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India: The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) political party, including differences between the SAD (Badal) led by Parkash Singh Badal and the SAD (Amritsar) led by Simranjit Singh Mann; relations with authorities (2016-April 2018)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

**1. Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) (SAD(B))**

**1.1 Leadership**

According to sources, the SAD(B)'s leader is Sukhbir Singh Badal (*The Times of India* 23 May 2018; *Political Handbook of the World* 2017, 667). Sources indicate that Sukhbir Singh Badal is the son of Parkash Singh Badal, and that the former became the party's president in 2008, when the latter became the party's "patron" (*The Hindu* 1 Feb. 2008; *Hindustan Times* 31 Jan. 2008).
1.2 Political Representation

Sources report that in February 2017, the SAD(B) contested the Punjab assembly elections in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (The Times of India 23 May 2018; FirstPost 11 Mar. 2017), which is described as "its regional and national ally" (The Times of India 23 May 2018). The SAD(B)-BJP alliance won 18 seats out of 117 in the elections (FirstPost 11 Mar. 2017; India [2017]), with 15 seats going to the SAD(B) and 3 to the BJP (India [2017]).

According to sources, the SAD(B) was in power before the Punjabi 2017 state assembly elections for two consecutive terms (Kumar 12 Mar. 2017) or 10 years (The New Indian Express 17 Dec. 2017). In a 2015 academic paper published in the Journal of Punjab Studies, Jugdep Singh Chima, an assistant professor of political sciences at Hiram College (Hiram College n.d.), notes that the SAD(B), together with the BJP, won the Punjabi state assembly in 1997, 2007 and 2012 (Chima 2015, 151).

1.3 Political Agenda

In an article published in the Indian daily Hindustan Times, Ashutosh Kumar, a professor at the Department of Political Science at Panjab University who specializes in Indian politics (Panjab University n.d.), explains that the SAD(B), under Parkash Singh Badal, "reincarnated itself from being a 'movement party'" with a Sikh "ethno-religious agenda" to an "'electoral party'," which allowed the party to gain wider support (Kumar 12 Mar. 2017). Similarly, Chima explains that, during a conference held in 1996, the SAD(B) expressed its support for "a composite Punjabi culture or regional nationalism irrespective of religion," called Punjabiyat, opened its membership to Hindus and stated that its goal was to govern "based on compassion and equality" (Chima 2015, 151). Chima concludes that the SAD(B) went for a "more moderate political ideology and inclusive party identity," and shifted from "being a parochial 'ethnic party' to becoming more of a 'multienomic' Punjabi" party (Chima 2015, 151). The New Indian Express also notes that the SAD(B) "tried to portray itself as secular" by appointing three Hindu leaders as senior vice-president, general secretary and treasurer (The New Indian Express 17 Dec. 2017).
The Elections.in website [1] indicates that the SAD(B) is at the far right of the political spectrum insofar as "it asserts that religion and politics are synonymous and [that] one cannot operate without [the other]" (Elections.in 10 Mar. 2015). However, in contrast, Jugdep Singh Chima indicated, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, that the SAD(B) is not at the far right of the political spectrum but is rather a "moderate" Sikh party, which attempted to gain more votes from the Hindus by becoming more of a "Sikh moderate, Punjabi regional party" (Chima 1 May 2018). Chima stated that, although the SAD(B) does not separate between politics and religion, "pragmatically, it does not focus on religion but on the bread and butter of politics (such as economic issues)"; the SAD(B) needs to make claims in favour of religion because it does not want to lose the Sikh electorate (Chima 1 May 2018).

Kumar explains that the SAD(B)'s alliance with the BJP, which has an "urban upper caste Hindu support base," allowed the party to increase its support base and to cement its "newly invented 'secular' image" (Kumar 12 Mar. 2017). Chima similarly explained that the BJP's support base rather lies within the upper cast urban Hindu population, and that the coalition between the SAD(B) and the BJP is "usually a matter of convenience" (Chima 1 May 2018). According to Kumar, both the transition from a "movement party" to an electoral party and the alliance with BJP allowed the SAD(B) to "shape politics" in Punjab despite being perceived as concerned mainly with rural Sikhs (Kumar 12 Mar. 2017).

