



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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16 April 2009

### IND103121.E

India: The All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF), including its objectives and activities, and its relationship with the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) (April 2006 - March 2009)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Under the provisions of the *Anti-Terrorism Act*, the Public Safety Canada website publishes a list of entities that are identified "as being associated with terrorism" (Canada n.d.). The list that was reviewed on 20 November 2008 includes the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), but does not include the All India Sikh Student Federation (AISSF) (ibid. 20 Nov. 2008). Public Safety Canada states that "ISYF was founded in 1984 in the United Kingdom as an international branch of the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF)" (ibid.). The description of ISYF further states that its objectives are "to promote Sikh philosophy and the establishment of an independent Sikh nation called Khalistan" (ibid.).

Additionally, Public Safety Canada reports that ISYF "collaborates and/or associates" with various Sikh "terrorist" groups (ibid.). A 27 November 2008 Asian News International (ANI) article indicates that there are 36 organizations listed by the Indian government as "terrorist groups" operating in India, including the ISYF. The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), a database that houses information on terrorism and low-level warfare in South Asia (n.d.a), lists AISSF and ISYF as "terrorist groups" (SATP n.d.b).

In a 5 November 2008 *Vancouver Sun* article, journalist Kim Bolan, who regularly reports on the Sikh community in British Columbia, reported that Indian visa applicants must complete a form that questions whether they or their relatives "have ever had links to militant groups," including, among six others, the AISSF and ISYF, before the applicant can visit Canada. The article reports that a Vancouver immigration lawyer acquired the questionnaire through the access to information law, and the article indicates that the form "appears to have been implemented recently and only for India" (*Vancouver Sun* 5 Nov. 2008).

Among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate, only one March 2009 news article makes reference to the continued activities of AISSF (PunjabNewslines.com 5 Mar. 2009). The PunjabNewslines.com article states that Ranjit Singh Bitoo left the Chawla-Mehta faction of AISSF and joined the faction led by Gurcharan Singh Grewal on 5 March 2009, due to the "indifferent attitude" of Chawla-Mehta leaders (ibid.). The remaining information in this Response refers only to the activities of ISYF.

A *Vancouver Sun* article written by Bolan reports that "a coalition of Canadian Sikhs" drafted an "eight-point Sikh agenda," which was made public in early April 2007 (17 Apr. 2007). This agenda included a request to have the ban on Sikh "separatist groups" lifted (*Vancouver Sun* 17 Apr. 2007). In response, then Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day stated that the government of Canada would not delist "terrorist organizations," including ISYF (ibid.).

The *Vancouver Sun* article further states that the former Canadian leader of ISYF helped to organize the 7 April 2007 Vaisakhi parade in Surrey, British Columbia (ibid.). The Vaisakhi parade is a celebration of the anniversary of the Sikh religion (CBC 28 June 2007). In 2007, this parade received media attention due to the presence of floats bearing images of dead members of ISYF and Babbar Khalsa (a banned "terrorist" group), celebrating them as "martyrs" (*Vancouver Sun* 11 May 2007; see also CBC 28 June 2007).

*The Press Trust of India* reported on the parade as well, citing the head of a Sikh temple in Surrey as saying that members of another temple, "considered a fundamentalist sect," entered a float in the parade that carried photos of "so-called Sikh martyrs" (22 Apr. 2007). According to the article, the President of the Mackenzie Institute, a Canadian non-profit organization specializing in "political instability and organized violence" (The Mackenzie Institute n.d.), stated that support for Khalistan exists "to some extent in Canada and could rise," whereas "there was no chance for the revival of the Khalistan movement in Punjab" (*The Press Trust of India* 22 Apr. 2007).

According to a 20 February 2008 *World Sikh News* article, Dabinderjit Singh, a UK-based civil servant, who is a former member of ISYF, went on a Canadian speaking tour in February 2008. The article states that Singh's tour was designed to "gather support for a new lobby group for the larger Sikh cause," which includes a review of ISYF and Babbar Khalsa's status as listed entities, though the article states that Singh was aware "that the issue could

trigger controversy and is going rather low profile on this [point]" (*World Sikh News* 20 Feb. 2008). According to the article, the emphasis of the tour was on human rights issues affecting Sikhs internationally and on creating a platform to present to politicians (ibid.).

