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Information on operation Blue Star

In June 2015 the *India Times* notes:

“India's most 'infamous' incident Operation Blue Star was a military operation that was ordered by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, to eliminate Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and other Sikh militants who were amassing weapons in the Harmandir Sahib Complex (the Golden Temple) in Amritsar. Bhindranwale's plan was to take control over The Golden Temple” (India Times (5 June 2015) *31 Years Later, Here's How Operation Blue Star Changed The History Of India!*).

A report released in June 2014 by the *Daily Telegraph* states:

“At about 7.30 on the morning of June 6 1984, Operation Blue Star, one of the most extraordinary battles in military history, came to a head when Indian army tanks pounded the Sikh shrine, the Akal Takht, with 105mm high-explosive squash head shells. It stands opposite the centre of the Sikhs' religion, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The complex housing the two had been occupied and fortified by a fundamentalist Sikh preacher, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was demanding the establishment of Khalistan, a Sikh homeland. The assault was the climax of a nine-hour, gruelling battle between the Indian army and Bhindranwale with his heavily armed and well-trained followers. Sikhs in India, and in the West, were outraged by what they saw as the defilement of their holiest place. And that anger remains 30 years later, as I have found in making a documentary for the BBC World Service on the divisive legacy of Operation Blue Star” (Daily Telegraph (6 June 2014) *Operation Blue Star: How an Indian army raid on the Golden Temple ended in disaster*).

BBC News in June 2014 notes:

“The Indian government says 400 people and 87 soldiers were killed during the 1984 military raid to flush out Sikh separatists from the Golden Temple at Amritsar, codenamed Operation Blue Star. But Sikh groups say the number of casualties was much higher and estimate it closer to 1,000” (BBC News (6 June 2014) *India Sikh groups clash at Golden Temple*).

In June 2014 the *Hindustan Times* states:

“The military's 1984 assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar - called Operation Blue Star - was aimed at flushing out militants holed up inside demanding an independent Sikh homeland” (Hindustan Times (2 June 2014) *Operation Blue Star: Khalistan a dream 30 yrs later*).

A document issued in June 2014 by the *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* notes:

“International Educational Development, Inc., the Association of Humanitarian Lawyers and Sikhs for Justice inform the Council that June 2014 marks the 30th anniversary of Indian Army's attack on the holiest Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Code named "Operation Blue Star, the attack resulted in the killing of several thousand unarmed and innocent pilgrims” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2 June 2014) *Written statement submitted by the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (The situation of the Sikh people in India)*).

In March 2012 the *United Kingdom Home Office* issued a report of COI sources which included stating:

“Dr Apurba Kundu observed in his book *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus*, published by Tauris Academic Studies in 1998...Operation Blue Star left many scars. The approximately 1000 army personnel involved in the unexpectedly ferocious fighting endured a very high one-third casualty rate of four officers and 79 men killed, 12 officers and 237 men wounded. The subsequent government White Paper also stated that the militants suffered 493 dead, including Bhindranwale, and 86 injured (figures still much disputed). While the Golden Temple itself (the Hari Mandir, or Temple of God) sustained little damage as army forces had been under strict orders to avoid damaging it, the Akal Takht was almost destroyed and the precious Golden Temple library set on fire. Both sides are reported to have committed atrocities during the battle, especially on the unarmed civilians caught in the middle of the fight for the Golden Temple hostel complex...Europa World Online recorded, "In October 1984 Indira Gandhi was assassinated by militant Sikh members of her personal guard [in apparent retaliation for ordering an attack on the Golden Temple]. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, was immediately sworn in as Prime Minister... Widespread communal violence erupted throughout India, resulting in more than 2,000 deaths..." (United Kingdom Home Office (30 March 2012) *India Country of Origin Information (COI) Report March 2012*, pp.102-103).

