



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

India

India – IND38900 – Dera Sacha Sauda – Update on treatment of followers and availability of protection

4 August 2011

1. Please provide information on any reports of DSS followers being targeted for harm in Punjab or elsewhere in India since February 2010.

As detailed in previous research responses, there has been considerable tension between Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) followers and some Sikh groups in northern India, and these tensions have at times erupted into violent incidents.¹ A number of reports published in the Indian press indicate that some active DSS followers have been targeted for harm in the period since February 2010.

In May 2011, it was reported that the police in Panchkula in Haryana state had received a letter from DSS management regarding a “suspected threat to the life of the Dera head”, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who was required to attend court hearings in relation to murder charges against him. The court subsequently allowed Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh to attend the hearings by video-conference.² Recent news reports indicate that the hearings are continuing.³

In March 2011, there was a clash between DSS followers and a Sikh group in Dhale Ke village in the Moga district of Punjab. The Sikhs reportedly attempted to disrupt a DSS religious event – a “naam charcha” or “congregation” – by playing an audiotape at high volume. After Dera followers complained about this to policemen, a duty magistrate asked that the tape be stopped. Dera followers alleged that, after the naam charcha programme concluded, “members of Ek Noor Khalsa Fauz, a Sikhs religious body, blocked their way, brandishing unsheathed swords”. The Sikh group reportedly refuted these allegations, and alleged that the Dera followers had resorted to stone pelting, and damaging the Sikh gurudwara. Despite police having been “deployed in strength in the village to avert any clash between the two sword-brandishing groups”, two people (of unreported group allegiance) were seriously injured before a further deployment of police brought the situation under control.”⁴

¹ For the most recent research responses on the Dera Sacha Sauda, see: RRT Country Advice 2011, *Country Advice IND38924*, 11 July – Attachment 1; and RRT Country Advice 2011, *Country Advice IND38269*, 8 March – Attachment 2

² Nagarkoti, R. 2011, ‘Video-conferencing facility ready for Dera chief’s appearance’, *The Times of India*, 28 May – Attachment 3

³ ‘Witness turns hostile in Chhatrapati murder case’ 2011, *Indian Express*, 28 July – Attachment 4

⁴ ‘Tension in village as Sikhs, dera men clash’ 2011, *The Times of India*, 7 March

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-07/india/28665459_1_dera-followers-naam-charcha-dera-programme – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 5

Also in March 2011, a naam charcha in Bajidpur village in the Ferozepur district of Punjab, attended by more than 1000 DSS followers (also known as premis), attracted adverse attention from Sikh groups. *The Times of India* reported that:

When members of various Sikh organizations learned about it, they, including women, reached Bajidpur village and tried to disturb the congregation, but were checked by senior police officers. The Sikh protesters then blocked Ferozepur-Moga GT Road to mark their protest against it. They reportedly also thrashed some premis and damaged a few vehicles which were taking the Dera followers to the congregation venue. Some premis reportedly received minor injuries during the scuffle, but timely intervention of police force contained the situation.⁵

In January 2011, an altercation between DSS followers and a group of “pro-hardline” Sikhs occurred in Bhikhi in the Mansa district of Punjab after the Dera followers objected to remarks made by the Sikhs about the Dera head. District authorities reportedly “managed to calm” the Dera followers, however the “pro-hardline” Sikh group clashed with the police.⁶

2. Is there any evidence of the Indian police or security forces denying protection to or not investigating complaints from DSS followers since 2009?

No reports were found to present evidence of the police or security forces denying protection to DSS followers or failing to investigate complaints by DSS followers in the period since 2009. Rather, a survey of news reports during the period indicates that police have acted to prevent clashes between DSS followers and Sikhs and to protect DSS members, and laid charges following the registration of complaints from DSS followers.

On 23 July 2011, it was reported that non-bailable warrants had been issued against Balwant Singh Nandgarh, a Sikh religious leader, after he failed to appear in a judicial court in Fatehabad district of Haryana regarding a case registered against him under Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code. The case had been registered following a complaint by a Dera Sacha Sauda supporter that Nandgarh had made “a fiery speech at a religious gathering”.^{7 8} According to an earlier report, Nandgarh “claimed that he had been implicated in a false case by a follower of Dera Sacha Sauda sect”.⁹

On 9 July 2011, it was reported from the Moga district of Punjab that a man had been arrested on charges relating to section 295A of the Indian Penal Code after a DSS follower filed a police complaint that “abusive language” had been written on a photo of the Dera chief and posted on the internet.¹⁰

In May 2011, the court hearing cases against DSS chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in Panchkula in the state of Haryana exempted him from attending in person, after police made

