

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Who is Gurmeet Ram Rahim (“Baba”)?**
- 2. Did he create controversy and cause protests by resembling Guru Gobind Singh?**
- 3. Please provide details including whether the police arrested and detained his followers, or if they are being harassed.**
- 4. Are the authorities prosecuting the Baba? Please provide details.**
- 5. Are the Sikhs reacting with violence against the Baba’s followers? Please provide details.**
- 6. Are the Punjabi police notorious for killings / detaining people indefinitely?**
- 7. Would it be possible to relocate within India and avoid adverse treatment from the Punjabi authorities and the Sikh community?**

RESPONSE

1. Who is Gurmeet Ram Rahim (“Baba”)?

An article in *The Economic Times* dated 2 August 2007 refers to “Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh” as the “Dera Sacha Sauda chief” (‘CBI charges Dera chief with murder’ 2007, *The Economic Times*, 2 August – Attachment 1).

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to information request dated 11 July 2007 indicates that “Dera Sacha Sauda is a non-Sikh spiritual organization that was established in Sirsa in 1948 (Dera Sacha Sauda n.d.; see also *The Times of India* 18 May 2007a). Some media sources refer to it as a “cult” (*The Times of India* 18 May 2007a) or “sect” (BBC 22 May 2007)” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, IND102546.E - India: Treatment of Sikhs in Punjab within a contemporary historical context (2005 - 2007), 11 July <http://www.irb->

cizr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451370 - Accessed 19 September 2007 – Attachment 2).

An undated article on the derasachasauda.in website indicates that “[t]he 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” (‘What is Dera Sacha Sauda?’ (Undated), derasachasauda.in website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/index.html> - Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 3). Another article on the website refers to “His Holiness Huzoor Maharaj Sant Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh Ji” as the present Guru. According to the article, he “was born in a royal family on Tuesday, 15th of August 1967 in a small village named Gurusar Modia district Ganganagar (RAJASTHAN).” His predecessor, Param Pita Shah Satnam Singh Ji Maharaj, “handed over with proper tradition all the responsibilities, spritual [sic] powers and assigned tasks of the Dera to him” on 23 September 1990 (‘Lifesketch of the present Master Sant Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh Ji Maharaj (The Present Guru’ (Undated), derasachasauda.in website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/guruji3.html> - Accessed 14 January 2008 – Attachment 4).

An article dated October 2007 referred to in a RRT research response dated 9 October 2007 (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32408*, 9 October – Attachment 5), indicates that Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh is the chief of “Dera Sacha Sauda, the breakaway Sikh sect”. The article also indicates that “Dera Sacha Sauda is one in a long line of reform movements to challenge mainstream Sikhism” and includes background information on the group. It notes that “[t]here 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.” The article also notes that “[t]he group’s faith, considered a combination of all religions, is referred to within the Dera as *insaan*. Though Dera Sacha Sauda technically does not follow any one religion (other than *Insaan*) – its base of followers, though mostly Sikh, is also Hindu and Muslim – it is still considered a Sikh breakaway group because all three of its chiefs have been from the Sikh community. As such, the organisation’s movement away from Sikhism has inevitably irked the Sikh community, which has long criticised the Dera, as well as other deras, for ‘diluting’ the spirit of Sikhism. At times, these criticisms have been more intense than others. While violence has not been unheard of, the incidents of May 2007 were in a category of their own.” The article also indicates that Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh “took over as the head of the Dera Sacha Sauda” on 23 December 1990. According to the article:

Subsequent years, particularly the first several months of 2007, have revealed Gurmeet Singh to be less than a ‘god incarnate’. Indeed, past indiscretions aside, he now appears to be more of a thoroughly earthly megalomaniac – even worse, one that has found, in faith, a convenient outlet for indulging his lusts. Gurmeet Singh now stands accused of murder, sexual exploitation and illegal possession of arms and ammunition, amidst longstanding demands by the Punjab and Haryana High Courts of a CBI probe. In early August of this year, the CBI filed a charge sheet against the Dera and Gurmeet Singh (Alig, Asif Anwar & Anwar, Abid 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 6).

An article in *The Times of India* dated 18 May 2007 indicates that Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was “[b]orn in Gurusarmodia village of Sriganaganar district of Rajasthan in 1967” and became “the president of Dera Sacha Sauda... on September 23, 1990”. It is stated in the article that:

With him at the helm of affairs, the number of dera followers grew. Their ranks were not limited only to places in Punjab and Haryana, but even to the bordering areas of Rajasthan, including Sriganaganar and Hanumangarh. In fact, the dera built ashrams (Naam Ghar) in Gujarat, Maharashtra, HP, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Chandigarh. In the Malwa region, almost all towns, big or small, have a Naam Ghar.

The era also saw the sect embroiled in a number of contentious issues, especially those involving the dera chief. In 2003, an anonymous letter alleged sexual exploitation of young girls at the dera. Later, murder of a senior member of the dera and a Sirsa-based journalist set the rumour mills working overtime. Family members of the slain scribe moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court, demanding a CBI probe into the role of dera in the murder. The case was handed over to the CBI. However, the CBI probe moved at a slow pace despite the HC pulling up the investigating agency. Also, political pressure and protests by dera followers did not help.

More recently, the dera courted trouble just before the Punjab assembly elections this year. Though it enjoyed the patronage of both the Akali and Congress leaders, the president issued an edict asking his followers to support Congress candidates. According to sources, this favour was extended after the party (Punjab Congress) promised relief in the CBI case. Post elections, there have been complaints of Akalis harassing dera men (‘Dera Sacha Sauda and Gurmeet Ram Rahim’ 2007, *The Times of India*, 18 May <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-2060431,prtpage-1.cms> – Accessed 14 December 2007 – Attachment 7).

