

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please give me relevant information about Dera Sacha Sauda and practices followed by its adherents. Please also give me any information about its founder.**
- 2. Is there any information about incidents of social unrest involving Dera Sacha Sauda in May 2007, particularly in the town of Jalandhar?**
- 3. Is there information about clashes between Dera Sacha Sauda and the Sikh Youth Federation?**
- 4. Is there information about the authorities in Punjab failing to protect adherents of Dera Sacha Sauda from attacks or about those authorities taking volunteers of the organisation into custody and torturing them?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please give me relevant information about Dera Sacha Sauda and practices followed by its adherents. Please also give me any information about its founder.**

Previous Research Responses

Research & Information Services provided extensive information on the Dera Sacha Sauda sect in seven RRT research responses between October 2007 and December 2008; information provided below is sourced largely from these responses, along with a 2009 update on the situation for the sect and its current leader, Gurmeet Ram Rahim (or Raheem) Singh. The research responses are summarised below:

- Question 1 of *Research Response IND34112*, of 22 December 2008, provides information on the history of the Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS), the beliefs and practices of

adherents, the relationship between the DSS and Sikhs, and the number of DSS adherents. Question 2 addresses issues between the DSS and other groups; Question 3 provides information on state protection for DSS members in Punjab; and Question 4 investigates the possibility of internal relocation for DSS followers (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34112*, 22 December – Attachment 1).

- Question 1 of *Research Response IND34033*, of 4 December 2008, provides information on a February 2008 bomb blast targeting the DSS and its leader Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in Haryana. Question 2 of the response addresses the issue of state protection and the attitude of the authorities in Punjab toward the DSS, and relations between the DSS and the Sikh community (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34033*, 4 December – Attachment 2).
- Question 1 of *Research Response IND33842*, of 31 October 2008, provides information on whether it is possible to be a DSS follower and a Sikh at the same time; Question 3 addresses links between the DSS and the Congress Party; and Questions 5 and 6 provide information on government and police attitudes to the DSS, respectively (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33842*, 31 October – Attachment 3).
- Question 3 of *Research Response IND33422*, of 24 June 2008, reports on clashes between the various Akali groups and DSS members in Punjab, while Question 4 provides information of state protection and corruption in Punjab (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33422*, 24 June – Attachment 4).
- Question 1 of *Research Response IND33077*, of 28 March 2008, provides information on the history and practices of the Dera Sacha Sauda, and the criminal accusations and charges leveled at the DSS and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. Question 2 provides reports on the risk that DSS members may suffer harm at the hands of various Sikh groups in Punjab and Haryana, including extensive reportage on the May-July 2007 violence; this question also addresses the role of politics and caste conflict in relations between the DSS, Sikh groups, and political parties in Punjab. Question 3 provides information on state protection for DSS members in Punjab, including the response of police to the May 2007 outbreak of violence, and incidents of violence between police and DSS members (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33077*, 28 March – Attachment 5).
- Question 1 of *Research Response IND32740*, of 16 January 2008, provides background information on Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, and Question 2 addresses the alleged imitation of a Sikh guru by the DSS leader which was the trigger for the May-July 2007 violence. Question 3 provides information on alleged police harassment and arrests of DSS followers in the wake of the 2007 unrest; Question 5 on police charges and prosecutions against Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh; and Question 6 on alleged Sikh violence towards DSS members. Question 7 provides general information on the Punjab police, and on allegations that they are responsible for human rights violations, and Question 9 addresses the issue of internal relocation for DSS followers (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND32740*, 16 January – Attachment 6).

- Question 1 of *Research Response IND32408*, of 9 October 2007, provides information on the violence between DSS members and Sikh groups in Punjab and Haryana in May-July 2007 (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32408*, 9 October – Attachment 7).