Chima stated that while the SAD(B), being culturally nationalist, protects the interests of the Sikhs when they are violated, it is not politically separatist (Chima 1 May 2018). According to the same source, the SAD(B) accepts the "wider Indian identity" for the Sikhs as well as the unity of India (Chima 1 May 2018).

1.4 Symbols

The electoral Commission of India indicates that the party's symbol is "[s]cales" (India 13 Apr. 2018, 7). According to Elections.in, the scales symbol is shown as being equal on both sides, and is "usually drawn on a bluish-black rectangular flag" (Elections.in 10 Mar. 2015).

2. Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) (SAD(A))
2.1 Formation and Leadership

According to the *Political Handbook of the World 2016-2017*, the SAD(A) was formed in the mid-1990s by Simranjit Singh Mann, whom the *Handbook* describes as a "radical" (*Political Handbook of the World 2017*, 675). Sources from 2017 and 2018 still describe Mann as the leader of the SAD(A) (*Political Handbook of the World 2017*, 675; Chima 1 May 2018). The *Political Handbook of the World* notes that the SAD(A) is also referred to as the SAD(M) (*Political Handbook of the World 2017*, 675).

The same source notes that in March 2013, the SAD(A)'s leadership in Malwa [one of the main divisions of Punjab] joined the SAD(B) (*Political Handbook of the World 2017*, 675).

2.2 Political Representation

Sources indicate that the SAD(A) ran for 54 seats in Punjab's 2017 assembly elections (India [2017]; *Hindustan Times* 12 Mar. 2017), but won none (India [2017]). According to sources, the SAD(A) has not won an election since 1999, when Mann was elected a member of the parliament [of the Lok Sabha (Lower House)] (*Political Handbook of the World 2017*, 675; *Hindustan Times* 12 Mar. 2017).

2.3 Political Agenda

Sources indicate that Mann advocates for the creation of Khalistan, a separate Sikh country (*Hindustan Times* 23 Mar. 2016; Chima 1 May 2018). Asian News International (ANI) reports that, in 2014, Mann demanded the creation of Khalistan "to act as a buffer state between India, China and Pakistan" (ANI 6 June 2014). The same source quotes Mann as stating the following:

"Everyone has heard that the Sikh community has just one demand, i.e. Khalistan. … Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs would feel safe in this Sikh nation and peace would prevail forever in South Asia. Khalistan is in favor of all the nations and religions" (ANI 6 June 2014)
Chima explained that while the SAD(A) advocates for a separate Sikh country, it is a "non-violent separatist party" that is committed to the creation of Khalistan through political means (Chima 1 May 2018).

According to the Hindustan Times, advocacy for the state of Khalistan "shrank from public and political discourse over time," and Mann lost the support-based he used to enjoy in the 1980s and 1990s (Hindustan Times 1 Jan. 2017). The Indian daily newspaper Mail Today explains that, since the mid-1990s, the state of Khalistan has not been a "rallying point" in state elections (Mail Today 31 Jan. 2017). According to the same source, there are two advocacy groups for Khalistan in Punjab, namely SAD(A), which has been "struggling in electoral politics for … years," and the Dal Khalsa, which does not participate in state or national polls (Mail Today 31 Jan. 2017).

On the use of the words "radical" or "extremist" when describing Mann, a 2017 article in the Hindustan Times states that Mann "abhors" the use of these terms (Hindustan Times 1 Jan. 2017). The same source quotes Mann's son, Emaan Singh, as stating that

"[o]nce we are compartmentalised as this, it gives an easy handle to the state to persecute us. It is unfair. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has held that demanding Khalistan is not a crime, and yet my father is hunted relentlessly by the state in a bid to curtail him." (Hindustan Times 1 Jan. 2017)

3. Relations with Authorities

The information in the following two paragraphs was provided by Chima in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate:

Mann has been charged with "dozens of sedition cases" for publicly calling for a Sikh independent country. The SAD(A) deems the SAD(B) "too soft" when it comes to defending Sikh political interests, leading to tensions between both parties. SAD(A)'s activists often disrupt rallies held by the SAD(B)-BJP coalition and they are also often "roughed up" by SAD(B)'s supporters or members. SAD(A)'s activists were "beaten up" several times and sometimes arrested by police when disrupting the SAD(B)'s and the BJP's rallies. There are no armed militias associated with either the SAD(A) or the SAD(B), though there are activists that can "act like militias," while being mainly activists.
In terms of treatment of its members, the SAD(B) is an established constitutional party that does not challenge the unity of India; SAD(B)'s members do not face "political persecution." However, because SAD(A)'s activists advocate for a Sikh country, their situation might be "different"; there have been "multiple" cases of "temporary arrests" of SAD(A)'s members (Chima 1 May 2018). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