2. Did he create controversy and cause protests by resembling Guru Gobind Singh?

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to information request dated 11 July 2007 refers to clashes erupting “between the Dera Sacha Sauda and the Sikh community in Punjab (*The Times of India* 17 May 2007; BBC 22 May 2007)” in May 2007. According to the response to information request:

The clashes erupted after the head of the Dera Sacha Sauda imitated Sikh religious ceremonies performed by Guru Gobind Singh (a well-respected Sikh guru), which was considered an insult by the Sikh community (*The Tribune* 14 May 2007a; *ibid.* 21 May 2007; *The Times of India* 17 May 2007). *The Tribune* reports that protests occurred in the following districts in Punjab: Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib, Hoshiarpur, Sangrur, Nawanshahr and Bathinda (16 May 2007a; *The Tribune* 14 May 2007b). News sources also report that the clashes resulted in injuries (*ibid.* 16 May 2007b; *The Times of India* 20 May 2007) and arrests (*The Tribune* 20 May 2007a). The BBC reports that one man was shot dead during the clashes (22 May 2007), information which was corroborated by an article in *The Times of India* (18 May 2007b). Sikh leaders declared an edict for all deras (temporary abodes or camps (India n.d.) or chapters (Ensaaf 25 May 2007) of the Dera Sacha Sauda) to be closed by 27 May 2007 (BBC 22 May 2007; *The Times of India* 20 May 2007; *The Tribune* 20 May 2007b); however, the Dera Sacha Sauda refused to accept this edict (*ibid.*). On 22 May 2007, a bandh (a form of protest usually consisting of a one-day strike) was called by the Sikh community in Punjab (*ibid.* 22 May 2007a; *The Times of India* 20 May 2007). Media sources indicate that,

following a meeting between Sikhs and Dera Sacha Sauda, a resolution to the conflict was drafted (*The Tribune* 22 May 2007b; *The Indian Express* 24 May 2007; *Hindustan Times* 22 May 2007). Information as to the tenets or outcome of the resolution could not be found within the time constraints of this Response. However, *The Tribune* reports that the Dera Sacha Sauda leader issued an apology through a press note on 27 May 2007 (27 May 2007) and other media sources report that this apology was not accepted by leaders of the Sikh community (*The Hindu* 30 May 2007; DailyIndia.com 30 May 2007; *Hindustan Times* 29 May 2007) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, IND102546.E - India: *Treatment of Sikhs in Punjab within a contemporary historical context (2005 - 2007)*, 11 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451370 - Accessed 19 September 2007 – Attachment 2).

The previously mentioned article dated October 2007 indicates that “Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh” had “angered Sikhs by imitating Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhism’s revered Tenth Guru.” It is stated in the article that:

The controversy over Dera Sacha Sauda, the breakaway Sikh sect, has only just begun to wind down. Early May saw a frenzy over Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who angered Sikhs by imitating Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhism’s revered Tenth Guru. Gurmeet Singh had appeared in photographs carried in two dailies, in which he wore attire similar to the Tenth Guru in order to advertise his organisation. Gurmeet Singh apologised a few weeks later, but by then the matter had escalated so far that hardline Sikhs refused to accept his contrition. Besides being belated, the subsequent apology was undercut by Gurmeet Singh himself, who defiantly stated that he wears “whatever my followers design and give me to wear”.

Groups on both sides were able to bring out supporters en masse. Under the leadership of a hardline Sikh religious group, the Damdami Taxal, more than 10,000 protesters moved towards Salabat Pura Dera, 30 km from Bhatinda, where Gurmeet Singh was alleged to have committed his act of sacrilegious imitation. There were subsequently clashes involving Sikhs and up to 3000 Dera activists, leaving at least one person killed and dozens more severely injured.

The Punjab state government, which initially attempted to maintain a distance from the issue, was forced to intervene after the supreme Sikh body, the Akal Takht, issued an ultimatum on 20 May, demanding that the state government close down all reform deras within a week. While Dera Sacha Sauda activists complained that they were being scapegoated, sword- and kirpan-bearing Sikhs blocked roads and organised dharnas. Punjabis were suddenly witness to a sight they had not seen in two decades, harking back to the days of militancy that had engulfed the state during the 1980s (Alig, Asif Anwar & Anwar, Abid 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 6).

The RRT research response dated 9 October 2007 includes information on clashes between members of the Dera Sacha Sauda and Sikhs over Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh wearing similar attire to Guru Gobind Singh (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32408*, 9 October, (Questions 1 & 2) – Attachment 5).

3. Please provide details including whether the police arrested and detained his followers, or if they are being harassed.

The RRT research response dated 9 October 2007 refers to an article that indicates that the Indian government had deployed paramilitary forces in Punjab and Haryana following clashes between Sikhs and followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda, and a report by a Sikh publication that a Dera follower had been arrested by security forces after he fired on protesting Sikhs (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32408*, 9 October, (Questions 1 & 2) – Attachment 5).

According to an article in *The Hindu* dated 16 May 2007, “followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda sect and Sikh activists” had “staged protest rallies and clashed with the police in many areas” of Punjab. The article refers to ““premis” (followers of the Dera sect)” clashing “with the police, leaving 20 injured” and to “premis” attacking “a small posse of security personnel, injuring seven” after “their demand for action against those who attempted to burn an effigy of Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh... was not met”. Police had “used force and lobbed teargas shells to disperse the crowd, which damaged at least a dozen vehicles” (Pandher, Sarabjit 2007, ‘20 hurt as clashes spread in Punjab’ *The Hindu*, 16 May – Attachment 8).