Background on the Dera Sacha Sauda

RRT Research Response IND32408 of 9 October 2007 contains information on the Dera Sacha Sauda sourced from a report published in *Himal South Asian* magazine in October 2007, which provides a basic summary of the organisation:

The Dera Sacha Sauda came into existence in 1948 at Sirsa, in present-day Haryana, then part of the undivided state of Punjab within India. The organisation was founded by Shehenshahji Mastana, a pious Sikh leader from Balochistan, with an eye to social reform and spiritual purification – among the Sikhs in particular, but also others in general. The organisation takes its name, sacha sauda, meaning ‘true business’, from the place where a 12-year-old Guru Nanak was believed to have fed the poor, with money given to him by his father to do business. Indeed, with a charter to include all religions in the new faith, the Dera has emphasised humility, meditation and social work. Other prominent reform deras of pre-Independence India were those of Baba Prem Singh and Peer Buddhu Shah, both in Punjab, but Dera Sacha Sauda is by far the most prominent.

There are two types of reform deras in Sikhism. The first exclusively follows the tenets of the Sikh faith, and bestows its gurus with supreme power. These deras are popularly known as being part of the Nihang group. The second type does not restrict itself to Sikhism. While neither condemning nor supporting Sikhism, this second type claims to follow the positive aspects of every religion, including Sikhism. Dera Sacha Sauda falls into this latter category, as a social reformatory ‘faith’ with its own set of guidelines. The immense popularity of Dera Sacha Sauda, which claims to have 15 million followers, is a direct result of its active reform work over the past half-century (Alig, A. & Anwar, A. 2007, ‘Embers of a Sikh fire’, *Himal South Asian*, October

http://www.himalmag.com/2007/october_november/embers_of_a_sikh_fire.html – Accessed 9 October 2007 – Attachment 8; RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32408*, 9 October – Attachment 7).

The abovementioned report from *Himal South Asia* also provides information on the recent activities of the DSS under Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh:

The Dera Sacha Sauda purports to accept no donations, but owns 700 acres of donated farming land in Punjab and Haryana, from which the bulk of the organisation’s income is drawn. (The group’s income has come under regular suspicion in recent years for Gurmeet Singh’s propensity to drive around in luxury cars.) The Dera’s physical presence goes far beyond these two states, however, and includes 36 local and urban branches in eleven states across India. In tune with its mandate, the organisation’s main outreach focus is on social work. In 1994, the Dera opened a 175-bed hospital at Gurusar Modia, in Rajasthan. In 2004, it also opened a girls’ school in Gurusar Modia. The organisation has been active in responding to disasters, such as those that have taken place in the tribal areas of Chhattisgarh state. The Dera also has a number of world records under its belt, for having organised massive blood-donation drives (Alig, A. & Anwar, A. 2007, ‘Embers of a Sikh fire’, *Himal South Asian*, October http://www.himalmag.com/2007/october_november/embers_of_a_sikh_fire.html – Accessed 9 October 2007 – Attachment 8).

Conflicting information was located regarding the nominal religious affiliations of DSS members, with different sources claiming that Sikhs or Hindus make up the majority of Dera Sacha Sauda’s followers:

- An article published by *BBC News* on 18 May 2007 states the followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda “are drawn mainly from low caste Hindus”, but that “they also include Sikhs, Muslims and Christians” (Singh, J. 2007, ‘What is behind Sikh protests?’, *BBC News*, 18 May http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6670569.stm – Accessed 6 March 2008 – Attachment 9).
- An article published by *Himal South Asian* in October 2007 states of the Dera Sacha Sauda that “its base of followers, though mostly Sikh, is also Hindu and Muslim” (Alig, A. & Anwar, A. 2007, ‘Embers of a Sikh fire’, *Himal South Asian*, October http://www.himalmag.com/2007/october_november/embers_of_a_sikh_fire.html – Accessed 9 October 2007 – Attachment 8).

Sources cited in *Research Response IND34112* provide varied estimates regarding the number of Dera Sacha Sauda followers in India (commonly referred to as “premis”), ranging from four hundred thousand to thirty million:

