Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

India TV report on Nikhil Gupta sentencing is accurate on facts, misleading in framing

An India TV article circulated via Dailyhunt accurately reports Nikhil Gupta's 235-month US sentence, but labels the intended victim a "Khalistani terrorist" without attributing the designation to Indian law. The Lab's verdict: Misleading.

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

India TV reports Nikhil Gupta's 235-month prison sentence and provides details of the assassination conspiracy targeting Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. However, the article describes Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without clarifying in its headline or opening paragraph that this designation originates from India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation, rather than the US court.

The report acknowledges the alleged involvement of Indian government employee Vikash Yadav and the political motive identified by prosecutors. Its main information-integrity concern is the prominent use of criminalizing terminology for the intended assassination victim, including the unsupported description “self-styled” and the failure to specify that Sikhs for Justice is banned in India. These descriptions contribute to a recurring framing pattern that does not clearly distinguish Sikh political advocacy from allegations of criminal conduct.

THE CLAIM

Nikhil Gupta gets over 19 years in US jail in plot to kill Khalistani terrorist Pannun

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 20, 2026, India TV published a report concerning the sentencing of Indian national Nikhil Gupta, who received 235 months in a United States federal prison for participating in a murder-for-hire conspiracy targeting Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York. The report, subsequently distributed through Dailyhunt, described Gupta's guilty plea, the sentencing proceedings and the undercover operation that prevented the planned assassination.

The article identified Judge Victor Marrero as the sentencing judge and reported that Gupta expressed regret during the hearing. It also included Pannun's statement that the assassination threat had disrupted his legal practice for more than 1,200 days. The report detailed the prosecution's account of Gupta's involvement, including the alleged direction of Indian government employee Vikash Yadav, the use of a confidential source working with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the financial arrangements associated with the planned killing.

However, the article introduced Pannun in its headline and opening paragraph as a “Khalistani terrorist” without immediately identifying the Government of India as the authority responsible for that designation. Although the report acknowledged India's designation toward its conclusion, its introductory framing presented the characterization without explaining its jurisdictional basis.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assessed 14 claims in the article, identifying 12 as True and two as Misleading. The principal concerns relate to the characterization of the intended assassination victim and the continued use of allegation-based language when describing Gupta's participation in a conspiracy to which he had already pleaded guilty.

The Lab assessed the item as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3 out of 5.

What the review found

The Lab's review confirmed the principal judicial developments described in the article. On November 20, 2026, a US federal court sentenced Gupta to 235 months in prison. Gupta had pleaded guilty in February 2026 to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. His criminal participation was therefore established before the sentencing report was published.

The review also examined the article's description of the assassination arrangements. The US Department of Justice documented Gupta's contact with an individual he believed to be a criminal associate, who was actually a confidential source working with the DEA. The source introduced Gupta to a purported contract killer who was an undercover officer. Prosecutors described an agreement to pay $100,000 for the assassination and an advance payment of $15,000 arranged around June 9, 2023.

The article further identified Vikash Yadav as Gupta's co-defendant and reported the prosecution's allegation that at least one Indian government employee participated in directing the conspiracy. Prosecutors maintained that Pannun was targeted because of his political ideology. These findings are significant because they establish the political circumstances surrounding the attempted assassination, although Yadav's individual criminal responsibility remains subject to separate legal proceedings.

Pannun's statement concerning the disruption of his legal practice was also included in the review as an attributed courtroom account. His description of the personal and professional consequences of the assassination threat is relevant to understanding the impact of the conspiracy on the intended victim.

The article's reference to Sikhs for Justice as a banned organization was classified as True with an important qualification. The organization is banned in India, but the report does not identify the jurisdiction in which the prohibition applies. This distinction matters because a designation or prohibition under Indian legislation does not automatically determine the organization's legal status in other countries.

The two misleading elements

The first concerns the description of Pannun. The article asserts that Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a "Khalistani terrorist". The Lab rates this Misleading. The designation originates from India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, rather than from the US court that sentenced Gupta. The article does not clarify that attribution in its headline or opening paragraph. The report also uses the description "self-styled", which the analyst records as unsupported.

The second concerns the characterisation of Gupta's own role. The article's framing that Gupta's role in the assassination conspiracy remains merely alleged is rated Misleading, because that wording is applied to conduct established through his guilty plea.

Context: Sikh political advocacy and the assassination conspiracy

The wider significance of the case lies in the political motive identified by US prosecutors. According to the Department of Justice, Gupta participated in a conspiracy directed against a Sikh political activist who advocated for an independent Khalistan and publicly criticized the Indian government.

The prosecution's account described a planned killing involving surveillance, personal information about the intended victim, financial arrangements and communications concerning the timing of the assassination. American authorities identified the case as involving an effort to silence a political critic through violence.