⁵ ‘Followers hold congregation amid protest’ 2011, *The Times of India*, 7 March http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-07/india/28665719_1_naam-charcha-dera-followers-sikh-organizations – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 6

⁶ ‘Curfew continued in Punjab town after clashes between police and Sikhs’ 2011, *Punjab News Line*, 3 January – Attachment 7

⁷ ‘Nandgarh not to appear in Haryana court’ 2011, *Hindustan Times*, 23 July – Attachment 8

⁸ Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code relates to “[d]eliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs”: Government of India, *Indian Penal Code, 1860*, Act No. 45 of 1860 – Attachment 9

⁹ ‘Akhal Takht excommunicates head of religious academy’ 2011, *The Press Trust of India Limited*, 22 July – Attachment 10

¹⁰ ‘Man arrested for hurting sentiments of Dera followers’ 2011, *The Press Trust of India*, 9 July – Attachment 11

an application to the court to allow him to participate by video-conferencing. The police had held concerns that “there could arise a law and order problem in Panchkula as thousands of his followers were likely to reach Panchkula”, and had received a letter from DSS management noting a “suspected threat to the life of Dera head”.¹¹

A news article from March 2011 indicated that following an altercation between DSS followers and Sikhs in Dhale Ke village in the Moga district of Punjab, police were “deployed in strength” to the area to avert any violence between the groups.¹²

Another news report from March 2011 stated that “heavy police protection” had been provided for a large DSS event in Bajidpur village in the Ferozepur district of Punjab. According to the article:

The congregation, attended by more than 1,000 premis, was organized under a heavy police protection. When members of various Sikh organizations learned about it, they, including women, reached Bajidpur village and tried to disturb the congregation, but were checked by senior police officers. The Sikh protesters then blocked Ferozepur-Moga GT Road to mark their protest against it. They reportedly also thrashed some premis and damaged a few vehicles which were taking the Dera followers to the congregation venue. Some premis reportedly received minor injuries during the scuffle, but timely intervention of police force contained the situation.¹³

In February 2011, a prayer meeting conducted by the Dera head in Panchkula was held “amid tight security”. According to one report, the police presence was considerable:

With 15 battalions of Haryana and numerous women cops, around 40,000 police personnel were deployed by the Haryana Police.

Panchkula SP Maneesh Chaudhary said the police force included three Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP) rank officers and eight inspectors on the venue itself. Over hundred policemen were from Ambala district and the Haryana Armed Police along with presence of special commando units and anti-sabotage team.¹⁴

A January 2011 article in *The Hindu* indicated that police used force to prevent a clash between DSS followers and Sikhs in Bhikhi, a remote town in the Mansa district of Punjab, and subsequently arrested more than 50 followers of a “pro-hardline Sikh group”. Reports indicate that the police had also “resorted to preventive detentions in various parts of the State”, following anticipated expression of “solidarity” with the Sikhs.¹⁵ Authorities imposed a curfew as part of an effort to prevent further violence.¹⁶

¹¹ Nagarkoti, R. 2011, ‘Video-conferencing facility ready for Dera chief’s appearance’, *The Times of India*, 28 May – Attachment 12

¹² Tension in village as Sikhs, dera men clash’ 2011, *The Times of India*, 7 March, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-07/india/28665459_1_dera-followers-naam-charcha-dera-programme – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 6

¹³ ‘Followers hold congregation amid protest’ 2011, *The Times of India*, 7 March http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-07/india/28665719_1_naam-charcha-dera-followers-sikh-organizations – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 7

¹⁴ ‘Traffic suffers due to prayer meeting’ 2011, *The Pioneer*, 21 February – Attachment 13

¹⁵ ‘Curfew re-imposed in troubled Punjab town; 51 arrested’ 2011, *The Hindu*, 4 January <http://www.hindu.com/2011/01/04/stories/2011010450990500.htm> – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 14

¹⁶ ‘Curfew clamped in Punjab town’ 2011, *The Hindu*, 3 January <http://www.hindu.com/2011/01/03/stories/2011010361620500.htm> – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 15

In July 2010, it was reported that Sikhs who had “protested in a peaceful manner” against a congregation being held by DSS followers in Thikriwala village in the Barnala district of Punjab were met with a “lathi charge” (or baton charge) by police. At least eight Sikhs were arrested. The protesting Sikhs alleged that the DSS naam charcha had been held “under police patronage”.¹⁷

In June 2010, the Dera head reportedly visited a commercial area in the city of Kochi in the southern state of Kerala, accompanied by “around 50 security personnel, including commandoes from the Haryana police, private security guards and armed volunteers of DS”.¹⁸