An article dated 27 May 2007 indicates that “[w]ith the deadline set by the five Sikh High Priests for the closure of all Dera Sacha Sauda centres expiring Sunday, security personnel were put on high alert in Punjab” and the Punjab Police had “set up special check-posts and beefed up security around the Dera Sacha Sauda centres in the state, including its main centre in Punjab at Salabatpura to avoid any untoward incident.” Security had also “been tightened at Sirsa in Haryana where the Dera is holding its regular last Sunday of the month congregation” (‘Security tight in India’s Punjab as Sikh priests’ deadline nears’ 2007, *BBC Monitoring Online*, source: PTI news agency, 27 May – Attachment 9).

Another article dated 14 June 2007 refers to “[f]resh clashes between Sikhs and followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda sect” erupting “in Punjab’s Sangrur District... after a Sikh boy was beaten up by alleged followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda sect.” A Deputy Superintendent of Police had said that they had “arrested the culprits and stringent action will be taken against them” (‘Fresh clashes between Sikhs and Dera followers in Punjab’ 2007, *Asian News International*, 14 June – Attachment 10).

A *Hindustan Times* article dated 17 June 2007 indicates that “there were armed clashes that left scores of Dera followers and Sikhs injured and one young man dead” and that “[f]or the first three days, the police were mere spectators as sword and lathi-swinging mobs clashed in and around Bhatinda, the heart of Punjab’s prosperous Malwa” (‘Keep the faith’ 2007, *Hindustan Times*, 17 June – Attachment 11).

An article in *The Times of India* dated 5 July 2007 indicates that the Dera Sacha Sauda had “accused the Punjab government of unleashing a reign of terror against its followers in the state for supporting the Congress in the 2007 assembly elections. In a memorandum, which was given to Punjab governor S F Rodrigues by the women’s wing of Dera on Tuesday, the sect has alleged that since the followers supported the Congress, “it was apparently decided by the Punjab government to settle scores with the guru and his premis.”” It is stated in the article that:

The Dera has further alleged that the government cashed in on the Dera issue by instigating and directing all the Sikhs against the sect. The memorandum states that “premis are being prevented from holding naam charcha (prayer meetings), their houses have been burnt and they have been beaten up and socially boycotted.”

The Dera has also alleged that its followers are forcibly being converted to Sikhism. The memorandum states that “Dera followers are not being allowed to hold marriages or bhog ceremonies according to their customs. There have been incidents when the body of a Dera follower was not allowed to be cremated until the whole family vowed to disassociate themselves from the sect.”

It further says that “instead of restraining these hoodlums the local administrations are pressurising the premis to avoid holding regular prayer meetings and are also registering false cases against followers” (Mullick, Rohit 2007, ‘Punjab govt settling scores: Dera’, *The Times of India*, 5 July – Attachment 12).

An article dated 17 July 2007 indicates that “[p]olice resorted to mild lathicharge and fired in the air to disperse the protesters” after “Sikhs and Dera followers clashed with each other after sect chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was attacked near Ghukanwali village, 20 km from Sirsa, on Monday afternoon. The Dera chief escaped unhurt.” The article notes that “[w]hile both Dera followers and Sikhs alleged police highhandedness, cops justified their action, claiming they had averted a major clash.” According to the article:

Dera followers said the incident was ‘pre-planned’ and lodged a complaint with district police chief Vikas Arora. “They fired shots at Guruji and the police stood like mute spectators,” alleged Aditya Insaan, Dera spokesperson. Meanwhile, demanding action against the Dera chief, Sikhs blocked the national highway.

...The spokesman also charged the district administration with failing to prevent the attack despite being informed a day in advance about his programme in the Gukanwale and its adjoining villages today. Security had been beefed up in Sirsa ahead of the event but it wasn’t enough, the spokesperson said. “There has been slackness in dealing with the security of the Dera head, who has been given Z-plus security in view of threat to his life,” he said.

“Timely action by police forced the two groups to disperse. We are closely monitoring the situation at both the Dera and on the highway,” Haryana DGP Ranjeev Dalal said (‘Mob attacks Dera chief’ 2007, *The Times of India*, 17 July – Attachment 13).

An article in *The Times of India* dated 31 July 2007 refers to “the court of chief judicial magistrate, Bathinda” issuing “arrest warrants to eight senior office-bearers of the Dera in connection with clashes that took place in Bathinda in May.” The article also indicates that “Bathinda police registered criminal cases against a large number of unknown Dera followers after a clash between them and police on May 14. The police arrested 42 premis in the case and one person was granted bail. The police moved an application alleging that eight people were hiding at different places outside Punjab, so procuring arrest warrants were necessary for their arrests” (‘Dera chief arrested and quizzed’ 2007, *The Times of India*, 31 July – Attachment 14).

Another article in *The Times of India* dated 29 August 2007 indicates that the Punjab police had “admitted error in deciphering” an “intelligence department report on five Bathinda women. Senior officers on Monday said the intelligence department had identified some potential self-immolators belonging to the Dera Sacha Sauda, who were mistakenly portrayed as human bombs.” The Bathinda police were “apparently rapped by the government for releasing their pictures and hanging them on walls across police stations in the state.” Aditya Insaan, Dera chief spokesperson, “said Punjab police was hell bent on defaming the Dera by levelling one charge after the other. He said like the human-bomb theory, self-immolation

was another ploy to paint the Dera in bad light” (Mullick, Rohit 2007, ‘Cops rule out human bomb theory’, *The Times of India*, 29 August – Attachment 15).

The article dated October 2007 notes that the Dera Sacha Sauda’s “numerical strength has given the Dera significant political clout, particularly in Punjab and Haryana.” It is stated in the article that:

This has also made the organisation the centre of intense speculation. More than most, Punjab cannot afford to exclude religion from politics, and state politics are dominated by Sikhs. Punjab’s biggest party is the Shiromani Akali Dal, which has significant influence over Sikh religious organisations, including nearly eight decades of control over the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the most prominent Sikh religious body.

