

Sikhs rally in protest as President of India makes plea for unity

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NEW DELHI (Reuter) — Indian President Zail Singh made an impassioned appeal for national unity last night after thousands of Sikhs joined nation-wide prayers of protest against the army's storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

The President, a Sikh, said the Government sent in the security forces reluctantly because extremists had taken over Sikh shrines. Speaking on radio and television, he appealed to Indians to maintain the country's unity and integrity.

"My agony is all the more because I am the representative of the whole nation," he said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, moving to curb Sikh militants abroad, has written to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, a spokesman for the Ministry of External Affairs said.

No details were disclosed but Mrs. Gandhi appealed to foreign governments, in an interview for Australian and Canadian radio, not to aid Sikh separatists in their countries.

An employee of Canada's Department of External Affairs said in an interview that the Government has not heard from Mrs. Gandhi.

"We have not received any letter, Telex or any communication," said Pierre Alarie, on weekend duty for the department since Friday night.

Mr. Alarie said if there is any direct communication between the Indian leader and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, it will probably be made public today.

Sikhs have staged angry protests in several capitals since the army action on June 6, when about 1,000 people were killed. Last week, Sikhs abroad proclaimed a Sikh republic of Khalistan with headquarters in London.

Responding to a call by the Akali Dal, the main Sikh party, Sikhs held prayers in temples throughout India to commemorate those who died at the Golden Temple.

Security forces were on the alert

in several areas and armed police cordoned off the main Sikh shrines in New Delhi.

No incidents were reported but the army arrested 90 suspected extremists and found arms and ammunition in raids in troubled Punjab state at the weekend, state-run radio said.

In her interview, which was also carried by the British Broadcasting Corp., Mrs. Gandhi defended the decision to send in the army. She said repeated attempts were made to reach agreement with the Akali Dal before force was used.

The army "was not used against the Golden Temple. It was not used against the Sikh religion. It was used to take out terrorists who had been indulging in murder, arson and looting," she said.

More than 900 Sikhs and 84 soldiers were reported killed.

Mrs. Gandhi said she believed reports that foreign powers were involved in the unrest, although she did not know which powers.

A senior Indian official has said Sikh extremists received military training in Pakistan.