These circumstances are important when examining how Pannun is characterized in media coverage. His advocacy for Sikh self-determination is a documented political position, while India's designation of him as a terrorist reflects its domestic legal classification. Neither fact changes the criminal responsibility established against Gupta for participating in the assassination conspiracy.

The distinction also extends to Sikhs for Justice. The article describes the organization as banned without initially specifying the relevant jurisdiction. India's prohibition is an established legal fact, but the existence of that prohibition should not be treated as determining the legality of peaceful advocacy for Khalistan in the United States or Canada.

Canadian intelligence authorities have expressly recognized that peaceful advocacy for Khalistan is lawful political activity in Canada. Criminal conduct involving violence must be evaluated separately through evidence concerning particular individuals and actions.

The article's framing is therefore relevant beyond the immediate sentencing. It illustrates how descriptions originating from Indian security legislation can be incorporated into reporting on Sikh political activists without consistently explaining their legal scope.

Recurring narrative patterns

The India TV report reflects a recurring pattern in coverage of the Pannun assassination conspiracy in which the intended victim is identified through terrorism-related terminology even when the central development concerns criminal proceedings against individuals accused or convicted of targeting him.

Similar descriptions have appeared in reports published by ANI, Organiser and other Indian news outlets covering Gupta's sentencing. In some reports, India's designation is acknowledged later in the article, while the headline presents it without qualification. This repeated placement can reinforce the characterization of a Sikh political activist through the terminology of Indian security legislation.

A related pattern involves the use of descriptions such as “self-styled” when referring to individuals associated with organizations advocating Sikh self-determination. Without an evidentiary explanation, such wording introduces an editorial judgment into what would otherwise be a factual description of the person's organizational role.

The India TV article also demonstrates the importance of distinguishing established criminal conduct from unresolved allegations. Gupta's guilty plea settled his personal participation in the conspiracy, while the charges against Yadav remain unresolved. Maintaining this distinction is necessary to prevent the seriousness of the established criminal proceedings from being obscured.

The recurrence of similar terminology across multiple publications is relevant to the Lab's monitoring of narrative amplification. However, shared terminology or common news-agency reporting does not independently establish coordination or deliberate deception.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	Nikhil Gupta was accused of taking part in a murder-for-hire conspiracy targeting Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States.	TRUE
02	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani terrorist.	MISLEADING
03	Nikhil Gupta was sentenced to over 19 years in US jail.	TRUE
04	Pannun said the assassination plot disrupted his legal practice for over 1,200 days.	TRUE
05	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and money laundering.	TRUE
06	Gupta and others plotted to kill Pannun because of his political ideology.	TRUE
07	At least one Indian government employee was implicated in directing the conspiracy.	TRUE
08	Vikash Yadav was named as Gupta's co-defendant.	TRUE
09	Gupta contacted a person he believed was a criminal associate, who was actually a DEA confidential source.	TRUE
10	A supposed contract killer was an undercover DEA officer.	TRUE
11	The arranged payment for the assassination was $100,000.	TRUE
12	An advance payment of $15,000 was arranged around June 9, 2023.	TRUE
13	Sikhs for Justice is a banned organization.	TRUE
14	Gupta's role in the assassination conspiracy remains merely alleged.	MISLEADING

SOURCES

01 https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/indiatvnews-epaper-intvnews/nikhil+gupta+gets+over+19+years+in+us+jail+in+plot+to+kill+k

02 India TV — Nikhil Gupta Gets Over 19 Years in US Jail in Plot to Kill Khalistani Terrorist Pannun, November 20, 2026

03 Article assessed, reproduced on Dailyhunt. Contains the claims concerning Gupta's sentencing, Pannun's designation, the prosecution's evidence and the alleged involvement of Vikash Yadav.

04 https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/indiatvnews-epaper-intvnews/nikhil+gupta+gets+over+19+years+in+us+jail+in+plot+to+kill+k

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

06 Primary official record confirming Gupta's 235-month prison sentence, the political circumstances of the attempted assassination, the alleged role of Vikash Yadav and the financial arrangements.

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

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

09 Official confirmation that Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Establishes the distinction between his admitted criminal participation and unresolved allegations against others.

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

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

12 Official prosecution announcement identifying Yadav as the Indian government employee charged with directing the assassination conspiracy. The charges against him remain separate from Gupta's conviction.

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

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

15 Official announcement confirming India's designation of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun under its domestic anti-terrorism legislation. Establishes the jurisdictional origin of the terminology used by India TV.

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

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

18 Official Canadian intelligence assessment recognizing peaceful advocacy for Khalistan as lawful political activity and distinguishing it from conduct involving violence.

19 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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