May 1986, he used his influence to the detriment of the Barnala government and was one of the three persons responsible for Barnala's ouster in May 1987.

Darbara Singh had been Chief Minister in Punjab until October 6, 1983, when President's Rule was declared. Operating behind the scenes he was said to have influenced Rajiv Gandhi's initial non-compromising attitude.

As concessions give to the Sikhs would inevitably have affected the interests of Haryana, Bhajan Lal, Congress (I) Chief Minister of this state, joined the hardliners at the Centre. His scope to justify adverse effects of a concessional strategy was severely limited by the opposition parties in Haryana. The contentious issue of the transfer of Chandigarh was of lesser impact. Central to the interests of the Haryana farmers, however, was the issue of the disputed river waters distribution. This issue could potentially provide the opposition parties with convenient arguments in the approaching state assembly elections (due in 1987) to topple the Congress (I) state government. In view of Haryana's significant role in the Hindi belt, Congress (I) could hardly afford such a potential development. In 1985, this consideration might not have been of such an importance, but the nearer the date of the assembly elections approached, the more significant this tactical consideration would probably become.

Finally, the Punjab wing of Congress (I) should have functioned as a concerned lobby. But the state party was in a poor condition. Santokh Singh Randhawa, president of the state unit and a close associate of Darbara Singh, was ultimately forced to resign on June 18, 1985, because of alleged links with the Sikh extremists. His successor, Rajjinger Singh Sparrow, a 74 year old retired major-general, was appointed on June 30. However, Sparrow was regarded only as an interim solution who was merely meant to function as an "executive" of the Centre's directives.

To sum up, although a political solution was vital for the nation's unity, Rajiv Gandhi's initiative was faced by a strong hardline opposition within Congress (I) right from the beginning - a fact which gained relevance in the future mishandling of the accord's implementation. The

other obstacle to the Centre's initiative was the absence of a representative spokesman or leadership of the Sikhs. Thus, two simultaneous tasks lay ahead of the Centre: to establish a dialogue with various opinion leaders among the Sikhs and to identify - or build up - a representative Sikh leader. The first task was taken up by appointing a Ministerial Subcommittee and the second task by releasing the detained Akali Dal politicians. In retrospect, setting up the subcommittee can be assessed as having been primarily a tactical move to signal the Sikh community the Centre's willingness to resume political talks. The subcommittee comprised Home Minister S.B. Chavan, Defence Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Education Minister K.C. Pant. It held its constituting session on January 4 - one day before Rajiv Gandhi's broadcast to the nation -, but during the following weeks the ministers were too preoccupied with the assembly elections in ten states on March 2 and 5, as to seriously tackle the Punjab problem. Only in early April the subcommittee toured the state to assess the repercussions of the post-assassination events. In March, the political situation in Punjab had significantly changed, and the newly appointed Governor, Arjun Singh, emerged as the prime agent of the Centre's initiative.

Although denied by the Home Minister Chavan in the Lok Sabha on March 11, the turning point was obviously reached by an ultimatum of the Akali Dal and the SGPC on March 7.(3) The two Sikh bodies threatened to organize an action programme in case the Centre did not appoint a judicial commission to the probe into the November 1984 anti-Sikh riots and did not release the detained Sikh leaders until Baisakhi (April 13). Baisakhi is the most important religious Sikh festival and a traditional occasion to gather the Sikh community and decide on major issues. The Centre sensed the political consequences for the law and order situation and reacted immediately.

Starting with Chavan's announcement of the release of eight leading Akali Dal politicians on March 11, the Centre - assisted by the energetic Arjun Singh - initiated a step-by-step concessional strategy which repeatedly alternated with a "wait-and-see-attitude" in order to watch for the emergence of the dominant Akali leader. On March 12, Longowal, Barnala, Jagdev Singh Talwandi and five other politicians were released from detention. On March 14, Arjun Singh was sworn in as the new governor and immediately announced a relaxation of press censorship in the state and a partial withdrawal of the army. To forestall a protest campaign on Baisakhi, the Centre announced a major list of concessions on April 11, namely (i) to set up a judicial inquiry of the November riots, (ii) to lift the ban of the All-India Sikhs Students Federation (AISSF), (iii) to review and release more detenus.(4) On Baisakhi itself, Arjun Singh released the first batch of 53 Sikh detainees, and Rajiv Gandhi reiterated his wish to reach a peaceful solution.