Singh has been a civil servant with the UK's National Audit Office for almost 20 years (ibid.; see also *Evening Standard* 21 Apr. 2008). Additionally, an April 2008 *Evening Standard* article reports that the mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, appointed Singh to the board of transport for London (21 Apr. 2008). The article further reports that Singh was a member of ISYF until it was banned in the UK in 2001, after which a "successor body" called the Sikh Federation UK was created with "largely the same" senior members as ISYF (*Evening Standard* 21 Apr. 2008). The article goes on to state that "there is no suggestion that [Singh] has been personally involved in facilitating or carrying out an act of terrorism, or in ISYF activity since the group was banned" (ibid.). Following Singh's three-week Canadian speaking tour, the Indian High Commission and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) held discussions in early March 2008 regarding information that "Khalistan groups" are "regrouping" in Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and Pakistan (*Vancouver Sun* 10 Mar. 2008).

Several sources report that Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) - Pakistan's "external intelligence agency" - has plans to "revive" ISYF (SATP n.d.c.; NDTV.com 21 Oct. 2007; *The Pioneer* 9 Mar. 2008; Jamestown Foundation 9 Jan. 2009). According to the 2007 section of SATP's information on ISYF,

Intelligence agencies reportedly said that the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) ... are trying to revive militancy in Punjab through sympathisers of Sikh militant groups like the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), Khalistan Zinzabad Force (KZF) and Khalistan Commando Force (KCF). (n.d.c)

NDTV.com, a multimedia news station, reported, on 22 October 2007, that the ISI in Pakistan "is believed to be helping [Punjab terrorists living abroad] revive defunct outfits like ... the International Sikh Youth Federation," among others. Though the article lists five "Punjab terrorists," stating that "all of them are still active," the article does not include specific reference to recent ISYF activities, other than stating that Lakhbir Singh Rode is a successful fundraiser in the United States (US), UK and Canada (NDTV.com 22 Oct. 2007). In a similar article reporting on the ISI "activating its cells in Punjab," *The Tribune* identifies Rode as a member of ISYF who "keeps moving from Pakistan to other countries" (7 Jan. 2009).

Mumbai-based *Daily News and Analysis* (DNA) reports, in a 7 December 2008 article, that Indian authorities have provided Pakistani authorities with an extradition list of 20 people, 15 of whom have "Interpol Red Corner notices," while the remaining 5 people are reportedly being processed for the notices. According to Interpol, red notices are issued when "persons concerned are wanted by national jurisdictions ... and Interpol's role is to assist the national police forces in identifying or locating those persons with a view to their arrest and extradition" (n.d.). Of the 20 people, Lakhbir Singh Rode is listed as "chief" of ISYF (DNA 7 Dec. 2008). The Jamestown Foundation, a Washington-based research institute that produces the *Terrorism Monitor*, corroborates that Rode is included on the list of 20 people and states that he "is wanted in relation to cases of arms smuggling and conspiracy to attack government and political leaders in Delhi, as well as inciting religious hatred in Punjab" (9 Jan. 2009, 1). He reportedly lives in Lahore, Pakistan (Jamestown Foundation 9 Jan. 2009, 1). In an 18 December 2008 article, DNA reports that Rode is the coordinator of Khalistan Kashmir International, a "joint organisation" of "Punjab and Kashmir militants."

A 9 March 2008 article in *The Pioneer* reports that the ISI is "establishing linkages among various terror outfits and Sikh extremist leaders," citing a meeting held in Berlin in 2007 wherein three groups, BKI, the International Sikh Youth Federation - Rhode (ISYF/R) and LeT, reportedly coordinated financial and logistical support for terrorist activities. The article states that the ISYF/R, among other Sikh militant groups, is "currently being controlled by their Pakistan-based leaders" (*The Pioneer* 9 Mar. 2008). According to the Jamestown Foundation, the ISI "has supported the ISYF by providing training camps, funds, arms, and ammunition to its members" (9 Jan. 2009, 2). *The Pioneer* also reports that "ISYF/Rhode UK activist" Paramjit Singh Dhadi was arrested in December 2006 (9 Mar. 2008). The SATP similarly reports that Dhadi, referred to as an ISYF member, was arrested on 23 December 2006 by the Jalandhar police (n.d.c). The SATP reports that the following day, on 24 December 2006, three "unidentified terrorists" of the ISYF "Rode faction" were also arrested in Jalandhar, while in possession of explosives (n.d.c.).

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.

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Networks (Ecoi.net), Factiva, Global Integrity, GlobalSecurity.org, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group, *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, Ministry of External Affairs - India, Rediff.com, Sikh Student Federation (SSF), United Kingdom (UK) Border Agency, United States (US) Department of State.

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