



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

India

India – Dera Sacha Sauda – Jammu &
Kashmir – State protection
7 December 2009

- 1 Please provide information on tension between the DSS and other groups in the state of Jammu & Kashmir from 2007 to date.
- 2 Please advise if there is any reporting of tensions for DSS followers in the applicant's village of RS Pura, Jammu, from 2007 to date.

Reports sourced from the Indian media suggest that tensions between DSS followers and Sikhs in Jammu & Kashmir since 2007 have been triggered by specific incidents. In May 2007, Sikh protests against the DSS took place in districts across Jammu & Kashmir, including R.S. Pura. More anti-DSS demonstrations were staged in June 2008 in Jammu (R.S. Pura is a block of Jammu City) and, also in June 2008, police in Jammu & Kashmir reportedly foiled an assassination plot against DSS leader Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh.

In May 2007, demonstrations were staged by Sikh activists across northern India against the Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) and its leader, Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh, following an incident in which Rahim allegedly imitated the dress and actions of a Sikh guru in an advertisement. The protests reportedly took place in several regions of Jammu & Kashmir, including RS Pura in Jammu.

In May 2007 *The Tribune* reported that: "Activists of various Sikh organisations" in Jammu "burnt an effigy of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmit Ram Rahim and condemned the dera culture". The report quoted a Sikh leader from Jammu who "said Sikhs of Jammu were ready to extend help to those organisations in Punjab which were fighting against the dera culture there".¹ According to another May 2007 report from *DNA Daily News & Analysis*: "There were also protests in Jammu and Kashmir by Sikhs who demanded the arrest of the Dera chief for his "sacrilegious act" that had hurt the sentiments of their community. Sikhs organised rallies at Gandhinagar, **RS Pura** [researcher's emphasis], Rehari, Satwari, Udhampur, Kathua, Rajouri, Baderwah and Ramban in Jammu division".² On 22 May 2007, the *News Agency of Kashmir* reported that: "All the shops, business establishments and educational institutions in Jammu and its suburbs including **RS Pura** [researcher's emphasis], Miransahib, Kathua, Samba and Nagrota remained closed, while commercial traffic remained out of the road".³

¹ 'Sacha Sauda chief's effigy burnt' 2007, *The Tribune*, 16 May

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070516/j&k.htm#2> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 1.

² 'Punjab tense, Sikhs seek apology from Dera chief' 2007, *DNA Daily News & Analysis*, 16 May

http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_punjab-tense-sikhs-seek-apology-from-dera-chief_1097168 – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 2.

³ 'Life paralysed as Jammu observed complete shutdown' 2007, TwoCircles.net website, (source: *News Agency of Kashmir*), 22 May <http://www.twocircles.net/2007may22/life-paralysed-jammu-observed-complete-shutdown.html> – Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 3.

Further information on large-scale Sikh demonstrations against the DSS in May 2007 across northern India is provided in *Research Response IND33077* of 28 March 2008.⁴

Another upsurge of Sikh protest against the DSS in Jammu & Kashmir took place in June 2008, after a bodyguard of Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh shot and killed a Sikh protestor in Mulund, a suburb of Mumbai. The *IBN Live* news website stated that “[t]he incident in Mulund had rekindled a strong anti-Dera sentiment across Mumbai, Punjab, Haryana and Jammu. Though the situation was largely peaceful... [p]rotesters had earlier warned that things will get out of control if no action is taken against the Dera chief”.⁵ The Indian Viewspaper.net website reported that: “In Jammu, agitators wielded swords, burnt his effigies, shouted slogans and blocked busy thoroughfares”, in response to the killing of a Sikh demonstrator in Mumbai “by bodyguards of the Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh”.⁶

Also in June 2008, prior to the disturbances caused by the shooting incident in Mulund, *The Hindu* reported that “Jammu and Kashmir police claimed to have foiled a plot to kill Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh”; a police source quoted in this report attributes the assassination plot to the “newly formed outfit of Panj Pardhani Group (PPG) of the Khalistan Zindabad Force”. The three arrested militants are reported to be from “the Barnala area of Punjab province”.⁷

For background information on the Khalistan Zindabad Force and other Sikh militant groups of the Khalistan movement, see Question 2 of *Research Response IND32679*, of 11 December 2007.⁸

3 If so, was any police or government protection given to DSS followers in Jammu & Kashmir?

No references were located regarding whether police or security forces provided protection to DSS adherents during the upsurges of anti-DSS protest in Jammu and Kashmir in 2007 and 2008, or whether state protection is available to DSS followers in at present.