Until May 22, when Longowal finally decided the faction-fighting among the rival Akali politicians and between moderate and militant

groups in his favour, a number of minor concessions, obviously of a more tactical nature, were added. Relevant concessions were granted from June onwards, serving the twin purpose of demonstrating the Centre's earnest intentions and increasing Longowal's credibility as a successful politician. The most important were: (i) a judicial commission under Justice Ranganath Mishra took up its investigations of the November riots on June 27, and (ii) from June 29 onwards, Arjun Singh daily released detained Sikhs, totalling about 1,700 detainees by mid-July.

The actual negotiations on the accord were initiated by a secret letter dated July 2, sent by Rajiv Gandhi to Longowal, the messenger being Arjun Singh.⁽⁵⁾ Both Rajiv Gandhi and Longowal consulted only a few selected confidants during these most crucial days, until Longowal agreed to meet Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi on July 23. The following day, the accord was signed.

Faction-fighting within the Sikh leadership

Common to Indian politics in general, but under the given circumstances of particular dangerous consequences in Punjab was the problem of constant faction-fighting and personal power rivalry among leading politicians. The Akali Dal contributed its own story to this tradition. The problem was aggravated by the fact that the Sikhs were not only bereft of any influential moderate leadership since the detention of all prominent Akali Dal leaders in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar but were also drawn into an increasing polarisation between moderate and militant political groups.

In March - April 1985, the situation was such that none of the contestants for the political leadership was sure to muster sufficient support among the Sikh population. All detained leaders suffered under a "credibility crisis" because they were accused of having cowardly surrendered to the army when the Golden Temple was stormed in June 1984. Longowal, the official president of the Akali Dal, was particularly exposed to this popular resentment. His claim for leadership after his release was questioned by the militant elements on the ground that - contrary to Bhindranwale's martyrdom - he had shied away from sacrificing his life for the Sikh Panth (religious order). Thus, he was under constant pressure of adopting a more radical attitude than his personal inclinations would suggest and his assessment of the Centre's willingness to negotiate would recommend.

On the other hand, neither the militant leaders nor the illegal extremists had yet sufficiently re-asserted themselves in order to outdo the moderates. Because of this circumstance, the chances for a negotiated settlement were relatively sound at that time.

Among the first released were Longowal and his more radical rival,

Talwandi. Talwandi was the leader of an Akali Dal splinter group named after him. On March 25, however, 16 of Talwandi's 32 supporters in the SGPC resigned from his party and defected en bloc to the main Akali Dal led by Longowal. This placed Talwandi at the losing end of the contest for the leadership. He made another bid by operating as the moving force behind Baba Joginder Singh's attempt in early May to seize power in the Akali Dal, but failed to outmanoeuvre Longowal on the one hand and Longowal's keenest rivals, Tohra and Bandal, on the other hand.

With the release of Gurcharan Singh Tohra, president of the SGPC, on April 19 and Prakash Singh Badal's release shortly afterwards, the severest challenge to Longowal's leadership emerged. Their release gave new impetus to the more radical, non-compromising faction within the Akali Dal, thus enforcing the pressure on Longowal to harden his attitude against the Centre.

Tohra, having already presided over the SGPC for 13 years, was the most influential politician, well-versed in tactical manoeuvring, while Bandal, a former Punjab Chief Minister, was well-known for his desire to regain supreme political power in the state. On Tohra's first visit to the Golden Temple, he announced that the Akali Takht, the holy centre of the Temple, might have to be rebuilt in order to restore the pride of the Sikhs which had been hurt by the late Indira Gandhi's forced restoration of the Golden Temple.(6) The announcement did not receive significant attention at that time, but half a year later, militant youths, guided by the re-organizing extremists, demolished and rebuilt the Akali Takht, thus marking the renewed fight of the extremists for an independent Khalistan.

The clash between the rival Akali politicians and between the moderate and radical factions occurred in the first half of May.(7) The only element which was forced to keep a low profile in the power struggle were the extremists who had not yet sufficiently re-organized themselves. It did not, however, prevent them from demonstrating their returning strength, as was dramatically proved by the scrupulously planned series of transistor bomb explosions in Delhi and Northern India on May 10. After three weeks of infighting, Longowal finally asserted himself as the dominant representative of the Sikhs, thus paving the way on the part of the Akali Dal for a settlement with the Centre.

