

# Code: Operation Blue Star

An Episode That Triggered A Series Of Cataclysmic Events In India



## 1 What is Operation Blue Star?

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**Operation Blue Star** Overview  
1 June 1984-10 June 1984

It was a military operation launched by the former PM of India, Indira Gandhi, and carried out by the Indian security forces between June 1-10, 1984, to neutralise Sikh militants from different Sikh temples across Punjab. The main attack was carried out on the Golden Temple of Amritsar, from where Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, leader of the orthodox Sikh cultural and educational organisation Damdami Taksal, and his followers were operating.



## 3 How did the temples come into the picture?

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Many Sikh extremists like Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale were taking advantage of this strained atmosphere. With his supporters, all armed with automatic weapons, Bhindranwale went to the Golden Temple, after being invited by Harchand Singh Longowal, the then president of Shiromani Akali Dal, to take up residence in the temple. He made the guest house, Guru Nanak Niwas, his headquarters from where he gave interviews to media, taught his followers etc. Soon, the authorities started noticing that religious places in Punjab were giving shelter to extremists.



## 6 How did it change the political scenario of the country?

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As the operation targeted various Sikh temples including the religion's holiest site, the Golden Temple, it was criticised by Sikhs who saw it as an attack on their religion. There were cases of several Sikhs resigning from their posts in the government as well as returning awards conferred on them. The biggest aftermath was the assassination of PM Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, by her two Sikh bodyguards. Her death ensued an outcry, which led to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. In these riots, according to the Indian government, 2,800 Sikhs were killed in the capital and 3,350 in the rest of the country. However, independent sources estimate that around 8,000-17,000 people lost their lives. Strides were made to restore a semblance of normalcy with the signing of the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord in 1985, in which the central government agreed to some of the demands presented, but the cycle of violence in Punjab continued for nearly a decade.



## 2 Why was there so much tension between the Sikhs and government?

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At the time, India's Sikh population claimed to suffer from inequality. This was the time when the demand for a separate Sikh state 'Khalistan' was gaining momentum. The roots of the same dates back to British colonial policies that sought to divide Sikhs and Hindus. The British army recruited many Sikhs to use them against Hindu rulers that rebelled against the British Raj. After independence, tensions between Punjab and the Centre escalated further.



The Punjabi Sikh political party, Shiromani Akali Dal, presented the government with Anandpur Sahib Resolution, a list of demands like recognition of Sikhism as a separate religion, creation of a sep-

arate statehood etc.; but it was rejected by the then PM, Indira Gandhi. These growing tensions led to many political protests, including a march led by LK Advani and AB Vajpayee of BJP against the lack of government action. With nationwide elections coming up, Indira Gandhi knew she had to control the mounting tensions in the state to gain electoral popularity.

## 4 What exactly happened during Operation Blue Star?

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The operation started on June 1, 1984, when the security forces, on the order of Indira Gandhi, opened fired on various buildings with the aim of killing militants. Army units surrounded the Golden Temple on June 3, and a 36-hour curfew was imposed with all communication, electricity, water, and travel being suspended. The army attacked the militants with tanks and artillery, who also responded with Chinese-made grenade launchers, anti-tank, and machine-gun fires. The fight continued from both sides, but by the morning of June 7, the armed forces gained full control of the Golden Temple.



## 5 What were the casualties on both sides?

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As per the official figures, 83 army men died and 249 were injured. On the other hand, there were 1592 militant deaths and 554 civilian casualties. The high number of civilian casualties have been pinned to the army for allowing pilgrims to enter the temple on June 3, 1984, but not letting them leave after 22:00. According to the official stance of the army, warnings were made for the evacuation, but in April 2017, the Amritsar sessions judge Gurbir Singh said there was no evidence to support the claim.