News reports from July 2009 indicate that the police in Punjab registered a case against three persons involved in a fatal attack on a Dera Sacha Sauda follower. The follower had been returning to Alampur Mandra village in the Mansa district of Punjab after attending a court hearing relating to a 2007 clash between Dera followers and Sikhs of the village. It was reported that the police had “registered a case and have dispatched police parties to identify and arrest the alleged culprits involved in the shooting incident”.¹⁹ Prior to any arrests being made, however, a DSS follower “died in police firing when Dera Sacha Sauda followers went on rampage... while protesting police inaction in a sect member’s murder”.²⁰ The police later arrested three people for the murder that had prompted the protest.²¹

¹⁷ ‘Punjab Police cane charged Sikhs protesting against “Naam Charcha” by dera followers’ 2010, *Punjab News Line*, 17 July – Attachment 16

¹⁸ ‘Dera Sacha Sauda chief visits Kochi’s shops with pomp’ 2010, *New Indian Express*, 19 June – Attachment 17

¹⁹ ‘Sacha Sauda follower shot dead in Punjab’ 2009, *United News of India*, 28 July – Attachment 18

²⁰ Kamal, N. 2009, ‘Day later, another Dera follower dies in police firing’, *The Times of India*, 31 July – Attachment 19

²¹ ‘One killed in police firing as sect followers resort to violence’ 2009, *Indo-Asian News Service (IANS)*, 29 July <http://wwrn.org/articles/31434/?§ion=sikhism> – Accessed 10 March 2011 – Attachment 20

Attachments

1. RRT Country Advice 2011, *Country Advice IND38924*, 11 July.
2. RRT Country Advice 2011, *Country Advice IND38269*, 8 March.
3. Nagarkoti, R. 2011, 'Video-conferencing facility ready for Dera chief's appearance', *The Times of India*, 28 May. (FACTIVA)
4. 'Witness turns hostile in Chhatrapati murder case' 2011, *Indian Express*, 28 July. (FACTIVA)
5. 'Tension in village as Sikhs, dera men clash' 2011, *The Times of India*, 7 March http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-07/india/28665459_1_dera-followers-naam-charcha-dera-programme – Accessed 10 March 2011.
6. 'Followers hold congregation amid protest' 2011, *The Times of India*, 7 March http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-03-07/india/28665719_1_naam-charcha-dera-followers-sikh-organizations – Accessed 10 March 2011.
7. 'Curfew continued in Punjab town after clashes between police and Sikhs' 2011, *Punjab News Line*, 3 January. (FACTIVA)
8. 'Nandgarh not to appear in Haryana court' 2011, *Hindustan Times*, 23 July. (FACTIVA)
9. Government of India, *Indian Penal Code, 1860*, Act No. 45 of 1860. (CISNET Library)
10. 'Akali Takht excommunicates head of religious academy' 2011, *The Press Trust of India Limited*, 22 July. (FACTIVA)
11. 'Man arrested for hurting sentiments of Dera followers' 2011, *The Press Trust of India*, 9 July. (FACTIVA)
12. Nagarkoti, R. 2011, 'Video-conferencing facility ready for Dera chief's appearance', *The Times of India*, 28 May. (FACTIVA)
13. 'Traffic suffers due to prayer meeting' 2011, *The Pioneer*, 21 February. (FACTIVA)
14. 'Curfew re-imposed in troubled Punjab town; 51 arrested' 2011, *The Hindu*, 4 January <http://www.hindu.com/2011/01/04/stories/2011010450990500.htm> – Accessed 10 March 2011.
15. 'Curfew clamped in Punjab town' 2011, *The Hindu*, 3 January <http://www.hindu.com/2011/01/03/stories/2011010361620500.htm> – Accessed 10 March 2011.
16. 'Punjab Police cane charged Sikhs protesting against "Naam Charcha" by dera followers' 2010, *Punjab News Line*, 17 July. (FACTIVA)
17. 'Dera Sacha Sauda chief visits Kochi's shops with pomp' 2010, *New Indian Express*, 19 June. (FACTIVA)

18. 'Sacha Sauda follower shot dead in Punjab' 2009, *UNI (United News of India)*, 28 July. (FACTIVA)
19. Kamal, N 2009, 'Day later, another Dera follower dies in police firing', *The Times of India*, 31 July. (FACTIVA)
20. 'One killed in police firing as sect followers resort to violence' 2009, *Indo-Asian News Service (IANS)*, 29 July <http://wwwn.org/articles/31434/?§ion=sikhism> – Accessed 10 March 2011.