Later events in retrospect, however, revealed that his success had only extended the grace period for the moderates which was finally terminated in January 1986. The massive participation of radical youths in the infighting revealed the first indication of the extremists' political re-assertion. The various meetings in May testified that the potential of militant Sikh youths was large in number. They became vocal as a radical pressure group and founded an informal political centre in the United Akali Dal (UAD, formed on May 14) of Baba Joginder Singh, the octogenarian father of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. The UAD never

achieved importance as a legal political party, but Baba Joginder Singh's charisma, solely derived from his being the martyr's father, attracted the frustrated, unemployed and emotionally hurt Sikh youths.(8) The UAD was to function as the legal outpost for the militants, as the recruiting ground for the extremists and as a convenient platform for Akali Dal politicians to demonstrate their radical attitude.

Mishandling of the accord

Three reasons were responsible for the failure of the accord: (i) evasion of specific clarification of the two central issues by referring them to commissions; (ii) exclusion of the leading politicians of the two parties from the negotiations, thus making the implementation entirely dependent on the personal capabilities of Rajiv Gandhi and Longowal to get the accord accepted in their respective parties; (iii) evasive delay of the deadlines envisaged in the accord.

As for the first reason, the accord (see annex) evaded a verdict on the two central problems, namely the exact specification of the territorial claims and the distribution of the river waters - both long-delayed contentious issues. The territorial claims consisted of two distinct parts. In exchange for the state capital Chandigarh, which was awarded to Punjab,(9) "some Hindi-speaking territories" were to be transferred to Haryana. The identification of the exact number of villages was entrusted to a commission. A second commission was to be appointed to consider the respective claims concerning the readjustment of the Punjab-Haryana boundary.

The second vital issue suffered the same fate. A tribunal was to decide on the respective share of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan in the water distribution of the Punjabi rivers Ravi and Beas. This was an extremely complicated technical problem, having already occupied many an expert.(10) A "just" solution was hardly possible. Therefore, the need for a courageous political decision by the Centre would have been even more urgent.

To sum up, the accord granted a number of concessions to the Sikhs. In return, Longowal was forced to dispense with an immediate solution of the two most vital issues and to agree to a further delay of a - rather uncertain - verdict. In other words: The accord did achieve the resumption of a dialogue with the Sikhs, but it fell short of a sound solution of the Punjab problem. Instead, it merely passed the buck to three commissions, thus opening up the possibility for renewed lobbying of the Congress (I) hardliners.

As for the second objection, Arjun Singh, who had prepared the ground in 14 secret talks with Longowal, Badal and Tohra, reasoned: "Secrecy was the key to success. If we had failed there the accord would

never have come about."(11)

On the part of Congress (I), Rajiv Gandhi, backed by Arjun Singh, hastened to get the accord signed. In order to avoid any information leakages, he excluded President Zail Singh, Buta Singh and Darbara Singh from the negotiations. Bhajan Lal was summoned only shortly before finalization, and Harideo Joshi, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, was not informed at all. Signing the accord meant having accomplished only half of the task. By excluding the opponents from the negotiations, Rajiv Gandhi did not make them share the responsibility for the follow-up of the unresolved issues. But even this obstacle he could have overcome by having used his overwhelming position in the party to force through the implementation with the same determination which he had displayed in finalizing the accord.

On the part of the Akali Dal, the situation was more complicated. Longowal had just succeeded in asserting himself and the moderate faction, but his hold over the party -not to speak of the Sikh population in general - was far from secure. Tohra and Badal warned him during the early phase of the secret talks not to rush for a settlement - a warning which admittedly might have been reasoned out of their own power considerations. The personal responsibility which Longowal assumed by signing the accord demanded a tragic price, namely his assassination in August by Sikh extremists.

