Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

India Today's Nikhil Gupta sentencing report: accurate on the facts, misleading in its framing

India Today's November 20, 2026 report on the 235-month sentence handed to Nikhil Gupta is factually correct on the core court record, but the Lab assesses the item as Misleading for presenting India's "Khalistani terrorist" label as unattributed fact and for blurring conduct established by a guilty plea with unresolved allegations.

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NARRATIVES
Labelling Sikh Individuals as Terrorists Without Evidence · Portraying Advocacy for Khalistan as Terrorism

OUR ASSESSMENT

India Today's November 20, 2026 report discusses Nikhil Gupta's 235-month prison sentence for participating in an assassination conspiracy targeting Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. However, the article repeatedly describes Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without explaining that this designation originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, rather than the US court that sentenced Gupta.

The report identifies Vikash Yadav and the assassination arrangements but gives limited attention to his alleged role as an Indian government employee and omits prosecution records linking discussions of the Pannun plot to Hardeep Singh Nijjar's assassination. It also devotes considerable attention to Gupta's remorse and personal circumstances while continuing to describe aspects of his admitted conduct as alleged.

The Lab identifies misleading terminology, selective contextual framing and the imprecise distinction between established criminal conduct and unresolved allegations as the principal information-integrity concerns.

THE CLAIM

Nikhil Gupta sentenced to over 19 years in US jail in Pannun murder plot

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 20, 2026, India Today published a report concerning the sentencing of Indian national Nikhil Gupta to 235 months in a United States federal prison for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York. The article described the sentencing proceedings, the undercover investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the alleged involvement of Indian government employee Vikash Yadav.

The report repeatedly identified Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without explaining that this designation originates from India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation. It also devoted considerable attention to Gupta's expressions of remorse and personal circumstances while omitting significant information from American prosecution records concerning the wider circumstances of the assassination conspiracy.

The verdict

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assesses the article as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3/5. Of the 16 claims examined, 13 were classified as True and three as Misleading. The principal concerns involve the unqualified use of India's terrorism designation, the continued characterization of Gupta's admitted criminal conduct as merely alleged, and the presentation of the foiled assassination as having caused no physical harm without addressing the wider context documented by prosecutors.

The claims

The Lab examined the article's account of Gupta's sentencing and the criminal proceedings. US District Judge Victor Marrero sentenced Gupta to 235 months, equivalent to 19 years and seven months, for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Pannun on American soil. Gupta had pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. These claims were classified as True.

The review also examined the prosecution's account of the assassination arrangements. US authorities identified Vikash Yadav as Gupta's co-defendant and alleged that he directed the operation while employed by the Indian government. According to the prosecution, Yadav instructed Gupta to contact an individual he believed could arrange a contract killing. That individual was a confidential source working with the DEA, who introduced Gupta to an undercover officer posing as a contract killer.

The claims concerning the proposed $100,000 assassination payment and the $15,000 advance arranged around June 9, 2023, were also classified as True. These arrangements form part of the documented planning of the assassination conspiracy. The allegations concerning Yadav's individual criminal responsibility remain unresolved, while Gupta's participation was established through his guilty plea.

The three misleading elements

The characterization of Pannun as a terrorist

The article repeatedly describes Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without identifying the Government of India as the source of that classification. India designated Pannun under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in July 2020. However, this domestic designation is not a finding made by the American court that sentenced Gupta.

The US Department of Justice identifies Pannun as an attorney and political activist targeted because of his advocacy for an independent Khalistan and criticism of the Indian government. Introducing the intended assassination victim through India's terrorism designation risks conflating Sikh political advocacy with criminal conduct, particularly in reporting about a conspiracy to kill him because of his political activities.

Gupta's established involvement described as merely alleged

The second misleading element concerns the continued use of allegation-based language when describing Gupta's involvement in the assassination conspiracy. Although the article acknowledges his guilty plea, several passages continue to refer to his efforts to arrange the killing as alleged.