- An article published on the WebIndia123.com website on 4 June 2007 reports that the Dera Sacha Sauda had claimed in a petition to the Indian Supreme Court that it had around thirty million followers (‘Supreme Court declines to hear Dera Sacha Sauda petition’ 2007, WebIndia123.com website, 4 June http://news.webindia123.com/news/ar_showdetails.asp?id=706040159&cat=&n_date=20070604 – Accessed 17 December 2008 – Attachment 12).
- An article published by the *Economist* in July 2007 estimated that the Dera Sacha Sauda had around 400,000 followers (‘Dangerous tensions in Punjab’ 2007, *The Economist*, 5 July – Attachment 13).
- An article published in *Himal South Asian* in October 2007 stated that the Dera Sacha Sauda “claims to have 15 million followers” (Alig, A. & Anwar, A. 2007, ‘Embers of a Sikh fire’, *Himal South Asian*, October http://www.himalmag.com/2007/october_november/embers_of_a_sikh_fire.html – Accessed 9 October 2007 – Attachment 8)
- An article published on the indianexpress.com website on 25 June 2008 refers to a more recent statement by a Dera spokesperson, who said that there are 2.25 crore (or 22,500,000) followers “who are registered with the Dera for meditation” (Gopal, N. 2008, ‘Its chief at the centre of a row, Dera Sacha Sauda spreads its wings’ indianexpress.com website, 25 June <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/its-chief-at-the-centre-of-a-row-dera-sacha-sauda-spreads-its-wings/327145/0> – Accessed 8 December 2008 – Attachment 14).

Question 5 of *Research Response IND32740* refers to a variety of sources which provide information on the details and progress of legal proceedings against the Dera Sacha Sauda and Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, including an article published by *The Times of India* on 18 November 2007, which indicated that Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh had been interrogated by police at the Dera headquarters in Sirsa in December 2007 (‘Dera Chief interrogated by Punjab Police team’ 2007, *The Press Trust of India Limited*, 8 December – Attachment 11; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND32740*, 16 January – Attachment 6).

An article published in the *Economic Times* indicates that many Sikhs may perceive the Dera, which has a living Guru, to be a non-Sikh institution, reporting a statement made by the chief of the Sikh religious body the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC):

“The definition of a Sikh according to the Sikh Gurudwara Act is, “A person is a Sikh if he believes in 10 Gurus and Shri Guru Granth Sahib.” So we cannot count a person who follows other sects like Deras, Namdharis, Radhasowamis or Nirankaris as a Sikh” (Thampi, P.S. 2008, ‘Simmering discontent: Sikhs in Punjab are fighting many wars’, 8 March http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/The_Big_Story/Simmering_discontent_Sikhs_in_Punjab_are_fighting_many_wars/articleshow/2846479.cms – Accessed 10 March 2008 – Attachment 15).

An April 2009 article from the *Hindustan Times* claims that the political support of the Dera Sacha Sauda in Punjab may be crucial to the mainstream parties in the May 2009 Lok Sabha election. The DSS reportedly supported Congress in the 2007 State Assembly election, and this report claims that DSS “followers have been keeping a grudge against the SAD-BJP government, especially [Shiromani Akali Dal president] Sukhbir Badal who is seen as spearheading a campaign against them”:

Dera Sacha Sauda extended its support to the Congress in the 2007 Assembly election. The Congress’ showing improved and it won 18 seats with the Dera’s help. The group has again come to haunt the ruling Akali Dal.

True that the Dera has run into trouble since that time. The Dera chief, Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh is caught in a controversy and is facing a CBI probe. But, still it still remains a major factor that could influence the poll outcome in the state.

...In 2007, the Akalis lost a majority of seats in the Malwa region, considered as its traditional stronghold. The shocker was due to Dera followers voting en-masse for the Congress. The Akalis haven’t forgotten or forgiven the Dera even as the region prepares for the May 7 ballot.

The Akalis are also a worried lot. Even SAD president and Punjab’s deputy CM Sukhbir Badal (47), who was perceived to be spearheading a campaign against the Dera, likes to avoid questions on the issue. “Please don’t ask me this question...it’s between the Dera and SGPC,” he says.

Akali’s worries spring from their running animosity with the Dera, which has been at the receiving end of Sikh bodies after the sect chief allegedly imitated Guru Gobind Singh two years ago. After the controversy, the Dera followers – mostly dalits – were frequently attacked by Sikh groups, and subjected to humiliation and police action.

In Punjab, the followers have been keeping a grudge against the SAD-BJP government, especially Sukhbir Badal who is seen as spearheading a campaign against them.