In spite of this dramatic turn, Barnala, new moderate party president, not only whole-heartedly accepted Longowal's legacy but also succeeded in winning the September elections on this issue. His election victory can be interpreted as a verdict of the moderate Sikh majority to restore political normalcy in the state by rejecting the boycott appeal of Baba Joginder Singh's militant UAD. Yet, as Longowal's assertion was partly sponsored by the Centre's tactical moves, Baranala, too, owed his safe mandate to a considerable degree to the indirect election support of the Centre, namely by nominating weak Congress (I) candidates in certain constituencies. Thus, Barnala entered office prone to being labelled a "Congress puppet". Until the year's end, he could have disproved the accusation by unflinchingly reminding Rajiv Gandhi of his personal responsibility. But when he failed to deliver the accord's first follow-up, he became increasingly vulnerable to the militants' attacks.

As for the third reason, the delay of the crucial deadline of Chandigarh's transfer on January 26, 1986, can be explained on two levels. The "official" explanation was that the Mathew Commission was unable to identify an appropriate number of Hindi-speaking villages in Punjab to be transferred to Haryana in exchange for Chandigarh. The "unofficial" reason was that the Centre placed the party's interest above the necessity to back up the (oppositional) Akali Dal government.

After two extensions of its term and after a fresh linguistic census in 54 Punjab villages, strongly opposed by the Barnala Government, the Commission finally submitted its unexpected result on January 25, on

the eve of the envisaged transfer. The Commission's conclusion (12) was unexpected insofar as it opted against the interlinked transfer because the Punjabi-speaking village of Kandukhera violated the principle of geographic contiguity between 83 Hindi-speaking villages and two towns in the Fazilka and Abohar areas with the adjoining Hindi-speaking districts in Haryana. The compromise offered by the Barnala Government to transfer 13 Hindi-speaking villages in the Patiala district in lieu of Chandigarh was rejected outright by Bhajan Lal. Thus, the Centre let slip the first crucial follow-up of the accord's implementation, a fact which was "nobody's victory and nobody's defeat".(13)

In retrospect, the "unofficial" reason, namely to strengthen Bhajan Lal's Congress (I) Government vis-a-vis the opposition parties in Haryana proved to be one of Rajiv Gandhi's most fatal decisions. During the political bargaining preceding the non-transfer of Chandigarh, Rajiv Gandhi would have had the power to make Bhajan Lal accept a compromise. It can be assumed that Chandigarh's transfer and the non-transfer of the villages in the Fazilka and Abohar areas were a much more sensitive issue for Barnala's political image in Punjab than the loss of Chandigarh for Bhanjan Lal in Haryana. Contrary to the issue of the river waters distribution, the "Chandigarh issue" was of purely political and emotional importance. Confronted with the two alternatives, either to reconcile the Sikhs by a political gesture or to prevent a potential election defeat of Congress (I) in Haryana, Rajiv Gandhi opted for the latter. The actual outcome of the Haryana state assembly elections in June 1987, however, showed that Rajiv Gandhi had lost both: the restoration of normalcy in Punjab and the power in Haryana.

The toppling of the Barnala Government

Barnala's ouster was investigated from two different sides: by his radical rivals in the Akali Dal and by Congress (I) politicians.

Badal, acting in the forefront, and Tohra, operating in the background, were the chief agitators against Barnala. They were supported by other radical politicians, cooperated with the head priests of the Akal Takht and wooed the militants centred around Baba Joginder Singh's dubious UAD.

It is, however, not possible to draw a clear picture of the power structure in the Sikh leadership. The power struggle from May 1985 broke out again from January 1986 onwards, when Barnala suffered his first decisive set-back, and intensified from May 1986 onwards, when Barnala experienced his second set-back by ordering the police into the Golden Temple. Since then, the political situation continued to be extremely fluid.

The names of the (visible) main actors kept changing, power alignments emerged and disappeared. Radical politicians were prevented by

the militants from entering the Golden Temple for certain periods, but managed to assert themselves.

From January 1986 onwards, the militants controlled the Golden Temple either directly or indirectly, dismissed the head priests, but failed to get the new nominees accepted by the population. As in the case of the Akali Dal, the militants, too, split into several factions. Some of their leaders went underground, some were imprisoned, and some were shot by the police. In fact, neither a single gurudwara, nor a certain group, nor a single politician emerged as an acknowledged power centre, thus causing a highly fragmented and competitive character of the Sikh leadership.