*The Indian Express* reports that a First Information Report (FIR) was registered, among other, for raising "slogans against the nation," against the organizers of the 10 November 2015 Sarbat Khalsa (congregation of Sikhs), including Mann (*The Indian Express* 27 Nov. 2015). *A Hindustan Times* article states that, according to Mann's son, it was the 80th time Mann was charged with sedition (*Hindustan Times* 1 Jan. 2017). According to the *Indian Express*, Mann stated that the Punjab and Haryana High Court, as well as the Supreme Court of India, have "already cleared that the mere demand for Khalistan is no offence" (*The Indian Express* 27 Nov. 2015).

Sources indicate that, in April 2018, the commission responsible for investigating a sedition charge against Mann recommended the cancellation of the FIR against him and found that he did not "utter a word" at the November 2015 Sarbat Khalsa (*The Times of India* 14 Apr. 2018; PTI 13 Apr. 2018). Press Trust of India (PTI), an Indian news agency, states that the commission was set up to look into "false cases" registered against Mann, among others, during the SAD-BJP era in Punjab (PTI 13 Apr. 2018). The *Times of India* stated that, according to the Commission's report, the sedition case was "falsely" lodged against Mann by, among others, the Akalis (*The Times of India* 14 Apr. 2018). Similarly, PTI quotes a spokesperson of the Commission as stating that the Commission's "report said false cases were registered on political considerations against … Simranjit Singh Mann" (PTI 13 Apr. 2018).

*The Tribune* reports the following incidents involving members of SAD(B):

- On 15 January 2018, SAD(B) leaders and workers were detained by police during a march in Patiala; the protesters sought the registration of a case against Congress leader Harinderpal Singh (Harry Mann) "for allegedly inciting party workers to hack their SAD-BJP rivals" (*The Tribune* 16 Jan. 2018). The police released them "about one-and-a-half hours later" and allowed the protesters to march under "tight security" (*The Tribune* 16 Jan. 2018);
On 20 March 2018, leaders of the SAD(B) and the Punjab unit of the BJP, including Sukhbir Singh Badal, were detained after a protest march turned violent (The Tribune 21 Mar. 2018). According to the same source, the parties' leaders asked the protesters at their rally to maintain discipline and "not indulge in any violence," but the protesters turned violent during the march that took place on the first day of the budget session "against the alleged failure of the Congress government to honour its commitment of a complete loan waiver for farmers" (The Tribune 21 Mar. 2018).

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) [2], Kashmir News Service reported that on 25 July 2016, marchers belonging to the SAD(A) were stopped by police in Lakhanpora in the Jammu region while marching toward the Kashmir valley to "shore solidarity with the people there after civilian killings by the forces" (ACLED [2018] event 1322731). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Without providing further details or indicating which SAD party was involved, The Tribune reports that, on 24 February 2018, two policewomen were injured and one SAD candidate was attacked when SAD workers clashed with police in Bathinda city while the SAD "accused the ruling party of misusing the government machinery" (The Tribune 25 Feb. 2018). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes
[1] Elections.in provides news and information on elections in India, as compiled from "various online sources" and from the Election Commission of India (Elections.in 15 Oct. 2013). In its disclaimer, Elections.in warns that although it intends to provide reliable information, it does not warrant accuracy of the data (Elections.in 15 Oct. 2013).

[2] ACLED monitors and publishes data on dates and locations of reported incidents of political violence across, among others, South Asia and South East Asia (ACLED n.d.). It has received funding from the US Department of State and from the EU (ACLED n.d.).

**References**


Chima, Jugdep S. 1 May 2018. Telephone interview with the Research Directorate.


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**Additional Sources Consulted**

**Oral sources:** Global Institute for Sikh Studies; professor in the Department of Political Science at Panjab University; World Sikh Organization.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; ecoi.net; Factiva; Global Institute for Sikh Studies; Human Rights Watch; Sikh Siyasat News; Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar); *The Tribune*; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State; *World Sikh News*.

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