But the “enraged” followers are unlikely to vote for the ruling party unless the Dera chief himself asks them to do so.

Politicians who are aware of the Dera influence have already started making a beeline at the Dera headquarters in Sirsa. Among those who recently paid a visit to the Dera included former Rajasthan CM Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Haryana minister Randeep Surjewala and CM Om Prakash Chautala’s son Abhay Chautala, besides some Lok Sabha candidates such as Congress nominee for Bathinda Raninder Singh, Sangrur Congress pick Vijay Inder Singla (Tiwari, M. 2009, ‘Silent vote that may tilt Punjab’, *Hindustan Times*, 28 April

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print.aspx?Id=55aa3d62-e093-4100-b7e8-7867842e5c82> – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 31).

Practices followed by adherents

Question 1 of *Research Response IND33077* refers to material regarding the beliefs and practices of the Dera Sacha Sauda; an undated document accessed on the Dera Sacha Sauda website in January 2008 provides the following summary:

The reciting of God's words (divulged by the perfect saint i.e. Sant Satguru) & obtaining salvation in return is the True Business or 'Sacha Sauda'. Sacha Sauda Ashram Sirsa is an institution for spiritual emancipation and is not a new sect or religion. It aims at the union of soul with its creator, the Almighty. The organisation is altogether unique since no gifts, alms or donations in cash or kind are accepted and has more than 20 million followers. The practical method of meditation is taught without any obligation for attaining salvation during this human life ('What is Dera Sacha Sauda?' (undated), Dera Sacha Sauda website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/index.html> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 16; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33077*, 28 March – Attachment 5).

A document located on the Dera Sacha Sauda website provides a list of 47 principles laid down by the current Guru on 29 April 2007, which Dera followers take an oath to observe. These principles include non-violence, meditation, hard work, vegetarianism, charity, abstinence from alcohol, and the rejection of usury, the dowry system, and discrimination on the basis of caste ('Principles of Dera Sacha Sauda' (undated), Dera Sacha Sauda website <http://derasachasauda.in/principles.html> – Accessed 20 March 2008 – Attachment 17; see also 'Principles of Dera Sacha Sauda' (undated), Truth and Myth website, <http://www.truthandmyth.org/principles.html#> – Accessed 20 March 2008 – Attachment 18).

Shehenshahji Mastana

The website of the Dera Sacha Sauda (<http://www.derasachasauda.in/>) contains biographical information on the Dera Sacha Sauda founder Shehanshah Mastana Ji Maharaj, and on his successor, Pita Shah Satnam Singh Ji Maharaj, who took control of the Dera in 1960 ('Detailed Life Sketch Of Shehanshah Mastana Ji Maharaj' (undated), Dera Sacha Sauda website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/guruji1.html> – Accessed 20 March 2008 – Attachment 19; 'Lifesketch Of His Holiness Param Pita Shah Satnam Singh Ji Maharaj (Second Guru)' (undated), Dera Sacha Sauda website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/guruji2.html> – Accessed 20 March 2008 – Attachment 20).

Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh

A page on the Dera Sacha Sauda website provides biographical information on the current leader of the DSS, Guru Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh ('Life sketch of the present Master Sent Gurmeet Ram Rehem Singh Jib Maharaja The Present Guru' (Undated), Dera Sacha Sauda website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/guruji3.html> – Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 21).

Research carried out for *Research Response IND33077* located an article published on the *Frontline* website in December 2002 which outlines allegations which had been made against Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh, indicating that in 2002, a female member of the organisation sent a letter to the Indian Prime Minister and other national and state authorities, accusing Guru Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh of the sexual exploitation of female *sadhvis*, or disciples, and that in September 2002, the Punjab and Haryana High court referred the matter to the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation. The article also reported that on 24 October, 2002, Ram Chandra Chatrapati, the editor of a Sirsa newspaper which had been publishing extensive

coverage of the accusations against Guru Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh, was shot by two assailants, and later died of his injuries. When captured, the assailants confessed that they were members of the Dera Sacha Sauda, and had been sent to kill Chatrapati by a senior leader of the Dera (Rajalakshmi, T.K. 2002, 'Godman under a cloud', *Frontline*, Volume 19, Issue 26, 21 December 2002-3 January 2003

<http://frontline.in/fl1926/stories/20030103003404000.htm> – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 10; RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33077*, 28 March – Attachment 5).