Baranala's ouster was staged in four phases. The first phase started on January 26, 1986, when militant youths led by the Damdami Taksal (the training seminar of the Sikh priests whose head Bhindranwale had been) and the AISSF took over the Golden Temple, hoisted the Khalistan flag, nominated a five-member "Panthic committee" and began with their "kar sewa" (reconstruction) of the Akal Takht by dismantling the restoration done in August 1984 by the last kar sewa initiated by Indira Gandhi. Although Tohra had exactly proposed such a kar sewa half a year ago, obviously having had in mind an "official" kar sewa under his own stewardship, he was now outmanoeuvred and only managed to achieve a nominally "joint" kar sewa, thus avoiding the open confrontation with the militants.

The second phase was initiated by the militants' renewed seizure of the Golden Temple on April 29. This time, the Panthic committee declared the formation of Kalistan. The declaration was said to have been done on the insistence of the US-based World Sikh Organization and the International Sikh Youth Federation.⁽¹⁴⁾ Barnala, probably instructed by the Centre, the new Governor, Ray, and the new Director-in-General of Police, Ribeiro, sent in the police to clear the Temple from the militants.⁽¹⁵⁾ It was the second and last opportunity for Barnala to resign in honour, the first having been the Centre's failure to accomplish the transfer of Chandigarh. Although the police action was fully justified on the ground of maintaining law and order, the political repercussions of Barnal's decision sealed his fate.

Badal realized his chance to weaken his rival, made three ministers resign from Barnala's cabinet, caused 27 Akali parliamentarians to defect en bloc from Barnala's 73 member strong assembly group and - in accordance with Tohra - formally split the Akali Dal on May 8. Henceforth, Barnala, headed a minority government and could only function with the help of Congress (I) parliamentarians.

The third blow came on November 30, when Tohra defeated Barnala's candidate in the SGPC presidentship elections. Tohra and Badal were arrested two days later, but that gave Barnala only a short respite.

The final blow by the Akali rivals followed in February 1987. The radicalized SGPC had appointed five new head priests on December 24.

The new acting head priest, Darshan Singh Ragi, was described as being "less militant" than his colleagues (and consequently was forced to resign half a year later). The five head priests started a fresh attempt to achieve unity among the different Akali Dals, dissoveld all of them and served the faction leaders with an ultimatum to join a new "United Akali Dal" by February 5. Since Barnala refused to submit his resignation, he was declared a "tankhaiya" on February 9. For the deeply religious Barnala the excommunication order must have been a tragic insult.

In view of Barnala's shattered position it was only a question of time until the Centre would take the final step, dismiss his government and re-impose President's Rule. It was done on May 11, 1987, the timing obviously determined by the Haryana state assembly elections in June.

Barnala took upon himself Longowal's legacy with good intentions but lacked the firmness and tactical skill to suppress the power game of his Akali rivals, to control the progressively deteriorating law and order situation and to stand up against the militants. He defended his reluctant attitude towards the radical and extremist re-assertion during 1986 by accusing the Centre of having deprived him of any substantial support. To a large degree his argumentation was correct. Ever since the delayed and later abandoned attempt to transfer Chandigarh, the Centre was unwilling to bolster his position by any relevant concession and made him function indeed as a "Delhi puppet". When in April 1986 Siddharta Shankar Ray took over as governor, Julio Ribeiro as director-general of the Punjab police and in May Buta Singh as Union Home Minister, three advocates of the militant strategy against extremists joined hands in exploiting Barnala's apparent weakness and, finally, pressed Rajiv Gandhi for Barnala's dismissal.

Their justification for re-imposing President's Rule seemed, however, questionable because the number of killings by the hands of extremists had further increased since May 11, thus proving that the Punjab conflict could not be solved solely by a military crackdown on the extremists, but only by a combination of a political solution, an efficient restoration of the law and order situation by the Punjab police and an economic programme to integrate the unemployed militant youths.

Assessment of the extremist movement

In the following, an attempt is made to outline the extremist movement. Source material and figures are often vague or inconsistent, thus allowing only a preliminary assessment.

