

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Terrorists up the ante in India

The terrorist international is out to destroy the gains made by Rajiv Gandhi's statesmanship.

The murder of a moderate Sikh political leader in India and the break-up of the talks between Tamil leaders and the Sri Lankan government in Thimpu, Bhutan, point to the determination in certain quarters that the Indian subcontinent remain a focus of turmoil and destabilization.

On Aug. 20, weeks after Prime Minister Gandhi and Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, leader of the Sikhs' Akali Dal political party, reached a historic agreement on the Punjab crisis which paved the way for state elections and a restoration of civilian rule in the troubled border state, Longowal was assassinated.

The assassination was a major blow. Although the murder of the moderate Longowal can be expected to sharply alienate mainstream Sikh opinion, the assassination nonetheless leaves a vacuum of leadership in the Sikh community that could prove disastrous, and threatens to undermine the process of restoring normalcy to Punjab altogether.

Sikh terrorist networks safe-housed in Canada and Britain, where they are linked to Iranian fundamentalists, certain Pakistani agents and others, had vowed renewed terrorist activity in Punjab. Two of the assassins were arrested on the spot, and two others believed to have been complicit in the plot are now being stalked. Indian police are investigating claims by one of the assassins that he was financed and directed from Pakistan, and have sealed off the border as a security measure in conjunction with state elections still scheduled for the end of

September.

At the same time, on Aug. 16, talks in Sri Lanka between Tamil political leaders and the Jayewardene government aimed at finding a settlement to the two-year-old ethnic crisis there—talks which had been fostered and assisted by the Indian government—blew up.

Representatives of the militant Tamil separatist groups stalked out of the talks in protest against alleged Sri Lankan security forces killing of civilians. Press reports indicate that in fact a land mine placed by Tamil terrorists had exploded near the army camp at Vavuniya, in Sri Lanka, and in response soldiers rampaged, killing hundreds. Within six hours of the walkout, Tamil guerrilla attacks began in full force, and the fragile ceasefire was definitively buried in a fresh wave of violence.

Prime Minister Gandhi immediately offered to mediate a resumption of the talks, inviting the militant Tamils, based in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, to meet with him and convey their proposals. The militant groups dragged their heels, caucusing instead in Madras and rallying sympathy for their continued intransigence on the issue of a separate state. At least one of the separatist organizations had already declared that it would launch an armed struggle for "Tamil Eelam"—the name for a separate Tamil nation in Sri Lanka.

The so-called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) declared that they would arm Sri Lankan Tamil civilians to prepare for total war to es-

tablish a separate Tamil state in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The "hit and run" tactics employed so far, said LTTE leader A.S. Balasingam in Madras, would be replaced by all-out war.

On Aug. 23 the Indian government moved against the terrorist leaders. The government ordered Mr. Balasingam, and two other terrorist-separatist leaders, to leave the country on the grounds of violation of immigration laws. Balasingam, though born in Sri Lanka, holds a British passport.

In response the Tamil militant groups in conjunction with the state opposition party the DMK, a militant Tamil chauvinist party, organized protest demonstrations throughout Tamil Nadu in an effort to force Prime Minister Gandhi's hand. A strike and rail blockade was declared that paralyzed the state, and had resulted in the arrest of some 3,500 people in Tamil Nadu as of this writing. DMK President Karunanidhi blamed Rajiv Gandhi for the continued violence in Sri Lanka, charging that he had not raised his voice against the alleged army atrocities against Tamil civilians.

In a bid to defuse the situation, Prime Minister Gandhi revoked the deportation order against one of the militants, C.S. Chandrasaran. Chandrasaran, who held a U.S. visa, was sent to New York but refused to request entry there and demanded to be sent back to India. On return, Chandrasaran, head of the so-called Organization for Protection of Tamils from Genocide, declared that only Indian military intervention in Sri Lanka would resolve the crisis.

Rajiv Gandhi has explicitly rejected such intervention, demands for which are nothing but a provocation aimed at keeping India's relations with its South Asian neighbors hostile and unstable.