Since 2002, Dera Sacha Sauda leader Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh has been accused of various criminal acts. In 2007 and 2008, Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was charged with crimes including rape and murder (for information on criminal charges see Rajalakshmi, T.K. 2002, 'Godman under a cloud', *Frontline Magazine*, Vol. 19, Iss. 26, 21 December <http://frontline.in/fl1926/stories/20030103003404000.htm> – Accessed 10 March 2008 – Attachment 10; 'CBI charges Dera chief with murder' 2007, *The Economic Times*, 2 August – Attachment 22; and 'Chandigarh Fortified For Visit Of Dera Sect Chief' 2008, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 3 December – Attachment 23).

Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh has reportedly been the subject of several assassination plots by members and/or affiliates of various Sikh militant groups; in addition to a failed bomb attack against the Guru on 2 February 2008, reports were located of various plans against the Guru being uncovered by police investigations (for information on Sikh militant groups and assassination plots against Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, see 'Khalistan forces trying to stir sectarian violence' 2008, *Economic Times*, 21 March http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/PoliticsNation/Khal%20istan_forces_trying_to_stir_sectarian_violence/articleshow/2%20886425.cms – Accessed 19 June 2008 – Attachment 24; Vinayak, R. 2008, 'The Baba and the Bomb', *India Today*, 7 February http://indiatoday.digitaltoday.in/index.php?issueid=39&id=4335&option=com_content&task=view&assignedid= – Accessed 14 March 2008 – Attachment 25; and 'Police unveils conspiracy to assassinate Sacha Sauda chief' 2008, webindia123.com website, 8 November <http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20081108/1099507.html> – Accessed 8 December 2008 – Attachment 26).

Updated information

Recent reports on the Dera Sacha Sauda and Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh indicate that charges of rape and murder against the DSS leader continue to progress through the Punjab courts. Relevant extracts follow below:

- A 10 January 2009 article from *WebIndia123.com* states that: "Legal proceedings started in the special CBI court here today to record the statements of witnesses against Sirsa Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, facing allegations of murders of dera manager Ranjit Singh and journalist Ram Chander Chhaterpati and sexual exploitation of dera sadhvis" ('Witness deposes in rape case against Dera chief' 2009, *WebIndia123.com*, 10 January <http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20090110/1149388.html> – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 34).
- An 11 January 2009 article in *The Times of India* reports that a key prosecution witness in the murder and rape cases claimed that he "has been warned against giving evidence against Dera head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, failing which, the letter said, his son Gurdas Singh would be eliminated". A Dera spokesman responded that the

letter was fake, and designed to discredit the DSS leader ('Witness in Dera cases alleges threat, police lodge DDR' 2009, *The Times of India*, 11 January – Attachment 32).

- A 14 February 2009 article in *Tehelka* magazine provides an overview of the history of the criminal charges against Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, concluding that “the Dera remains impenetrable and its alleged gory murders, rapes, sexual exploitation, forced castration and illegal stockpiling of arms and ammunition are still uninvestigated” (Dixit, N. 2009, ‘The Clouds Of Falsehood Cannot Forever Hide The Sun Of Truth’, *Tehelka*, Vol. 6, Issue 6, 14 February http://www.tehelka.com/story_main41.asp?filename=Ne140209the_clouds.asp# – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 33).
- On 6 March 2009, the Sikh activist publication the *Panthic Weekly* claimed that “Gurmeet Ram Rahim of Dera Sacha Sauda was granted regular bail by the Punjab and Haryana High Court in the case of disturbing the sentiments of the Sikh community”, and that “[t]he case was ongoing in the court ever since the Haryana Cult leader organised a program in a fashion similar to the original amrit sanchar by Guru Gobind Singh Ji” (‘Gurmeet Ram Rahim Granted Regular Bail, Case Decision Pending’ 2009, *Panthic Weekly*, 6 March <http://www.panthic.org/news/125/ARTICLE/4800/2009-03-06.html#> – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 37).
- On 15 April 2009, *NewKerala.com* reported new charges against the DSS leader: “Almost eighteen years after he went missing under mysterious circumstances in 1991 and his suspected murder allegedly at the behest of Sirsa-based Dera sachha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, the Punjab and Haryana High Court today directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe the disappearance of Dera manager Faqir Chand” (‘CBI to probe missing Dera Sachha Sauda manager’ 2009, *NewKerala.com*, (source: *UNI*), 15 April <http://www.newkerala.com/nkfullnews-1-21808.html> – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 35).
- *WebIndia123.com* reported on 25 April 2009 that: “The evidence of an important witness in the murder case of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati, in which Sachha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh is the prime accused, concluded in the special CBI court here today” (‘Key witness concludes evidence in Dera chief case’ 2009, *WebIndia123.com*, (source: *UNI*), 25 April <http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20090425/1237220.html> – Accessed 26 May 2009 – Attachment 36).