The strategy is clearly outlined in threatening letters sent to prominent Hindus:

"We will first force Hindus out of the rural and semi-urban areas to major cities. In this, Sikhs will have to support us. And then we will

encircle the cities. We know it is a prolonged war but we will surely win."(16)

Contrary to the moderate Akali leaders who demand far-reaching autonomy for the state but within the framework of the Indian constitution, the extremists clearly are aiming at a "separate constitution, flag and president", i.e. the independent nation Kalisthan. The radical Akali politicians oscillate between these two demands. So far it seems that they are paying tribute to the extremists' vocabulary not out of conviction but for tactical purposes to muster support among the militant and to pressurize the Centre. It seems doubtful that the old and discredited guard of radical Jat Sikh politicians would be allowed to play an important role in an independent Kalisthan. Therefore, their radical attitude will be confined to verbal attacks, while their political preference seems to be a greater autonomy for the existing state. Open to discussion, however, is the question of dependence between radical politicians and extremists. The often mentioned "links" between the two sides do not reveal who is dependent on whom, i.e. do the radical politicians control the extremists or vice-versa, or do they merely coordinate their urge for power in the present phase, postponing the fight for actual control to a later stage. The last option seems the most likely one at the moment.

The background to the fight for an independent Kalisthan is the old demand of a Sikh state, reaching back to the historical time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the only Sikh kingdom (1801-1839). Only after the trifurcation of the previous larger state of Punjab in 1966, did the Sikhs become the majority communal group within the present state boundaries. The shift in the communal distribution of Sikhs versus Hindus changed between the last census years of 1971 and 1981, to the detriment of the Sikhs, reducing the Sikh community to a small majority of only 52%.(17)

From this an important argument can be derived. During the pre-Green Revolution campaign for a Sikh state, the issue was a Sikh-dominated state on religious grounds, later changed into the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state on linguistic grounds (Punjabi Suba). The socio-economic repercussions of the Green Revolution (i.e. high rate of unemployment) added economic demands, focussing now on the controversial water rivers distribution. Although on April 29, 1986, the extremists reacted to the failed implementation of the accord by proclaiming an independent Kalisthan, at the present moment, i.e. shortly after the re-imposition of President's Rule, the question still seems to be, whether the ultimate aim is, indeed, the achievement of an independent nation-state or whether the prime concern is better political and economic treatment of the Sikhs. In the latter case, the fight for Kalisthan might still be abandoned if the Centre would soon offer a convincing political solution. Unfortunately, in view of the present crisis of the Rajiv Gandhi Government, the chances for a renewed political initiative are not discernible, thus further aggravating the conflict.

A journalistic investigation of the "Spectre of Terrorism"(18), undertaken in Summer 1987, concludes that the "Sikh terrorism has evolved along classic lines" of international terrorism and has now reached the "final stage", i.e. stage 5, described below. According to the investigation, the Kalisthan movement passed through the following stages:

1. attacking selective targets, i.e. prominent Hindus
2. extreme escalation of demands and terrorization of the local Sikh population
3. fund-raising through bank robberies and external sources such as the international Sikh community
4. setting up a parallel administration
5. killing randomly and indiscriminately to pressurize the Centre into a compromise
6. according to intelligence officials "the next logical targets" will be public places outside the Punjab.

Although all criteria were met by the extremists between Spring 1985 and Summer 1987, and although extremist attacks have significantly increased since early 1986, the main objection to the above mentioned conclusion is that such a systematic pattern cannot be discerned. The prime reason seems to be the absence of one dominant political and strategical coordination centre. The question of the power structure among the various extremist groups is, at present, the most difficult one to answer.

The most influential group seems to be the five-member "Panthic committee", set up in January 1986, operating in a semi-underground matter, and comprising Wassan Singh, Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, Aroor Singh, Gurdev Singh and Dhanna Singh. They are said to act as the "brain trust" behind the extremist movement. Background information about them, however, is not accessible, and it is uncertain, if the committee, in fact, is accepted by all other groups.

According to intelligence sources, 19 separate extremist groups were identified:(19)

1. The main group is the Kalisthan Commando Force (KCF) under Labh Singh. The recently captured "star extremist" Jinda was a close associate of Labh Singh. The group is linked to the Gurjit faction of the AISSF and the Damdami Taksal.
2. The Kalisthan Liberation Force (KLF) functions as an umbrella organisation comprising (i) Kalisthan Armed Police, (ii) Kalisthan Security Force, (iii) Tat Khalsa of Avtar Singh Brahma, (iv) and other groups. The KLF maintains links with the Manjit faction of the AISSF and the Panthic committees.
3. The largest group is the Babar Khalsa; but so far it has concentrated on killing specific targets, avoiding massacres among the ordinary population.
4. The remaining groups are much smaller, operating separately and concentrating on specialized tasks such as bank robberies etc..