Gupta pleaded guilty in February 2026 and was sentenced in November 2026. His criminal participation was therefore established. The allegations against Vikash Yadav remain subject to separate proceedings, but that uncertainty does not extend to Gupta's admitted conduct. Applying allegation-based language without maintaining this distinction can obscure the significance of the criminal proceedings.

The presentation of the attempted assassination as causing no physical harm

The article gives considerable attention to Gupta's expressions of remorse, including his statement that the attempted assassination did not result in anyone being killed or physically injured. This is factually true when referring specifically to the foiled plot against Pannun. However, the presentation provides no corresponding discussion of the wider circumstances documented in the US prosecution record.

According to the Department of Justice, Gupta discussed the June 18, 2023 assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar during communications concerning the planned killing of Pannun. Prosecutors reported that

Gupta referred to Nijjar as another target and discussed proceeding with Pannun's assassination without further delay following Nijjar's death.

These communications do not establish Gupta's responsibility for Nijjar's murder. Nevertheless, they provide significant context concerning the threats directed against Sikh political activists in North America. Presenting the absence of physical injury in the foiled Pannun plot without this context narrows the reader's understanding of the broader circumstances surrounding the conspiracy.

Context

The article identifies Vikash Yadav and discusses the assassination arrangements but provides limited information about his position within the Indian government. US prosecutors alleged that Yadav was employed by India's Cabinet Secretariat, which houses the Research and Analysis Wing, during the period relevant to the conspiracy. The prosecution described his alleged involvement in recruiting Gupta, providing information about Pannun and directing the assassination arrangements.

The article also omits the documented communications concerning Nijjar's assassination. These records are important to understanding the political circumstances surrounding the attempted killing of Pannun, although they do not resolve responsibility for the separate murder.

The report reflects a recurring narrative pattern in which Indian domestic security classifications are prominently applied to Sikh political activists who have been targeted by violence. In this case, the intended victim is repeatedly described through terrorism-related terminology, while significant evidence concerning the alleged government-employee connection and wider targeting of Sikh activists receives comparatively limited attention.

SDL Review

India Today's coverage of Gupta's sentencing illustrates how the presentation of established criminal proceedings can be shaped by the terminology used to characterize the intended victim. The Lab's assessment of 16 claims identified 13 as True and three as Misleading, with the principal concerns involving the treatment of Pannun's political identity, the distinction between admitted criminal conduct and unresolved allegations, and the contextual framing of the assassination conspiracy.

The repeated description of Pannun as a terrorist introduces India's domestic security designation into an American criminal proceeding without clearly identifying its legal origin. The continued use of allegation-based terminology concerning Gupta's admitted involvement further obscures the distinction between established criminal responsibility and charges that remain unresolved against other individuals.

The article's emphasis on Gupta's remorse and the absence of physical injuries in the foiled assassination also leaves out significant information about communications referencing Nijjar's murder. Although these communications do not establish responsibility for the separate killing, their omission limits the context in which the attempted assassination of a Sikh political activist is understood.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab identifies misleading terminology, selective contextual framing and insufficient distinction between established criminal conduct and unresolved allegations as the article's principal information-integrity concerns.

Gupta's participation in the assassination conspiracy was established through his guilty plea and subsequent sentence. The allegations against Yadav remain unresolved, while India's designation of Pannun does not

determine the findings of the American criminal court. The case underscores the importance of distinguishing peaceful Sikh political advocacy from allegations of criminal conduct and examining the documented evidence concerning violence directed against Sikh political activists.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	Nikhil Gupta was sentenced to over 19 years in a US jail in the Pannun murder plot.	TRUE
02	US District Judge Victor Marrero of the Southern District of New York handed Gupta a 235-month prison sentence.	TRUE
03	Gupta was sentenced for his role in a foiled plot to assassinate Gurpatwant Singh Pannun on American soil.	TRUE
04	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani terrorist.	MISLEADING
05	US prosecutors alleged that individuals linked to the Indian government were involved in the conspiracy.	TRUE
06	Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire.	TRUE
07	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire.	TRUE
08	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit money laundering.	TRUE
09	Gupta's efforts to arrange Pannun's assassination remained merely alleged.	MISLEADING
10	Vikash Yadav was Gupta's co-defendant and was accused of directing the operation.	TRUE
11	Yadav allegedly instructed Gupta to arrange the assassination through a criminal contact.	TRUE
12	Gupta contacted a person he believed was a criminal associate, who was a DEA confidential source.	TRUE
13	The assassination arrangements involved an undercover DEA officer posing as a contract killer.	TRUE
14	The proposed payment for Pannun's assassination was $100,000.	TRUE
15	An advance payment of $15,000 was arranged around June 9, 2023.	TRUE
16	The attempted assassination of Pannun did not result in anyone being killed or physically injured.	MISLEADING