2. Is there any information about incidents of social unrest involving Dera Sacha Sauda in May 2007, particularly in the town of Jalandhar?

Question 2 of the abovementioned *Research Response IND34112* provides information on tensions between the DSS and sections of the Sikh community in Punjab, and particularly on widespread violence between DSS adherents and Sikhs in Punjab and other states of India between May and July 2007 (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34112*, 22 December – Attachment 1)

Sources located for *Research Response IND34112* indicate that the attire and actions of Guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in a newspaper advertisement published in Punjab on 13 May 2007 were broadly interpreted by members of the Sikh community as an impersonation of the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh. In the resulting violent protests called by various Sikh groups across Punjab (and other states) between mid-May and July 2007, one Sikh was killed and many people were injured. Reports also indicate that DSS members were implicated in violence against Sikhs in this period (for information on the alleged impersonation of Guru Gobind Singh and subsequent violent clashes and protests in Punjab and Haryana in mid-2007 see: Baixas, L. 2007, 'The Dera Sacha Sauda Controversy and Beyond', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 6, Vol. 42, No. 40, p. 4059 – Attachment 27; 'Keep the faith' 2007, *The Hindustan Times*, 17 June – Attachment 28; and Alig, A. & Anwar, A. 2007, 'Embers of a Sikh fire', *Himal South Asian*, October http://www.himalmag.com/2007/october_november/embers_of_a_sikh_fire.html – Accessed 9 October 2007 – Attachment 8; for reports on acts of violence by Dera Sacha Sauda members in mid-2007 see: 'Fresh clashes between Sikhs and Dera followers in Punjab' 2007, *Asian News International*, 14 June – Attachment 29; and 'Haryana Sikhs Fired Upon by Cultists, Many Injured' 2007, *The Panthic Weekly*, 25 July <http://www.panthic.org/news/126/ARTICLE/3445/2007-07-25.html> – Accessed 9 October 2007 – Attachment 30).

Jalandhar incidents

A 16 May 2007 report from *The Hindu* names Jalandhar as one of the towns in which "[a]ctivists of Sikh organisations and the Sikh Students' Federation (SSF) organised protests":

Punjab remained tense for the second day on Tuesday as followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda sect and Sikh activists staged protest rallies and clashed with the police in many areas.

Trouble arose in Bathinda on Monday after an advertisement in some newspapers showed the Dera chief in the attire of Guru Gobind Singh, 10th Sikh guru.

On Tuesday, protesters brandished swords, burned effigies and damaged public property in several parts of the State. Markets and commercial establishments downed the shutters in Bathinda after "premis" (followers of the Dera sect) clashed with the police, leaving 20 injured.

...The police used force and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the crowd, which damaged at least a dozen vehicles. Activists of Sikh organisations and the Sikh Students' Federation (SSF) organised protests in Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Moga, Patiala and Mansa districts.

At many places, SSF activists brandished swords and burnt the effigies of the Dera chief, whom they accused of committing blasphemy by imitating Guru Gobind Singh at a recent congregation (Pandher, S. 2007, '20 hurt as clashes spread in Punjab', *The Hindu*, 16 May <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2007/05/16/stories/2007051606780100.htm> – Accessed 22 May 2009 – Attachment 42).