The difficulty with such reports is that the credibility of police is rather questionable. Most confessions of arrested extremists are said to have been extracted under torture. The image of the police, irrespective of Ribeiro's acknowledged professionalism, is still rather low. The frequent denials of "fake encounters", Ribeiro's "number game" of the estimated account of underground extremists and the repeated references to the alleged "foreign hand" in Pakistan do not add to the credibility. Although not all released information can be dismissed as being exaggerated or politically motivated, it is difficult to extricate the correct facts.

To conclude, the larger number of individual groups, the loose coordination (if at all) among them, the smallness of some of the groups and a non-discernible political/strategical centre which is recognized by all extremists is reminiscent of a specific military tradition in Sikh history, namely the "misls".(20) A misl was a group of soldiers united under one leader, the strength of the misl depended on the significance of the commander and on political circumstances. The misls were famous for their high fighting spirit, but were also prone to factionalism and fragmentation in the absence of an overall political leadership. Irrespective of the legitimacy of the extremists' long-term aim, the Centre should take into consideration the strength of the extremist movement, i.e. their mental dedication and readiness to sacrifice their lives for the Sikh Panth, and the movement's weakness, i.e. their present inability to agree on a united political leadership.

Annex

Text of the Memorandum of Settlement of July 24, 1985

Compensation to innocent persons killed:

Along with ex-gratis payment to those innocent killed in agitation or any action after 1-8-82, compensation for property damaged will also be paid.

Army recruitment:

All citizens of the country have the right to enroll in the Army and merit will remain the criterion for selection.

Inquiry into November incidents:

The jurisdiction of Shri Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission inquiring into the November riots of Delhi would be extended to cover the disturbances at Bokare and Kanpur also.

Rehabilitation of those discharged from the Army:

For all those discharged, efforts will be made to rehabilitate and provide gainful employment.

All India Gurudwara Act:

The Government of India agrees to consider the formulation of an All-India Gurudwara Bill. Legislation will be brought forward for this purpose in consultation with Shromani Akali Dal, others concerned and after fulfilling all relevant constitutional requirements.

Disposal of Pending Cases:

The notifications applying the Armed Forces Special Powers Act to Punjab will be withdrawn.

Existing Special Courts will try only cases relating to the following type of offences:

- (a) Waging war
- (b) Hijacking

All other cases will be transferred to ordinary courts and enabling legislation if needed will be brought forward in this session of Parliament.

Territorial Claim:

The Capital Project Area of Chandigarh will go to Punjab. Some adjoining areas which were previously part of Hindi or Punjabi regions were included in the Union Territory. With the capital region going to Punjab, the areas which were added to the Union Territory from the Punjabi region of the erstwhile State of Punjab will be transferred to Punjab and those from Hindi regions to Haryana. The entire Sukhna lake will be kept as part of Chandigarh and will thus go to Punjab.

It had always be maintained by Smt. Indira Gandhi that when Chandigarh is to go to Punjab, some Hindi-speaking territories in Punjab will go to Haryana. A Commission will be constituted to determine the specific Hindi-speaking territories in Punjab which should go to Haryana, in lieu of Chandigarh.

The principle of contiguity and linguistic affinity with a village as a unit will be the basis of such determination. The Commission will be required to give its findings by 31st December 1985 and these will be binding on both sides. The work of the Commission will be limited to this aspect and will be distinct from the general boundary claims which the other Commission referred to in para 7.4 will handle.

The actual transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab and areas in lieu thereof to Haryana will take place simultaneously on 26th January, 1986.

There are other claims and counter-claims for readjustment of the existing Punjab-Haryana boundaries. The Government will appoint another commission to consider these matters and give its findings. Such findings will be binding on the concerned States. The terms of reference will be based on a village as a unit, linguistic affinity and contiguity.

Centre-State relations:

Shromani Akali Dal states that the Anadpur Sahib Resolution is entirely within the framework of the Indian Constitution that it attempts to define the concept of Centre-State relations in a manner which may bring out the true federal characteristics of our Unitary Constitution; and that the purpose of the Resolution is to provide greater autonomy to the State with a view to strenghtening the unity and integrity of the country, since unity in diversity forms the corner-stone of our national entity.

