

Death toll at Sikh temple may be as high as 2,000

AMRITSAR, India (AP) — The death toll in last week's attack on the Golden Temple complex could be as high as 2,000 because many people are unaccounted for and more bodies are being pulled from the holy lake surrounding the shrine, officials say.

Authorities have already cremated the bodies of 825 Sikh militants killed in last week's two-day assault on the sprawling seventeenth-century temple complex, said police and civilian officials, who spoke on condition they not be identified.

A garbage truck carrying 38 bodies was seen in Amritsar on Sunday night.

Officially, the army has reported that as many as 400 Sikh extremists died in the temple siege. Maj.-Gen. R. K. Gaur said yesterday that 90 soldiers had been killed.

But sources here said the conservative estimate is at least 1,000 deaths, including 200 troops. And they said the figure could reach 2,000 once the tally is complete.

Most died on Tuesday and Wednesday when 3,000 troops backed by tanks and rockets attacked the fortified compound to flush out Sikh extremists blamed for more than 400 murders this year.

Waves of commandos, including frogmen assigned to dive in the temple lake, were sent into the compound first but all were killed, military and police sources said. It took three charges before the troops actually entered the temple grounds, they said.

Many surviving troops have had limbs amputated because they were wounded by mines and militants firing from manholes, they said.

Meanwhile, hundreds of outraged Sikh soldiers deserted in eastern and western India to protest against the assault on the Golden Temple. Reports indicated 26 extremists were killed and 355 arrested yesterday as they headed for Amritsar and three soldiers died in a clash with mutinous Sikh troops in southwestern India.

The Press Trust of India said the extremists were slain when government troops tried to halt 48 army and civilian vehicles heading to Amritsar from the eastern city of Ramgarh.

The agency reported that nine truckloads of well-armed Sikh extremists crossed from Maharashtra into neighboring Gujarat state Monday. It said some of the Sikhs later surrendered but did not say if

any soldiers were among the extremists.

In London, thousands of Sikhs rallied and burned effigies of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, shouting "Gandhi will pay" for the assault. Officials said more than 20,000 demonstrators marched on the Indian High Commission but were turned away by hundreds of police.

In Amritsar, Indian President Zail Singh, a Sikh, wept when he toured the temple complex on Friday and saw the devastated build-

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ings and grounds littered with corpses, witnesses said.

More paramilitary troops are being deployed in Amritsar where the situation remains tense. Explosions and gunfire were heard from the temple complex yesterday morning.

Police sources said at least seven people have died of starvation in Amritsar, which has been curfew-bound since June 3. Many more are sick from drinking contaminated water. Water and power to the central area was still cut off yesterday.

All letters from soldiers are being read and any mention of army casualties censored by officers. A roll of film taken by an Associated Press reporter in Amritsar was confiscated yesterday by army officials.

In the military's continuing operation to flush out Sikh terrorists and their arms caches, 15 suspected extremists have been killed since Sunday night in Faridkot and Ferozepur, six in Bhatinda and three in Amritsar district, the officials said.

Sikh extremists have killed 32 Hindus in six separate attacks across the state since Saturday, they said.

At least six armored personnel carriers and two tanks were spotted Monday on the highway from Amritsar to Jullundur city in central Punjab.

In Jullundur, about 2,500 Sikhs, including women and children, demonstrated against the army invasion of the Golden Temple.

"We will face bullets. We will fight for Khalistan," they chanted, referring to the name proposed for an independent Sikh nation.