Another report from *The Hindu*, on 19 May 2007, states that the national highway and the railway line between Jalandhar and Amritsar were blocked by "activists of several Sikh organisations", and that "[i]n Jalandhar, the bandh called by several Sikh organisations was peaceful with no incidents of violence reported":

After six days of sectarian violence which left one person killed and over 100 injured, Punjab was limping back to normalcy today with no major incidents of violence reported from anywhere in the state but protests and road blockade continued in some places.

Hundreds of activists of several Sikh organisations blocked the national highway and the railway line connecting Jalandhar and Amritsar for over three hours in Subhanpur area at Kapurthala demanding the arrest of Sirsa-based Dera Sacha Sauda chief Baba Guremeet Ram Rahim Singh.

...In Jalandhar, the bandh called by several Sikh organisations was peaceful with no incidents of violence reported. All commercial establishments and educational institutions remained closed but banks remained open.

At Subhajpur railway crossing in Jalandhar, few protestors tried to stop a train but were prevented following heavy police deployment ('Punjab limping back to normalcy, isolated protests' 2007, *The Hindu*, 19 May <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/000200705191801.htm> – Accessed 10 March 2008 – Attachment 43).

WebIndia123.com also reported on the bandh in Jalandhar on 19 May 2007, claiming that, while “Sikh activists...burnt effigies of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh...no untoward incident was reported from any part of the city”:

A total bandh was today observed in Jalandhar on a call given by various Sikh organisations, supported by the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) in protest against the Dera Sacha Sauda controversy.

All shops, except a few medical stores, other business establishments and educational institutions remained closed in the city during the bandh.

Hundreds of Sikh activists in different groups brandishing swords and other traditional weapons on two-wheelers and four-wheelers patrolled the streets, though no untoward incident was reported from any part of the city.

The Sikh activists also burnt effigies of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh at different places in the city in protest against his alleged attempt to project himself as Guru Gobind Singh ('Total bandh in Jalandhar' 2007, *WebIndia123.com*, 19 May http://news.webindia123.com/news/ar_showdetails.asp?id=705190334&cat=&n_date=20070519 – Accessed 22 May 2009 – Attachment 44).

An article published by *Daily News and Analysis* on 31 July 2008 reports that after a large group of Sikhs had confronted local Dera leader Gursharan Singh in Jalandhar, Punjab and damaged his vehicle, he fired a gun into the crowd, killing a child and injuring a woman (Bharadwaj, A. 2008, 'Boy killed in anti-Dera protest', *Daily News and Analysis*, 31 July – Attachment 39)

3. Is there information about clashes between Dera Sacha Sauda and the Sikh Youth Federation?

No information was located about clashes between Dera Sacha Sauda adherents and members of the Sikh Youth Federation.

In November 2006, research conducted for *Research Response IND30814* was able to locate limited information about the Sikh Youth Federation, also known as the International Sikh Youth Federation (RRT Country Research 2006, *Research Response IND30814*, 1 November – Attachment 40).

According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) is a proscribed organisation in India under the 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act. Details of ISYF history and activities are provided as Attachment 41; no reference is made to any clashes with members of the Dera Sacha Sauda, and no recent ISYF activity is noted ('International Sikh Youth Federation' (undated), South Asia Terrorism Portal website http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/punjab/terrorist_outfits/ISYF.htm – Accessed 25 May 2009 – Attachment 41).

No additional information could be located about a 'Sikh Youth Federation' presently operating in Punjab; nonetheless, there is a group active in Punjab called the 'Sikh Students' Federation'. As can be seen in the information on unrest in Jalandhar provided in the response to Question 2 above, the Sikh Students' Federation was active in organising anti-Dera protests in Punjab in 2007 and 2008. No reports were located which state that the Sikh Students' Federation (SSF) is implicated in attacks on individual Dera adherents, or that SSF members and Dera adherents clashed directly in May 2007. Reports of SSF protests against the Dera Sacha Sauda follow below; please see Question 2 above for further reports of SSF involvement in the violence of May-July 2007.