As such, when violence erupted this past spring, the SAD-led Punjab government had little space in which to turn: the state government could not suppress the Dera, given its numbers; nor could it turn its back on the mainstream Sikh community, which had come out onto the streets in the tens of thousands. Meanwhile, the SAD’s coalition partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was also experiencing difficulties, with memories still fresh over the large-scale killings of Hindus in Punjab during the 1980s. BJP worries over the possibility that Hindus would again be victimised if violence were to spiral have had the party favour a solution that would rein in both the Dera and the Sikh community at large.

Further complicating matters is the fact that, in the last state assembly elections, Gurmeet Singh threw his support not behind the SAD, but behind the Congress (Alig, Asif Anwar & Anwar, Abid 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 6).

4. Are the authorities prosecuting the Baba? Please provide details.

An article dated 8 December 2007 indicates that the Bhatinda police had registered a case against Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh “for allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of the Sikhs by wearing a dress similar to that of 10th Guru Gobind Singh, which had resulted in stand off between the Dera followers and the Sikhs.” The article also refers to “Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh” being “interrogated by a Punjab Police team at his sect headquarter” in relation to the case registered against him (‘Dera Chief interrogated by Punjab Police team’ 2007, *The Press Trust of India Limited*, 8 December – Attachment 16).

An article in *The Times of India* dated 18 November 2007 notes that a court had “adjourned hearing on the bail plea of Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh to February 12. The interim relief against arrest granted to the Dera head will continue till the said date.” According to the article:

The Dera head had moved the plea for pre-arrest bail in a case registered against him by Bathinda police. A case was registered against the Dera head for his alleged imitation of Guru Gobind Singh by wearing clothes resembling those of the Guru and also offering Jam-e-Insan to his followers at a ceremony.

The petitioner had averred during previous hearings that he had no intention of imitating the tenth Sikh Guru whom he held in great esteem and thus had done nothing to hurt the feelings of the Sikh community.

It was also averred that the FIR was registered against him due to politics of vendetta pursued by the present government in Punjab. The Dera head had also submitted that the present Akali-BJP regime was baying for his blood following media reports that the Dera had given the call to its followers to support the Congress during the last assembly poll.

A complaint had been filed against the Dera head in May 2007 by a member of a Sikh religious organization based in Bathinda, wherein it was alleged that he had hurt the feelings of Sikhs by imitating the acts and clothes of the tenth Sikh Guru ('Dera head gets relief against arrest' 2007, *The Times of India*, 18 November – Attachment 17).

Another article refers to Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh being charged with murder and rape. The previously mentioned article in *The Economic Times* dated 2 August 2007 indicates the Central Bureau of Investigation had "charged Dera Sacha Sauda chief Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in two murder cases and one rape case. The three cases came to the CBI four years ago, but resurfaced after the recent episode concerning the Dera chief." It is stated in the article that:

The CBI has chargesheeted the Dera chief for the murder of Dera manager Ranjit Singh, Sirsa-based journalist Ram Chander Chatterpatti and the alleged rape of a disciple. The Dera chief is the sole accused in the rape case, where a sadhvi accused Singh of raping his female disciples.

In the murder case, the CBI has accused the Dera chief and five others of the murder of the Dera manager who was allegedly telling people about a letter claiming the Dera chief raped his disciples. In the second murder case, the Dera chief and four others allegedly murdered Chatterpatti for publishing the anonymous letter. The Dera chief has been charged under Section 376 (rape), Sections 302 (murder) and 120 (b) (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC.

The CBI has been investigating the cases for four years and now says that investigations into the three cases are complete and that it has a strong case against the Dera chief.

These cases have been investigated for over four years and have surfaced now after the Dera chief got embroiled in his latest controversy where he has been accused of hurting the sentiments of the Sikh community for allegedly dressing up like Sikh Guru Gobind Singh. The Dera chief has a huge following in Punjab and was considered instrumental in the Congress victory in Malwa region in the last assembly polls ('CBI charges Dera chief with murder' 2007, *The Economic Times*, 2 August – Attachment 1).

According to the article dated October 2007, "Gurmeet Singh now stands accused of murder, sexual exploitation and illegal possession of arms and ammunition, amidst longstanding demands by the Punjab and Haryana High Courts of a CBI probe. In early August of this year, the CBI filed a charge sheet against the Dera and Gurmeet Singh" (Alig, Asif Anwar & Anwar, Abid 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 6).

A recent article in the Calcutta newspaper *The Telegraph* dated 23 December 2007 indicates that "[a] CBI court has deferred till January 13 the hearing of two cases of murder and one of sexual harassment against Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh" ('Dera respite' 2007, *The Telegraph*, 23 December http://www.telegraphindia.com/1071223/jsp/nation/story_8700877.jsp - Accessed 9 January 2008 – Attachment 18).

An *Indo-Asian News Service* article dated 19 May 2007 refers to the Punjab police withdrawing “the security cover of the controversial Dera Sacha Sauda chief at his Sirsa headquarters in neighbouring Haryana.” According to the article:

The move to withdraw the security cover of Gurmeet Ram Rahim comes just hours before a 72-hour ultimatum served on the Akali Dal government by the Sikh clergy to arrest the godman ends Sunday noon.

...“We have withdrawn the Punjab Police security provided to the dera chief. The security cover had been given to him by the previous Congress government,” Director General of Police N.P.S. Aulakh said here.

Police security cover on the sect chief comprised four personal security officers. Saturday all of them were asked to report back to Punjab.