SOURCES

01 India Today — Nikhil Gupta Sentenced to Over 19 Years in US Jail in Pannun Murder Plot, November 20, 2026

02 Original article under assessment. Contains the repeated terrorism-related description of Pannun, the sentencing account, Yadav's alleged role and Gupta's mitigation statements.

03 https://www.indiatoday.in/world/indians-abroad/story/indian-national-nikhil-gupta-sentenced-to-over-19-years-in-us-jail-in-pannun-mu

04 United States Department of Justice — Nikhil Gupta Sentencing, November 20, 2026

05 Primary record confirming the sentence, the alleged direction of the conspiracy by an Indian government employee, the assassination arrangements, Nijjar-related communications and Gupta's arrest in the Czech Republic.

06 https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/indian-national-sentenced-235-months-prison-plotting-assassinate-us-citizen-new-york

07 United States Department of Justice — Nikhil Gupta Guilty Plea, February 13, 2026

08 Confirms Gupta's guilty plea to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering, distinguishing his established criminal responsibility from allegations against others.

09 https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/indian-national-pleads-guilty-plotting-assassinate-us-citizen-new-york-city

10 United States Department of Justice — Charges Against Vikash Yadav, October 17, 2024

11 Official announcement identifying Yadav as the Indian government employee accused of directing the conspiracy and documenting his employment in the Cabinet Secretariat during the relevant period.

12 https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-attorney-announces-charges-against-indian-government-employee-connection-foiled

13 United States Department of Justice — Second Superseding Indictment, October 17, 2024

14 Primary court filing detailing the allegations concerning Yadav's role, surveillance of Pannun, payment arrangements and communications following Nijjar's assassination. The allegations against Yadav remain unresolved.

15 https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/media/1373851/dl?inline=

16 Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs — UAPA Terrorist Designations, July 1, 2020

17 Establishes that the terrorism designation applied to Pannun originates from India's domestic legislation, rather than the US criminal proceedings.

18 https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1635710

19 Canadian Security Intelligence Service — Public Report 2025, Operations and Analysis

20 Provides Canadian national-security context concerning foreign interference and distinguishes lawful political advocacy for Khalistan from criminal violence.

21 https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/publications/csis-public-report-2025/operations-and-analysis.html

Sikh Disinformation Lab

About Sikh Disinformation Lab

Sikh Disinformation Lab is an independent, evidence-based programme founded and hosted by the World Sikh Organization of Canada. It monitors, analyses and publicly documents disinformation affecting Sikhs.

The Lab examines claims against evidence, publishes assessments with that evidence attached, and tracks coordinated campaigns over time. Every published assessment names what was claimed, where it appeared, what the review found, and what that assessment rests on. Where an item makes several distinct claims, each is assessed separately.

Assessments are made against the methodology framework in force at the time of publication. That framework is public, versioned, and reviewed at each phase gate; a material change produces a new version rather than a silent edit. The full method is published at sikhdisinfolab.ca/method.

Corrections are dated entries, never silent edits. Where a published assessment is found to be wrong or incomplete, the correction is recorded against it and listed at sikhdisinfolab.ca/corrections. If you believe something published here is inaccurate, write to the programme and it will be reviewed.

Assessments are the responsibility of Sikh Disinformation Lab.

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