In December 2009 the *Refugee Review Tribunal of the Government of Australia* issued a compilation of COI sources which includes stating:

“Operation Bluestar refers to the military operation carried out at the Golden Temple in Amritsar on 4 June 1984, under the direction of then Prime Minister Indira Ghandi. In a 2002 essay, Meredith Weiss provides the following account of Operation Bluestar: On 4 June 1984, in an operation codenamed Bluestar, 2,000 army troops moved in to arrest Akali leaders inside the temple. This action incited thousands of Sikh peasants to converge upon Amritsar. The military dispersed the crowds and launched a full-scale attack on the Temple, taking control of it. In the process, an estimated 5,000 civilians, including Bhindranwale, and 700 officers were killed. The army also attacked forty other gurdwaras where Sikh activists were allegedly hiding. The temple sustained substantial damage in the attack, including to manuscripts and other artifacts. In the wake of the attack, "The entire Sikh community was outraged, not so much by the death of Bhindranwale but by the all-out assault on their premier shrine by the Indian army" (Deol 2000:108). A number of Sikh troops deserted the military and tried to march toward Amritsar, several Sikhs resigned from Parliament or other government posts, and Sikh intellectuals returned government-given honors in protest. The government rebuilt the shrine, but their doing so was popularly seen as the government's again taking control and attempting to humiliate the Sikhs” (Refugee Review Tribunal of the Government of Australia (17 December 2009) *Country Advice IND35817 - India – Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) – Khalistan movement*).

A report issued in October 2006 by *Ensaaf* states:

“On June 4, 1984, the day after the anniversary of the martyrdom of the fifth Sikh Guru, the Indian Army launched Operation Bluestar, allegedly to flush out Sant Bhindrawale and his “terrorists.” According to an eyewitness, the Army launched its attack without warning...” (Ensaaf (October 2006) *Twenty Years Of Impunity, The November 1984 Pogroms of Sikhs in India*, p.14).

A report issued in 1991 by *Asia Watch* points out that:

“In the early 1980s, a movement by Sikh leaders for greater autonomy turned violent when some militant Sikhs embarked on a campaign of terror, murdering elected officials, civil servants, and Hindu and Sikh civilians. Nineteen-eighty-four marked a turning point in the conflict. In June of that year, the Indian army stormed the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Sikhs' holiest shrine, which had been turned into an armed fortress by the militants. Thousands were killed, most of them civilians. Outraged by the assault, some separatist Sikhs demanded an independent state of Khalistan...On October 31, 1984, Sikh bodyguards assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and in the aftermath of her death, mobs slaughtered thousands of Sikhs in New Delhi and other cities across northern India. The connivance of local officials in the massacres and the failure of the authorities to prosecute the killers alienated many ordinary Sikhs who had not previously supported the separatist cause” (Asia Watch (1991) *Punjab in Crisis*, p.1).

An undated document issued by *Encyclopædia Britannica* states that:

“By the early 1980s some Sikhs were calling for more than mere separate provincial statehood, instead demanding nothing less than a nation-state of their own, an autonomous Sikh Khalistan, or “Land of the Pure.” More moderate Sikh leaders, such as Harchand Singh Longowal, who was elected president of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Supreme Akali Party) in 1980, unsuccessfully attempted to avert civil war by seeking to negotiate a settlement of Sikh demands with New Delhi's Congress Party leaders. Extremists like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale won the support of many younger devout Sikhs around Amritsar, who were armed with automatic weapons and launched a violent movement for Khalistan that took control of the Sikhs' holiest shrine, the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), and its sacred precincts in Amritsar. Gandhi and her government seemed unable to do anything to stop the growing number of politically motivated killings and acts of terror in Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi. She knew that nationwide elections would have to be called by January 1985, and the overwhelming Hindu majority of India's electorate would likely judge her government too weak to be retained. In 1984, therefore, Gandhi gave her generals permission to launch their “Operation Bluestar,” as it was code-named, against the Golden Temple. Early in June, after a night of artillery fire, they moved tanks and troops into the temple precincts, and for four days and nights the battle raged, until Bhindranwale and most of his snipers were dead. Hundreds of innocent people were caught in the cross fire, and at least 100 soldiers died. Khalistan had its first martyrs. In retaliation, on October 31, 1984, Gandhi herself was shot dead by two of her own Sikh guards inside her garden in New Delhi. The next day mobs of bloodthirsty thugs began to roam the Sikh neighbourhoods in and around Delhi, where they set fire to cars, homes, and businesses and launched a massacre of Sikhs that left thousands dead and many more thousands wounded and homeless in the worst religious riot since partition (Encyclopædia Britannica (Undated) *Sikh separatism*).

A series of newspaper links from Sikhmuseum.com are listed at:

<http://www.sikhmuseum.com/bluestar/newsreports/index.html>

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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