Aulakh justified the withdrawal of security saying that it was not required from Punjab since the sect chief enjoyed security from Haryana Police and also kept private guards (‘Punjab Police withdraws security of dera chief’ 2007, *Indo-Asian News Service*, 19 May – Attachment 19).

A subsequent article dated 14 June 2007 in the *World Sikh News* notes that “Dera Sacha head Gurmeet Ram Rahim will now be provided “Z-plus” security cover by the Haryana government, putting him among the ranks of the most protected VIPs in the state” (Sharma, Ashok 2007, ‘Gurmeet Ram Rahim gets Z-plus security’ 2007, *World Sikh News*, 14 June http://worldsikhnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=675 – Accessed 9 January 2008 – Attachment 20).

Another article indicates that the Punjab police had foiled an attempt to assassinate Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. An article dated 13 December 2007 refers to the Punjab Police foiling “an attempt by Babbar Khalsa International(BKI) terrorists to assassinate Sirsa-based Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh and heads of two other sects” (‘Punjab Police foil attempt to assassinate Sacha Sauda head’ 2007, *UNI (United News of India)*, 13 December – Attachment 21).

5. Are the Sikhs reacting with violence against the Baba’s followers? Please provide details.

As mentioned in the answer to Question 2 above, there were clashes between followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda and the Sikh community in Punjab after Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, the head of the Dera Sacha Sauda, angered Sikhs when he wore attire similar to Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhism’s Tenth Guru, in an advertisement for his organisation in May 2007.

In addition to the sources mentioned in the answer to Question 2, the following articles provide further information on the situation between members of the Dera Sacha Sauda and the Sikh community.

The *Hindustan Times* article dated 17 June 2007 notes that:

For the first time, the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, not only ordered Sikhs to sever all relations — social, economic and political — with the ‘Premis’, the followers of Sacha Sauda, but also called for a Punjab bandh on May 27. They also called for closure of all the Deras in Punjab and the arrest of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. One of the

high priests, Balwant Singh Nandgarh, who heads the Takht Damdama Sahib at Talwandi Sabo in the Malwa, publicly declared, Khomeini-style, that anyone who kills the Sacha Sauda head would be weighed in gold.

Fortunately, the bandh passed off peacefully, though it left a fear psychosis among the public ('Keep the faith' 2007, *Hindustan Times*, 17 June – Attachment 11).

An *Indian Express* article dated 2 July 2007 refers to "Punjab's Leader of the Opposition Rajinder Kaur Bhattal" alleging "that the Akalis are trying to terrorise Dera Sacha Sauda followers into disassociating themselves from the sect... Bhattal, a former Chief Minister, said Dera followers or premis, were being summoned to village gurdwaras where they were being coerced to swear that they had nothing to do with Sacha Sauda. The oath over, they were presented with siropas. When asked to name the areas where such incidents had taken place, Bhattal mentioned Talwandi Sabo Assembly constituency in Bhatinda district. She said Bhatinda and Mansa districts of Malwa region were the worst-hit." Bhattal also "said the "harassment of premis" was unjustified even if sect chief Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh had done any wrong. "Can you punish the children for their father's crime?" she asked" ('Dera followers being terrorised: Bhattal' 2007, *Indian Express*, 2 July – Attachment 22).

The previously mentioned article in *The Times of India* dated 5 July 2007 indicates that in a memorandum, the Dera Sacha Sauda had alleged that the Punjab government was "instigating and directing all the Sikhs against the sect. The memorandum states that "premis are being prevented from holding naam charcha (prayer meetings), their houses have been burnt and they have been beaten up and socially boycotted.'" It is stated in the article that:

The Dera has also alleged that its followers are forcibly being converted to Sikhism. The memorandum states that "Dera followers are not being allowed to hold marriages or bhog ceremonies according to their customs. There have been incidents when the body of a Dera follower was not allowed to be cremated until the whole family vowed to disassociate themselves from the sect."

It further says that "instead of restraining these hoodlums the local administrations are pressurising the premis to avoid holding regular prayer meetings and are also registering false cases against followers" (Mullick, Rohit 2007, 'Punjab govt settling scores: Dera', *The Times of India*, 5 July – Attachment 12).

According to an article dated 10 July 2007, "[i]n Ferozepur, tension mounted when scores of Sikhs surrounded the Dera campus where the Sacha Sauda followers were to gather for their weekly prayer meeting near Ferozpur town." The police were "able to persuade Dera followers not to assemble there in view of the tension". When "the protesting Nihangs, some of them armed with traditional weapons, tried to go near the premises and threatened to pull down the structure there", the "[p]olice resorted to a cane charge in which nearly a dozen people were injured. Police dispersed the Nihang Sikhs and arrested 17 of them." The article also refers to Sham Sunder, a Dera Sacha Sauda follower, setting himself on fire. "His family members said that Sham Sunder was under pressure from the Sikh community to leave the sect." The article also indicates that "hundreds of radical Sikhs held a demonstration in Mohali town, on the outskirts of Chandigarh, demanding the arrest of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh." The march had been called by "the Khalsa Action Committee, a joint group of various religious and radical Sikh organisations like Dal Khalsa and Damdami Taksal" (Bharadwaj, Ajay 2007, 'Dera row keeps Punjab simmering', *DNA – Daily News & Analysis*, 10 July – Attachment 23).

An article in *The Statesman* dated 16 July 2007 refers to the Khalsa Action Committee, “an umbrella organisation of various Sikh religious bodies” calling “to the Sikh masses to prepare for a long struggle to oust those conspiring to undermine the dignity and pride of their religion. Badal Mohkan Singh, the convener of the newly formed Khalsa Action Committee alleged that Dera head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was roaming across as a VIP and this was a challenge to the Sikh masses. Singh said that Khalsa Action Committee resolved to carry on with a struggle against the Sirsa-based sect its logical end” (‘Sikhs called for struggle’ 2007, *The Statesman*, 16 July – Attachment 24).