In view of the above, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in so far as it deals with Centre-State relations stands referred to the Sarkaria Commission.

Sharing of River Waters:

The farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will continue to get water not less than what they are using from the Ravi-Beas system as on 1.7.1985. Waters used for consumptive purposes will also remain unaffected. Quantum of usage claimed shall be varified by the Tribunal referred in para 9.2 below.

The claims of Punjab and Haryana regarding the shares in their remaining waters will be referred for adjudication to a Tribunal to be presided over by a Supreme Court Judge. The decision of this Tribunal will be rendered within six months and would be binding on both parties. All legal and constitutional steps required in this respect be taken expeditiously.

The construction of the SYL canal shall continue. The canal shall be completed by 15th August, 1986.

Representation of Minorities:

Existing instructions regarding protection of interests of minorities will be recirculated to the State Chief Ministers (P.M. will write to all Chief Ministers).

Promotion of Punjabi Language:

The Central Government may take some steps for the promotion of the Punjabi language.

This settlement brings to an end a period of confrontation and ushers in an era of amity, goodwill and cooperation, which will promote and strengthen the unity and integrity of India.

Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India

Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, President, Shromani Akali dal.

Dated, the 24 July, 1985

Source: Statesman, 25-7-1985.

Notes: 1. SYL = Sutlej-Yammuna Link Canal

2. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution, first adopted on October 16-17, 1973, and revised on October 28-29, 1978, is, inter alia, reproduced in the pro-Sikh publication: Army Action in Punjab. Prelude and Aftermath. New Delhi: Samata Era Publication, 1984.

Notes

1. see Citha D.Maaß: The 1984 Lok Shaba Elections: Verdict for India's Federal Unity, in: ASIEN, 15, April 1985, pp.15-32.
2. see India Today, 15.7.1985, pp.40-42.
3. SGPC = Shiromani Gurudwara Parbhandhak Committee, which manages the major gurudwaras in Punjab and exercises financial control over the Akali Dal.
4. Times of India, 12.4.1985. The AISSF had been banned on March 19, 1984, after a series of killings for which AISSF members were held responsible.
5. see India Today, 31.8.1985, pp.24-25.
6. for the enforced restoration of the Golden Temple in August 1984, supervised by Baba Santa Singh, head of the Nihangs (a rival Sikh sect) see India Today, 15.8.1984, pp.58-64.
7. for details see India Today, 31.5.1985, pp.22-37.
8. This wide-spread resentment was caused by four reasons: lack of job opportunities for the large number of educated young Sikhs; loss of a privileged status in the Indian society and a relative decrease of Sikh recruitment for the Indian army; revival of religious fundamentalism; hurt religious pride due to the Operation Bluestar in July 1984.
9. Indira Gandhi had already agreed upon this in 1966 but had failed to implement it.
10. for a short summary see India Today, 15.8.1985, pp.26-27.
11. *ibid.*, p.20.
12. for the text of the Mathew Commission report see Times of India, 26.1.1986.
13. India Today, 15.2.1986, p.32.
14. see India Today, 31.5.1986, p.10.
15. for details see India Today, 31.5.1986, pp.12-13. Compared with Operation Bluestar, the police operation on April 30, 1986, was only of a modest scale. Nevertheless, the very fact that police and para-military troops again forced their entrance into the Sikh sanctuary undermined Barnal's political reputation among radical Sikh politicians and orthodox segments of the population.
16. India Today, 30.6.1985, p.13.
17. for further details see Citha D. Maaß, Die Krise im Punjab - Zerreißprobe für die Indische Union? in: Jahrbuch Dritte Welt, Bd. 3, München 1985, pp.138-152.
18. India Today, 31.7.1987, pp.8-19.
19. *ibid.*, p.16.
20. see Khushwant Singh, A history of the Sikhs. Delhi et al., 1984 (5th impression), Vol. I, p.132ff.

In addition the following periodicals were used:

- Archiv der Gegenwart
- Asian Recorder (New Delhi)
- Far Eastern Economic Review
- Summary of World Broadcast (BBC)
- Indian Newspapers: Times of India, Statesman.