Research carried out for Question 3 of *Research Response IND31365*, of 2 March 2007, indicates that state protection for religious minority groups in Jammu and Kashmir is inadequate.⁹

4 Please advise (since the last RRT research of December 2008) whether the situation for DSS followers has calmed or escalated in Jammu & Kashmir and other major states in India where the DSS is active.

No reports were located of tensions between Sikhs and DSS followers in Jammu & Kashmir since December 2008. Whether the situation for DSS followers has calmed or escalated in that

⁴ RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33077*, 28 March – Attachment 4.

⁵ ‘Sikh groups block trains, want Dera chief arrested’ 2008, *IBN Live* website, 25 June <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/sikh-groups-block-trains-want-dera-chief-arrested/67726-3.html> – Accessed 30 November 2009 – Attachment 5.

⁶ Sinha, A. 2008, ‘The Dera Dared’, The Viewspaper.net website, 28 June <http://theviewspaper.net/the-dera-dared/> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 6.

⁷ Puri, L. 2008, ‘Plot to kill Dera Sacha Sauda chief foiled in J&K’, *The Hindu*, 6 June <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/06/06/stories/2008060650320100.htm> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 7.

⁸ RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32679*, 11 December – Attachment 8.

⁹ See Question 3 of RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response IND31365*, 2 March – Attachment 9.

state is difficult to answer, as Sikh actions against DSS adherents tend to erupt following particular incidents, as seen in Questions 1 and 2 above.

Other States December 2008-2009

Punjab

Sikh groups in Punjab continue to be publicly hostile toward the DSS, and to call for the closure of DSS facilities and the arrest of Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh. Research conducted in April 2009 by the Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada located Indian media reports from March 2009 which detail the anti-DSS activities of Sikh extremist groups in Punjab, including attempting to close down DSS premises, disrupting religious proceedings, and assaulting DSS members.¹⁰ Articles sourced from the Indian media report the killing of a DSS follower, Lilly Kumar, in Mansa, Punjab in July 2009.¹¹ Another DSS adherent was reportedly killed by police fire during a violent protest in Mansa the following day¹², and a protest against the killing of Kumar and “attacks on Dera followers in the state” also took place in Sangrur.¹³ Two Sikhs arrested over the murder are reported to have connections to Sikh militants involved in a February 2008 assassination attempt on Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh.¹⁴ In November 2009, the DSS called off a planned congregation at Bathinda following protests and threats from Sikh groups; *Punjab Newslite* reported that “radical Sikh organisations had warned of dire consequences” if the congregation went ahead.¹⁵

Uttar Pradesh

A 3 September 2009 report from *Thaindian News* notes of a planned DSS ‘congregation’ in the Agra District of Uttar Pradesh that “authorities in this Uttar Pradesh district withdrew permission to the sect to hold a congregation following protests from Sikh leaders”. The report also claims that Sikh groups “threatened violent disruption if the congregation was held”, and that the “district administration late Wednesday refused to provide security to the organisers of the congregation in Rohta village”.¹⁶

¹⁰ Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada 2009, IND103125.FE – India: Dera Sacha Sauda, a religious institution; whether their spiritual leader is facing charges for sexual assault and murder in India; how the public and the authorities perceive and treat members, 23 April – Attachment 17.

¹¹ ‘Tension erupts after Dera follower’s killing in Punjab’ 2009, *The Times of India*, 28 July <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Tension-erupts-after-Dera-followers-killing-in-Punjab/articleshow/4831162.cms> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 10.