The article dated 17 July 2007 in *The Times of India* indicates that “[a]bout 12 persons were injured, two of them critically, when Sikhs and Dera followers clashed with each other after sect chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was attacked near Ghukanwali village, 20 km from Sirsa, on Monday afternoon. The Dera chief escaped unhurt.” According to the article:

The incident took place when Ram Rahim, accompanied by his security guards, was on his way to Sirsa from Sriganganagar in Rajasthan. As the Dera chief’s cavalcade passed through the village, Sikhs who had assembled there protested by displaying black flags and naked swords.

When Dera followers objected, they started pelting stones at them. Sirsa SDM, who was present at the site, fired gunshots in the air. Police resorted to mild lathicharge and fired in the air to disperse the protesters (‘Mob attacks Dera chief’ 2007, *The Times of India*, 17 July – Attachment 13).

An article in *The Hindu* dated 27 July 2007 refers to “Dera spokesperson Aditya Insaan” calling “for acceptance of their apology and restoration of peace in Punjab.” It is stated in the article that:

Referring to the May 13 incident where Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh appeared in newspaper advertisements purportedly in attire similar to that of Guru Gobind Singh, Mr. Aditya said: “The Dera has already apologised thrice to the Sikh community.”

Addressing a press conference here, Mr. Aditya said: “The situation in Punjab is worsening and people are fleeing because of forced religious conversions. In addition, false cases are being filed against Dera followers and they are being harassed endlessly.”

...“The social boycotting of Dera followers is dividing religions and families,” said Himani Insaan, president of the women’s wing of the Dera (‘Dera calls for acceptance of apology’ 2007, *The Hindu*, 27 July – Attachment 25).

According to an article in *The Times of India* dated 4 September 2007, “[a]fter a brief lull, the Dera Sacha Sauda issue is again showing its evil face. Clashes between Sikhs and Dera followers on Sunday and Monday in village Alampur Mundra left dozen injured. ‘Naam charcha’ (religious discourse of Dera) was yet again the bone of contention between the two groups. Reportedly, both groups indulged in stone pelting, throwing of acid, and used swords. The bloody clash resulted in dozen persons from both sides getting injured” (‘Dera followers and Sikhs clash’ 2007, *The Times of India*, 4 September – Attachment 26).

The previously mentioned article dated 13 December 2007 refers to the Punjab Police foiling “an attempt by Babbar Khalsa International(BKI) terrorists to assassinate Sirsa-based Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh and heads of two other sects” (‘Punjab Police foil

attempt to assassinate Sacha Sauda head' 2007, *UNI (United News of India*, 13 December – Attachment 21).

6. Are the Punjabi police notorious for killings / detaining people indefinitely?

The section on Punjab in the Asian Centre for Human Rights 2007 report on human rights in India indicates that “Punjab continued to be engulfed in serious human rights violations” and the Asian Centre for Human Rights “documented several cases of extrajudicial and custodial killing of civilians during 2006.” According to the report:

Police investigation was synonymous with torture. On 25 October 2006, The Hindustan Times stated that 75 persons died in police custody each year on an average in Punjab. Sixty-six (66) per cent of such deaths were attributed to natural causes. Although majority of the victims were in the age bracket of 20 and 30 years, the police often stated the causes of custodial deaths to be heart attack and other medical problems.[\[1\]](#)

In relation to human rights violations by the security forces, it is stated in the report that:

The law enforcement personnel were responsible for gross human rights violations including extrajudicial executions. On 11 October 2006, Ruban Masih was beaten to death by the police at Bhadaurh in Sangrur district.[\[8\]](#) ACHR documented several custodial deaths during 2006. The victims of custodial deaths included Salwinder Singh, a Dalit of Margindpura village under Bhikhiwind police station, who was allegedly beaten to death on the night of 4 January 2006;[\[9\]](#) Gurmail Singh, a resident of Kakrali village at Rajpura, who was tortured to death on 4 January 2006;[\[10\]](#) Balbir Ram, a gunman with a bank, who died at Goraya police station on 8 February 2006;[\[11\]](#) Harjeet Singh, a Dalit of Dera Baba Nanak area, who died in Civil Lines police station of Batala on 20 February 2006;[\[12\]](#) 20-year-old Dalit identified as Madan Lal alias Tinku, a resident of Basti Shekhan, who died in June 2006[\[13\]](#) and another Dalit identified as Balwinder Singh alias Ballu Singh of Chathe Sekhwan village in Sangrur who died at Sangrur Sadar police station on 16 September 2006.[\[14\]](#)

Many civilians were shot dead by the police. The victims included Satnam Singh Satti of Jandiala village who was allegedly shot dead by inebriated Head Constable Loveleen Singh near Cheema Kalan village near the Indo-Pak border on 29 April 2006;[\[15\]](#) Kashmir Messih, a labourer, who was killed by Special Police Officer (SPO) Surinder Singh of the Punjab Police at Gaini village in Batala on 15 June 2006;[\[16\]](#) and a Muslim youth, Nameem Khan who was allegedly killed by members of the Special Task Force near Giana village on the intervening night of 20-21 September 2006.[\[17\]](#)

On 2 June 2006, Additional Sessions Judge D.S. Malwai sentenced six personnel of Sherpur police station including Deputy Superintendent of Police Gurjit Singh, Station House Officer (SHO) Kulwinder Singh, Additional SHO Yudhishter Singh, Head Constable Chamkaur Singh and constables Sohan Singh and Mukhtiar Singh to rigorous imprisonment for life for the custodial killing of Ravinder Singh in Sherpur police station on 18 January 2004.[\[18\]](#)

