

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### Soviet rockets in Punjab

*It is testimony to the particular blinders on Indian political discourse, that no official inquiry has been placed.*

**O**n March 23, Indians were shocked to learn that for the first time in their five-year open war against the state and central government, separatist-terrorists in Punjab used powerful rocket launchers in an attack on a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) outpost in Phagwara. The next day Indian intelligence agencies confirmed that the rocket used was an RPG-7, a sophisticated high-powered rocket made in the Soviet Union.

Fortunately, there were no casualties in the attack on the CRPF outpost where some 60 personnel had been sleeping, but a week later in a second rocket attack, this time in an ambush on a Border Security Force patrol, eight were seriously hurt.

Until now the stock weapon of the separatists demanding an independent Sikh nation of "Khalistan" has been the Chinese-made AK-47, along with some Indian-made automatic rifles. Though two rocket launchers had been recovered during Operation Blue Star in 1984, when Indian security forces stormed the terrorist fortress in the Golden Temple at Amritsar, the March 22 incident was the first time those weapons were actually used in Punjab.

Official circles are "intrigued" over how and where the sophisticated RPG-7s were acquired, according to the United News of India. Well they ought to be. It is a huge escalation of the threat in Punjab just at a time when the government is apparently engaged in a new political initiative to resolve the problem.

More important, Soviet rocket launchers in the Khalistani arsenal are

another reminder that the "nature of the beast" in Punjab—like the truth of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi—does not necessarily conform to the manichean logic of New Delhi's preferred foreign policy postures. (It was certainly not the discovery of a Pakistani or even a CIA hand on the trigger of the gun that murdered Mrs. Gandhi which prompted the government to keep the investigative report of the assassination under wraps.)

The daily *Patriot* jumped to assert that the Russian rocket launchers were given either directly by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency or the "Pakistani handlers of Sikh terrorists," or indirectly by the CIA through the Pakistani conduit to the Afghan rebels, as a "red herring" and to sow confusion. This is the same *Patriot* that, according to the London court records of proceedings involving a KGB defector a few years ago, was founded with East bloc support in 1965 as a media outlet for Soviet lies. Astonishingly, apart from the *Patriot's* predictable eruption, there has as yet been no serious discussion of the Russian rocket launchers in print.

There are many obvious questions: The U.S. has never made a secret of arming the Afghan rebels, so why should it need to issue "red herrings" in the form of Russian rockets? And why would the Soviet Union sell some of its most sophisticated rockets to the CIA to distribute to Afghans who are shooting at Soviet soldiers? Unlike in the West, there are no independent arms dealers or rogue intelligence operations in the Soviet bloc—arms distribution is a matter of gov-

ernment policy. So, how does the Kremlin account for provision of arms to Oliver North for the Contras? How does the Kremlin account for the Soviet rocket launchers in Punjab? Is any official inquiry planned?

Such questions are not even asked—testimony to the particular blinders on Indian political discourse. The implications of the Anglo-American-Soviet Yalta condominium—and the "New Yalta" readjustments under way—is only selectively appreciated here, and that too as a kind of abstraction.

Anglo-American subversion via separatist and fundamentalist movements is perfectly credible, but Soviet promotion of separatist and fundamentalist forces is dismissed out of hand. Yet, blood and soil fundamentalism is what the U.S.S.R. is based on! It is not a nation, as Indians or Americans understand that term, but a collection of ethnic-tribal based "nations" held together by force. The Kremlin and its associated communist movement within India—long entrenched in Punjab—never viewed India any differently.

Thus, in 1983, as the Sikh separatist terror campaign for "Khalistan" was coming to a head, Soviet orientologist B.I. Klyuyev could hail the "new wave of religiousness, quite complex in its social and psychological structure" sweeping India. It was Indira Gandhi who had angrily emphasized the difference of viewpoint in a parliamentary debate on Punjab months before she was killed. Mrs. Gandhi rose to refute an opposition MP who claimed that India was "many nations." In some communist countries and Marxist parlance generally, the word "nationalities" is used, she noted. But in India, she insisted, "there is no question of there being different nationalities. We are all one nation; we are all Indian citizens."