An August 2008 report from *Outlook India* states that SSF activists clashed with police during a "violent protest" staged to demand action against Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh for "donning the attire of Guru Gobind Singh":

Activists of Sikh Students Federation (SSF) today staged a violent protest seeking immediate action against the alleged blasphemous act of Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh donning the attire of Guru Gobind Singh last year.

Police resorted to cane charge and fired tear gas shells to disperse the protestors when they tried to break through police barricades to lay siege on the Haryana Chief Minister, Bhoopinder Singh Hooda. They were seeking immediate action against Singh.

In the melee, several SSF activists along with policemen were injured, police said.

Accusing the Haryana government for providing "shelter" to a "criminal" responsible for the killing of Sikhs, SSF president Gurcharan Singh Grewal said that the state government had continuously failed to take action against the Sirsa based Dera chief ('Sikh Students Federation stages protest against Dera chief' 2008, *Outlook India*, (source: *PTI*), 11 August http://www.outlookindia.com/pti_news.asp?id=598088 – Accessed 25 May 2009 – Attachment 45).

An August 2008 report from *The Tribune* reports that SSF activists were "brandishing kirpans and canes" while enforcing a "near-total bandh" in Jalandhar as they demanded "the arrest of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Baba Ram Rahim":

In response to a call given by the various Sikh organisations, a near-total bandh was observed in the city today. The bandh call had been given to demand the arrest of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Baba Ram Rahim. All business activities and movements in the city had come to a halt. All markets, commercial buildings and private offices remained closed. The protesters blocked roads by parking motorcycles across the highways.

Schools had already been closed by their respective managements with a prior notice to the parents.

The road transport system, including bus service and autorickshaws, remained paralysed for the day. A few buses that tried to enter the city were stopped by representatives of the All-India Sikh Students Federation brandishing kirpans and canes at PAP Chowk, Rama Mandi Chowk and Guru Nanak Mission Chowk. Bus crew were forced to drop all passengers at Rama Mandi Chowk.

...Life came to a grinding halt in Batala as the industrial town observed a complete bandh on Wednesday. The "Punjab bandh" call had been given by the Sikh Students Federation (Mehta) which is demanding arrest of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Baba Ram Rahim. All the commercial establishments, including shops, were found closed right from the morning. Even rickshaw-pullers, rehri-owners and roadside vendors were not seen on the roads ('Near total bandh leaves public a harried lot – Doaba comes to a standstill' 2008, *The Tribune*, 23 July <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2008/20080724/jal.htm> – Accessed 25 May 2009 – Attachment 46).

A March 2007 research response provides some background information on the Sikh Students' Federation (RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response IND31365*, 2 March – Attachment 47).

4. Is there information about the authorities in Punjab failing to protect adherents of Dera Sacha Sauda from attacks or about those authorities taking volunteers of the organisation into custody and torturing them?

No reports were located of Punjab police arresting and torturing Dera Sacha Sauda adherents; nonetheless, extensive information was located on state protection for DSS members in Punjab in previous research responses:

- Question 3 of *Research Response IND34112* provides a comprehensive analysis of state protection for DSS members, addressing: police protection for DSS members during large-scale clashes and during in localised incidents; protection for Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh; and general information on police and state protection in Punjab, and in India (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34412*, 22 December – Attachment 1).
- Question 2 of *Research Response IND34033* addresses the issue of state protection and the attitude of the authorities in Punjab toward the DSS, and relations between the DSS and the Sikh community (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND34033*, 4 December – Attachment 2)
- Question 5 of *Research Response IND33842* provides information on whether Punjabi authorities have taken action against the DSS, including the attitude and role of the authorities during the 2007 violence; and Question 6 assesses the level of police discrimination against members of the DSS (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33842*, 31 October – Attachment 3)
- Question 3 of *Research Response IND33077* provides information on state protection for DSS members in Punjab, including the response of police to the May 2007

outbreak of violence, and incidents of violence between police and DSS members (RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33077*, 28 March – Attachment 5)

In addition, Question 8 of *Research Response IND34231*, of 6 February 2009, provides information on police corruption and impunity in Punjab, and links to previous research responses on the corruption and violence in the Punjab police (RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response IND34231*, 6 February – Attachment 38).

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