During 2006, some policemen faced suspension or dismissal from service in connection with custodial death cases. These policemen included three Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel identified as Jarnail Singh, SHO of the Patiala GRP police station, Gurdeep Singh and Baldev Singh of the Rajpura police post in the custodial killing of Gurmail Singh;[\[19\]](#) Mandeep Singh, SHO of Goraya police station, who was suspended after public protest in the custodial death of Balbir Ram;[\[20\]](#) Inspector and SHO (City) of Batala, Kirpal Singh, Assistant Sub Inspector and in-charge of Simbal Chowki Paramjit Singh, Head Constable Satnam Singh and constable Naresh Kumar who were dismissed from service in the custodial killing of Harjeet Singh.[\[21\]](#)

In relation to arbitrary arrest, illegal detention and torture, the report indicates that:

The police routinely used torture. In early June 2006, two persons identified as Tarsem Singh and Sukhvinder Singh were seriously injured after being allegedly tortured in police custody in Gurdaspur after their arrest on the charge of preparing forged document. However, the police maintained that the two rammed their heads with iron bars and tried to commit suicide with broken glass pieces.^[22]

In October 2006, the Punjab and Haryana High Court imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 each on two Assistant Sub-Inspectors Surinder Singh and Manjeet Singh for wrongfully detaining a man, son of Ashok Kumar, and subjecting him to torture. The victim was arrested by the police after being implicated him in a false case under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act on 22 August 2004.^[23]

The report also provides information on the use of violence by the security forces in Punjab against women and dalits (Asian Centre for Human Rights 2007, 'India Human Rights Report 2007: Punjab', ACHR website, May <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/india/AR07/punjab.htm> - Accessed 1 June 2007 – Attachment 27).

The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to information request dated 11 July 2007 includes information on the role of the police in the conflict between Sikh separatists and the authorities in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s. The report indicates that following Operation Bluestar, an attack by the Indian army on India's most sacred Sikh shrine on 3 June 1984 in Punjab, India's Prime Minister Indira Ghandi was assassinated by two Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984. According to the response to information request:

Operation Bluestar prompted a decade of killings, with an estimated 10,000 (AI 20 Jan. 2003, 4; Ensaaf n.d.) to 20,000 (*The New York Times* 11 Apr. 2007; SATP n.d.b) people killed in Punjab, and "widespread" human rights violations (AI 20 Jan. 2003, 5). Another source states that official statistics indicate that at least 14,469 people were killed between 1985 and 1991 (*Revolutionary and Dissident Movements of the World* 2004, 181). Police officers were reportedly rewarded for capturing and killing Sikh "militants" (AI 20 Jan. 2003, 6; Ensaaf n.d.), which led to an increase in disappearances and extra-judicial executions of Punjabi Sikhs active in the Akali Dal party, as well as families and friends of suspected "militants" (ibid.; AI 20 Jan. 2003, 5). Eventually, the Sikh separatist uprising was suppressed in the mid-1990s (ibid.; AI 29 Oct. 2004; *The New York Times* 11 Apr. 2007; SATP n.d.b)

The response to information request refers to an Amnesty International report that indicated "that most police officers in Punjab responsible for human rights abuses between 1984 and 1994 "continued to evade justice" (23 May 2007)." It also refers to the Punjab mass cremations case, in which government crematoria records "showed that security forces had "secretly" cremated thousands of Sikhs in Punjab". It is stated in the response to information request that:

In early 1995, human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra exposed government crematoria records that showed that security forces had "secretly" cremated thousands of Sikhs in Punjab (HRW 1 Nov. 2005; Ensaaf Jan. 2007). Khalra was abducted in September 1995 (ibid.; HRW 1 Nov. 2005) and six policemen were convicted of Khalra's murder in November 2005, even though Khalra's body was never recovered (BBC 18 Nov. 2005; Ensaaf Sept. 2006; see also HRW 1 May 2006).

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was appointed to investigate 2,097 illegal cases of cremations (Ensaaf Jan. 2007; see also US 6 Mar. 2007, Sec. 1b). The NHRC concluded, in October 2006, that 194 victims were in the custody of the police immediately before their death and cremation, awarding each next of kin 250,000 Indian rupees (INR) [approximately 6,195 Canadian dollars (CAD) (Canada 10 Oct. 2006a)] (NHRC 10 Oct. 2006); however, the *International Religious Freedom Report 2006* reports only 45 such cases (US 15 Sept. 2006, Sec. 2). The NHRC further states that 1,051 victims were “unceremoniously cremated” and awarded each next of kin INR175,000 [approximately CAD4,336 (Canada 10 Oct. 2006b)] (NHRC 10 Oct. 2006). The NHRC also appointed another commissioner to investigate the remaining 814 cases in order to identify the bodies (Ensaaf Jan. 2007); however, reports of this investigation could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Some sources criticize the NHRC because it examined only whether the bodies were cremated according to the appropriate rules for cremation, instead of investigating why those cremated were killed and who was responsible for these deaths (*The Asian Age* 27 Feb. 2007; HRW 1 Nov. 2005; Ensaaf Jan. 2007). Ensaaf also states that the NHRC failed to hear evidence from the next of kin of the deceased, limited its mandate to three crematoria in Amritsar and did not hold officials accountable (*ibid.*).

