

Terror threatens economic gains of Indian state

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AMRITSAR, India — There have never been more than about 500 of them, the authorities say. Most are in their late teens or early 20s. Most are religious militants. Some are ordinary criminals who have simply seized an opportunity. A few are old-line Maoist revolutionaries whose main movement in India was crushed more than a decade ago.

But as compact as it is, this tiny band of Sikh terrorists has sown such fear and caused such instability in the state of Punjab in the past six weeks that it threatens to halt or even reverse the economic progress that has made Punjab a model of Third World industrial development.

Operating typically in pairs on motorcycles at night, the terrorists seek out Government officials,

policemen, editors, Hindu leaders, even other Sikhs, and shoot them. Then they fade away into the villages and towns, finding sanctuary in one of the hundreds of Sikh temples that dot the flat, green Punjabi landscape.

The Government does not follow them into the temples for fear of outraging the religious sensibilities of Sikhs at large. Few villagers have dared to turn them in. To some Sikh farmers they have become legend: holy warriors, divinely protected from capture, fighting for a centuries-old vision of Sikh identity, integrity and independence.

At the same time, many more of India's 14 million Sikhs worry about the damage that the terrorist campaign may be doing to their standing with the Hindu majority, and to their reputation as India's most enterprising group.

"The Sikhs are feeling damned hurt," said Bhagwant Singh Ahuja, an Amritsar textile manufacturer and a Sikh, "because the majority community is condemning all the Sikhs. But it's just a handful of people creating the situation."

Many Sikhs say they are fed up with it all, and in the past two weeks the Government has cracked down on the terrorists again. It has outlawed a Sikh student organization believed to be behind much of the terrorism, arresting many of its members and driving others underground.

But despite Government assurances that the situation is being brought under control, the killings continue.

More than 100 people have been killed since the terror reached a peak in mid-February, and more than 300 since 1982.

As the seat of India's Green

Revolution, Punjab has become this country's great economic success story. The Green Revolution, carried out almost exclusively by Sikh farmers, made the state India's wealthiest, and at the same time its main granary. There is little sign that this agricultural success is about to be undone.

However, Punjab's agriculturally induced prosperity has made it an increasingly commercial and industrial state as well, and it is this second stage of development that is being threatened by the violence.

The state's economy is estimated to have lost \$1.2-billion in the fiscal year that ended March 31 as a result of the state's instability.

More fundamentally, however, the terror is choking off the flow of outside capital on which Punjabi industrial development depends. Hindu entrepreneurs, afraid of

becoming targets, are fleeing the state. The development of a high-technology industrial park 40 kilometres from Amritsar has been stopped.

"It is the beginning of the disintegration of Punjab's economy," columnist Prem Shankar Jha wrote in *The Times of India* recently.

There is a deep irony in this, because one of the grievances underlying the agitation involves Sikh fears that Punjabi economic growth is being hobbled by Government policy.

Many Sikhs believe the Government is discriminating against them economically by manipulating wheat prices and discouraging the establishment of new industry in Punjab so that poorer areas of the country can have it.

Some Sikhs are particularly bitter because of their belief that the Government-owned banks in

Punjab are investing Punjabis' savings in industry elsewhere in the country.

"That's the sweat of the soil they're sending out of the state," Mr. Ahuja said.

All of this has been overshadowed by the terrorist activity. So have the original demands for greater Punjabi political autonomy that set off the agitation by the Akali Dal, an out-of-power Sikh political party, in August, 1982.

The Sikh movement, which originally used Gandhian tactics of non-violence, was gradually usurped by the more radical elements identified with Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a fundamentalist Sikh holy man who preached violence from his sanctuary in Amritsar's Golden Temple. Associated with Mr. Bhindranwale is the banned All-India Sikh Students Federation.