¹² ‘One killed in police firing as sect followers resort to violence’ 2009, *Thaindian News*, (source: IANS), 29 July http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/one-killed-in-police-firing-as-sect-followers-resort-to-violence_100224878.html – Accessed 3 December 2009 – Attachment 11.

¹³ Sadosh, R. 2009, ‘March by Dera Sacha Sauda followers’, *The Tribune*, 7 August <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090807/punjab.htm#6> – Accessed 3 December 2009 – Attachment 12.

¹⁴ Bajwa, H. 2009, ‘Drug, arm seizures point to Punjab ultras’, *Indian Express*, 28 September <http://www.indianexpress.com/story-print/522284/> – Accessed 3 December 2009 – Attachment 13; ‘Punjab cops seize 2.5kg RDX, claim major terror strike averted’ 2009, *The Times of India*, 5 September <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Punjab-cops-seize-25kg-RDX-claim-major-terror-strike-averted/articleshow/4973415.cms> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 14.

¹⁵ ‘Dera Sacha Sauda puts off state-level function’ 2009, *Punjab Newslite*, 14 November <http://www.punjabnewslite.com/content/view/20880/38/> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 15.

¹⁶ ‘Dera Sacha Sauda not allowed to hold congregation’ 2009, *Thaindian News*, (source: IANS), 3 September http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/dera-sacha-sauda-not-allowed-to-hold-congregation_100242088.html – Accessed 26 November 2009 – Attachment 16.

5 Please advise whether the police and government forces have been involved in the protection of DSS followers since December 2008?

Few references were located regarding state protection for DSS adherents in states other than Jammu and Kashmir. Sources indicate that there is some level of state protection provided to DSS facilities and congregations in Punjab, perhaps because the movement has become politically influential in the southern districts of the state.

According to an April 2009 research report produced by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), “the Convenor of the Movement Against State Repression (MASR), a not-for-profit organisation that documents human rights abuses in the Punjab”, claims that the Punjab government “deploys measures to ensure that members of Dera Sacha Sauda can practise their religion freely”. The IRB research report also contains the abovementioned March 2009 articles sourced from the Indian media, which suggest that the police in Punjab are active in protecting DSS congregations from Sikh activist groups:

He added that the government also ensures that they are not victims of “discrimination” in terms of government services (MASR 3 Apr. 2009). The Convenor did not elaborate on the kinds of measures taken. According to media reports, the police have intervened to prevent violence during the Sikh community’s protests against members of Dera Sacha Sauda (The Tribune 20 Mar. 2009; The Times of India 17 Mar. 2009; United News of India 16 Mar. 2009).

The Convenor of MASR stated that 20 or 25 years ago, Dera Sacha Sauda received “patronage” from the Punjab because the state wanted to isolate the Sikhs who were advocating for greater power and autonomy (3 Apr. 2009). According to Madan Lal, “various political parties ... take upon themselves the responsibility of safeguarding religious sects and thus make sure of their support in elections. e.g. Dera Sacha Sauda” (7 Jan. 2009, 8). An article published by The Times of India reports that this is the case for the Akali (Shiromani Akali Dal, SAD) and Congress parties, in particular (18 May 2007). After the elections for the House of the People (Lok Sabha, LS) were announced for 16 April 2009 (Maps of India n.d.), tensions between members of Dera Sacha Sauda and “radical” Sikh groups intensified due to their political differences (The Tribune 16 Mar. 2009). Some Sikh groups have accused the Punjab state government of cooperating with members of Dera Sacha Sauda in order to secure their support during the elections (United News of India 29 Jan. 2009).¹⁷

In other states, the available information suggests that state protection for DSS followers is provided in some cases, and in some states, and not in others. For example, the abovementioned 3 September 2009 report from *Thaindian News* claims that the Agra district administration refused to provide security for a proposed DSS congregation in Uttar Pradesh¹⁸, while the aforementioned June 2008 report sourced from the Viewspaper.net website states that, in Haryana, “[p]olice troops were rushed to the spot to prevent clashes between the Sikh community and followers of the Dera”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada 2009, IND103125.FE – *India: Dera Sacha Sauda, a religious institution; whether their spiritual leader is facing charges for sexual assault and murder in India; how the public and the authorities perceive and treat members*, 23 April – Attachment 17.