The report also provides information on the current treatment of Sikhs in Punjab, including their treatment by the police. According to the response to information request:

Two human rights organizations specializing in the situation of Sikhs in Punjab claim that the treatment of Sikhs involved in militant activities remains an issue of concern (SHRG 23 May 2007; Ensaaf 25 May 2007). The Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) is a non-governmental organization that promotes human rights and the peaceful resolution of conflicts... The Director of SHRG indicated in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate that Sikhs who are considered to be involved in Sikh militancy could be targeted by authorities (*ibid.* 23 May 2007). An October 2005 Ensaaf report entitled “Punjab Police: Fabricating Terrorism Through Illegal Detention and Torture” documented 28 cases in August and September 2005 of Sikhs being illegally detained for “militancy-related activities” (5 Oct. 2005, 4). The report asserts that the Punjab police “routinely” use illegal and incommunicado detention, without informing the families of the places of detention and “frequently tortur[ing] the detainees” (Ensaaf 5 Oct. 2005, 4). The report also claims that the police have threatened and detained relatives of targeted individuals, concocting “exaggerated” stories about suspected Sikh militants in order to justify their abusive tactics (*ibid.*).

Following a visit to Punjab in April 2007, the Co-Director of Ensaaf claimed, in a recent telephone interview with the Research Directorate, that Sikhs who continue to advocate support for their cause are still being monitored by authorities and, in some cases, risk detention and physical harm (25 May 2007)...

In contrast, the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), a Web site dedicated to providing information on terrorism and low intensity warfare in South Asia (SATP n.d.c), reports that the Sikh militant movement is no longer active in Punjab (SATP n.d.a)... Punjab police say that “the overall law and order situation in the State remained under control in 2005” (SATP n.d.a).

Similarly, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Director of the SHRG corroborated that, although Sikhs involved in militant activities could be targeted by authorities, the overall situation for Sikhs in Punjab was good and that there was no evidence that there was an increase in “Sikh insurgency” (23 May 2007).

Although both a professor Emeritus in political science from the University of Missouri and HRW indicate that the Punjab police have a reputation or a history of committing human rights violations (Professor Emeritus 18 May 2007; HRW 20 June 2006), HRW claims that violence and intimidation have decreased since the anti-Sikh riots, though many Sikhs still perceive the police as a threat (20 June 2006) (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2007, *IND102546.E - India: Treatment of Sikhs in Punjab within a contemporary historical context (2005 - 2007)*, 11 July http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451370 - Accessed 19 September 2007 – Attachment 2).

A recent report dated October 2007 by Human Rights Watch and Ensaaf on impunity for Indian security forces involved in counterinsurgency operations during the separatist Sikh rebellion in Punjab in the 1980s and 1990s indicates that “[t]he end to counterinsurgency operations has brought an end to systematic extrajudicial killings and “disappearances” in Punjab. However, the vast majority of these “disappearances” remain unresolved, and major perpetrators of the abuses from 1984 to 1995 have received promotions and currently occupy senior positions in the Punjab police. Their ongoing tenure and the impunity granted to almost all perpetrators have created a system that continues to facilitate custodial abuses, in particular illegal detention and torture” (Human Rights Watch and Ensaaf 2007, *Protecting the Killers: A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India*, October, Volume 19, No. 14(C), p. 16 – Attachment 28).

The US Department of State 2006 report on human rights practices in India indicates that “[t]he government made little progress in holding hundreds of police and security officials accountable for serious human rights abuses committed during the Punjab counterinsurgency of 1984-94, despite the presence of a special investigatory commission. The CBI claimed to be pursuing charges against dozens of police officials implicated in the 1980s for hundreds of deaths and secret cremations.” The report includes information on the NHRC investigation into “2,097 cases of murder and cremation that occurred between 1984 and the early 1990s” and notes that “no significant progress was made in bringing to justice those responsible for the killings.”

In relation to a more recent instance of violence involving the Punjab police, the report indicates that “[i]n June NGOs and media reported that a 20-year-old male Dalit (formerly known as “untouchables” who fall outside of the caste system), Madan Lal, died while in police custody in Ferozepore, Punjab. Lal was arrested on theft charges and died within two hours of his arrest during interrogation. Authorities suspended two policemen.” The report also refers to a human rights lawyer claiming “that all police stations in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, and Chandigarh have torture cells to “soften up” the accused prior to court appearance” (US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2006 – India*, March, Sections 1(a), (b) & (c) – Attachment 29).

7. Would it be possible to relocate within India and avoid adverse treatment from the Punjabi authorities and the Sikh community?

A search of the sources consulted did not locate specific information on whether a supporter of Dera Sacha Sauda could relocate within India and avoid the Punjabi authorities and Sikhs.

The previously mentioned article dated October 2007 indicates that the Dera Sacha Sauda is located in areas of India outside Punjab and Haryana. According to the article, “[t]he Dera’s physical presence goes far beyond these two states, however, and includes 36 local and urban

branches in eleven states across India (Alig, Asif Anwar & Anwar, Abid 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 6).

The article in *The Times of India* dated 18 May 2007 also notes that with Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh as leader, "the number of dera followers grew. Their ranks were not limited only to places in Punjab and Haryana, but even to the bordering areas of Rajasthan, including Sriganganagar and Hanumangarh. In fact, the dera built ashrams (Naam Ghar) in Gujarat, Maharashtra, HP, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Chandigarh. In the Malwa region, almost all towns, big or small, have a Naam Ghar" ('Dera Sacha Sauda and Gurmeet Ram Rahim' 2007, *The Times of India*, 18 May <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-2060431,prtpage-1.cms> – Accessed 14 December 2007 – Attachment 7).

Although in relation to Sikhs from Jammu and Kashmir, the answer to Question 5 of a RRT research response dated 2 March 2007 includes general information on relocation in India (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND31365*, 2 March, (Question 5) – Attachment 30).

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Non-Government Organisations

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Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org>

International News & Politics

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Region Specific Links

derasachasauda.in website <http://www.derasachasauda.in/index.html>

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