Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

Maha Media report on Nikhil Gupta sentencing labels Pannun a "terrorist" without attribution

An Indian outlet's November 21, 2026 report on the 19-year-and-seven-month US sentence handed to Nikhil Gupta describes Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist" without noting that the designation comes from Indian law, not the American case. The Lab assesses the report as Misleading.

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

Maha Media's November 21, 2026 report discusses Nikhil Gupta's 19-year-and-seven-month prison sentence for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. However, the article identifies Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without explaining that this designation originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, rather than the American criminal proceedings.

The report also omits significant information concerning the alleged direction of the assassination conspiracy by Indian government employee Vikash Yadav, whose identity was publicly disclosed by US prosecutors in October 2024. It provides no context concerning the political motive, the organized assassination arrangements or documented communications referring to Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing in Canada.

The article reflects a recurring framing pattern in which India's domestic security classification receives prominence while the targeting of Sikh political activists and allegations of government-linked involvement receive limited attention. Its principal concerns are misleading terminology, imprecise descriptions of the criminal charges and selective contextual framing.

THE CLAIM

US sentences Nikhil Gupta to 19 years

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 21, 2026, mahamedianews.com published a report headlined "US sentences Nikhil Gupta to 19 years." Datelined New Delhi, the piece states that a US court has sentenced Indian national Nikhil Gupta to 19 years and seven months in prison "for conspiring to assassinate Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun."

The Lab's assessment

The Lab assesses the report as Misleading. The core sentencing facts are accurate. The problems lie in the terminology used to describe the target of the conspiracy, the imprecise rendering of the criminal charge, and the context the report leaves out.

The claims, one by one

"A US court has sentenced Nikhil Gupta to 19 years and seven months in prison." True. The sentence length as reported is accurate.

"Nikhil Gupta is an Indian national." True.

"Nikhil Gupta was sentenced for conspiring to assassinate Gurpatwant Singh Pannun." True. Gupta's sentence relates to participation in a conspiracy to assassinate Pannun.

"Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani terrorist." Misleading. The report presents this as a plain description. The designation originates with India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, a domestic Indian security classification, and not with the American criminal proceedings in which Gupta was convicted and sentenced. Pannun is a Sikh political activist, and in the US case he is the intended victim of the conspiracy. Carrying India's domestic label into coverage of a US prosecution, without attributing it, presents a contested national classification as established fact.

"Gupta pleaded guilty to paying for a contract killing." True, but the legal wording is misleading: the actual charge was murder-for-hire.

"Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder." True in substance. The specific offence, however, was conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire. Imprecise descriptions of the charge obscure the structure of the offence the US court addressed.

What the report omits

Beyond the terminology, the Lab notes significant missing context.

The report makes no mention of the alleged direction of the assassination conspiracy by Indian government employee Vikash Yadav, whose identity was publicly disclosed by US prosecutors in October 2024. That disclosure is central to understanding the case as something other than a freelance criminal venture.

The report also provides no context concerning the political motive behind the plot, the organized nature of the assassination arrangements, or the documented communications referring to the killing of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

Why the framing matters

Taken together, these choices produce a familiar pattern: India's domestic security classification is given prominence in the opening line, while the targeting of a Sikh political activist and the allegations of involvement by a person employed by the Indian government receive little or no attention.

A reader relying on this report would come away with accurate sentencing figures and an inaccurate sense of what the US court case established. The effect is to recast a murder-for-hire prosecution with alleged state-linked direction as a straightforward criminal matter involving a designated extremist.

The Lab's assessment is directed at the content of the report, specifically its unattributed terminology, its imprecise description of the charges, and its selective contextual framing. Severity is assessed at 3 of 5.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	A US court has sentenced Nikhil Gupta to 19 years and seven months in prison.	TRUE
02	Nikhil Gupta is an Indian national.	TRUE
03	Nikhil Gupta was sentenced for conspiring to assassinate Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.	TRUE
04	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani terrorist.	MISLEADING
05	Gupta pleaded guilty to paying for a contract killing.	TRUE
06	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 Maha Media — US Sentences Nikhil Gupta to 19 Years, November 21, 2026

02 Original article assessed. Contains the characterization of Pannun, Gupta's sentence, guilty plea and courtroom apology.

03 https://mahamedianews.com/en/world-news/news/us-sentences-nikhil-gupta-to-19-years

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

05 Primary record confirming Gupta's prison sentence and documenting the alleged direction of the conspiracy by an Indian government employee, including the Nijjar-related communications.

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 Establishes the precise offences: murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

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 the Indian government employee charged in connection with directing the assassination conspiracy.

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

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

14 Documents the origin of the Indian legal designation used to characterize Pannun.

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

16 Associated Press — Man Gets 19½ Years in Prison for Plot to Kill Sikh Separatist Leader, November 20, 2026

17 Independent courtroom reporting confirming Gupta's apology and the sentencing proceedings.

18 https://apnews.com/article/862cf5a608b00694f2cc661ece763134

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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