¹⁸ ‘Dera Sacha Sauda not allowed to hold congregation’ 2009, *Thaindian News*, (source: IANS), 3 September http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/dera-sacha-sauda-not-allowed-to-hold-congregation_100242088.html – Accessed 26 November 2009 – Attachment 16.

¹⁹ Sinha, A. 2008, ‘The Dera Dared’, The Viewspaper.net website, 28 June <http://theviewspaper.net/the-dera-dared/> – Accessed 24 November 2009 – Attachment 6.

List of Attachments

1. 'Sacha Sauda chief's effigy burnt' 2007, *The Tribune*, 16 May <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070516/j&k.htm#2> – Accessed 24 November 2009.
2. 'Punjab tense, Sikhs seek apology from Dera chief' 2007, *DNA Daily News & Analysis*, 16 May http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_punjab-tense-sikhs-seek-apology-from-dera-chief_1097168 – Accessed 24 November 2009.
3. 'Life paralysed as Jammu observed complete shutdown' 2007, TwoCircles.net website, (source: *News Agency of Kashmir*), 22 May <http://www.twocircles.net/2007may22/life-paralysed-jammu-observed-complete-shutdown.html> – Accessed 30 November 2009.
4. RRT Research & Information 2008, *Research Response IND33077*, 28 March.
5. 'Sikh groups block trains, want Dera chief arrested' 2008, *IBN Live* website, 25 June <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/sikh-groups-block-trains-want-dera-chief-arrested/67726-3.html> – Accessed 30 November 2009.
6. Sinha, A. 2008, 'The Dera Dared', *The Viewspaper.net* website, 28 June <http://theviewspaper.net/the-dera-dared/> – Accessed 24 November 2009.
7. Puri, L. 2008, 'Plot to kill Dera Sacha Sauda chief foiled in J&K', *The Hindu*, 6 June <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/06/06/stories/2008060650320100.htm> – Accessed 24 November 2009.
8. RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32679*, 11 December.
9. RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response IND31365*, 2 March.
10. 'Tension erupts after Dera follower's killing in Punjab' 2009, *The Times of India*, 28 July <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Tension-erupts-after-Dera-followers-killing-in-Punjab/articleshow/4831162.cms> – Accessed 24 November 2009.
11. 'One killed in police firing as sect followers resort to violence' 2009, *Thaindian News*, (source: *IANS*), 29 July http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/one-killed-in-police-firing-as-sect-followers-resort-to-violence_100224878.html – Accessed 3 December 2009.
12. Sadosh, R. 2009, 'March by Dera Sacha Sauda followers', *The Tribune*, 7 August <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090807/punjab.htm#6> – Accessed 3 December 2009.
13. Bajwa, H. 2009, 'Drug, arm seizures point to Punjab ultras', *Indian Express*, 28 September <http://www.indianexpress.com/story-print/522284/> – Accessed 3 December 2009.
14. 'Punjab cops seize 2.5kg RDX, claim major terror strike averted' 2009, *The Times of India*, 5 September <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Punjab-cops-seize-25kg-RDX-claim-major-terror-strike-averted/articleshow/4973415.cms> – Accessed 24 November 2009.
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16. 'Dera Sacha Sauda not allowed to hold congregation' 2009, *Thaindian News*, (source: *IANS*), 3 September <http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/dera-sacha->

[sauda-not-allowed-to-hold-congregation_100242088.html](#) – Accessed 26 November 2009.

17. Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada 2009, *IND103125.FE – India: Dera Sacha Sauda, a religious institution; whether their spiritual leader is facing charges for sexual assault and murder in India; how the public and the authorities perceive and treat members*, 23 April. (REFINFO)