Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

Nikhil Gupta's Sentencing: How Lokmat Times Frames the Targeting of a Sikh Political Activist

A Lokmat Times item carried on Dailyhunt accurately reports the 235-month US sentence handed to Nikhil Gupta, but opens by describing Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as "a designated terrorist and Khalistani separatist" without immediately attributing that classification to India. The Lab assesses the item as Misleading.

PUBLISHED
24 November 2026

SOURCE POSTED
20 November 2026

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

Lokmat Times' report on Nikhil Gupta's 235-month prison sentence foregrounds India's terrorism designation of Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun while providing limited context about the alleged government-employee direction of the assassination conspiracy. Although the report eventually attributes the designation to India, its opening presents the classification without distinguishing it from the findings of the US criminal court.

The article also continues to identify the implicated Indian government employee as CC-1, despite American prosecutors publicly naming and charging Vikash Yadav in October 2024. It omits significant details concerning the organized planning of Pannun's assassination and the wider circumstances documented in US prosecution records.

The report reflects a recurring narrative pattern in which Indian domestic security classifications receive prominence while the political targeting of Sikh activists receives comparatively limited attention. Its disclosure that the text was refined using AI and automatically published without human editorial review raises an additional concern about editorial oversight.

THE CLAIM

Indian National Nikhil Gupta Jailed for 19 Years in US for Pannun Assassination Plot

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

In November 2026, Lokmat Times published a report, distributed through Dailyhunt, concerning the sentencing of Indian national Nikhil Gupta to 235 months in a US federal prison for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York.

The article described Pannun as a “designated terrorist and Khalistani separatist” in its opening paragraph while reporting Gupta's guilty plea, the undercover investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the alleged involvement of an Indian government employee.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assessed ten claims from the report, identifying nine as True and one as Misleading. The principal concern lies in the characterization of the intended assassination victim and the limited attention given to the alleged government-linked direction of the conspiracy.

The Lab's verdict on the item overall is Misleading.

What the review found

The Lab's review examined Gupta's sentencing, criminal charges and the investigation that prevented the assassination. The US Department of Justice confirmed that Gupta received a 235-month prison sentence

after pleading guilty to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

The review also examined the article's description of the DEA investigation, including the undercover operation that disrupted the planned killing. These claims are supported by American prosecution records, which document Gupta's involvement in arranging the assassination.

The article also reproduces India's October 2024 statement that the government employee implicated in the conspiracy was no longer employed by India. This statement concerns the individual's subsequent employment status and does not address allegations about his conduct while serving in government.

The US prosecution identified Vikash Yadav as the Indian government employee accused of recruiting Gupta and directing the assassination arrangements. Although the article refers to this involvement, it continues to use the original identifier “CC-1,” despite American prosecutors publicly naming and charging Yadav in October 2024. His individual criminal responsibility remains subject to separate proceedings.

The misleading characterization of Pannun

The Lab identified the article's description of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as its principal framing concern. The report introduces him through the combined description “designated terrorist and Khalistani separatist” without immediately identifying the Government of India as the source of the terrorism designation.

Pannun advocates for an independent Khalistan, but that political position must be distinguished from allegations of criminal conduct. India designated him under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in July 2020. The designation is not a finding made by the US court that sentenced Gupta.

The article eventually attributes the designation to India, but its introductory wording gives prominence to an Indian domestic security classification rather than Pannun's position as a Sikh political activist targeted in an assassination conspiracy.

This distinction matters because the American criminal proceedings concerned an attempt to kill Pannun because of his political activities. Presenting the intended victim primarily through security-related terminology risks conflating peaceful Sikh political advocacy with criminality.

Context omitted

The report provides limited information about the alleged role of Vikash Yadav, despite the availability of detailed prosecution records concerning his government employment and the direction of the assassination conspiracy. It also omits the documented payment arrangements, surveillance of Pannun and communications referencing the assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

According to the US Department of Justice, Gupta discussed Nijjar's killing during communications concerning the planned assassination of Pannun. These statements do not establish responsibility for Nijjar's murder, but they provide important context concerning the targeting of Sikh political activists in North America.

The article reflects a recurring narrative pattern in which Indian security classifications receive prominence while the alleged institutional involvement in violence against Sikh political activists receives comparatively limited attention. Similar framing has appeared in other Indian reports concerning Gupta's sentencing, illustrating how particular terminology can circulate through syndicated news coverage.

Editorial oversight

The item carries a disclosure that its text was refined using AI and automatically published without human editorial review. Where a report concerns an active criminal matter involving allegations against a foreign government employee, the absence of human editorial review raises an additional concern about accuracy and framing.

Assessment

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assesses the Lokmat Times report as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3/5. Of the ten claims examined, nine were classified as True and one as Misleading. The central issue is the article's framing of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun through India's terrorism designation while providing limited context concerning the alleged government-linked direction of the assassination conspiracy.

The report also retains the outdated CC-1 identifier despite the public identification of Vikash Yadav in October 2024. Its omission of the broader prosecution record, including communications concerning Nijjar's assassination, limits readers' understanding of the circumstances surrounding the targeting of Sikh political activists.

The article's AI-assisted publication without human editorial review raises an additional concern about editorial oversight and the reproduction of existing security-related framing.

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 illustrates how the use of jurisdiction-specific security classifications and selective contextual information can shape public understanding of violence directed against Sikh political activists. Peaceful advocacy for Sikh self-determination must be distinguished from allegations of criminal conduct, and reporting on assassination conspiracies should preserve that distinction.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	A US Federal Court sentenced Indian national Nikhil Gupta to 235 months, or over 19 years, in prison.	TRUE
02	Nikhil Gupta was convicted for his involvement in a thwarted plot to assassinate Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York.	TRUE
03	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani separatist.	MISLEADING
04	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire.	TRUE
05	Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire.	TRUE
06	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit money laundering.	TRUE
07	A DEA undercover operation disrupted the assassination conspiracy.	TRUE
08	The DEA investigated Gupta's efforts to arrange Pannun's killing.	TRUE
09	India's Ministry of External Affairs stated in 2024 that the implicated government employee was no longer employed by India.	TRUE
10	An Indian government employee recruited Gupta to arrange Pannun's assassination.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 Lokmat Times English / Dailyhunt — Indian National Nikhil Gupta Jailed for 19 Years in US for Pannun Assassination Plot, November 2026

02 Original report assessed, including the terrorism-related characterization of Pannun and the disclosure concerning AI-assisted publication without human editorial review.

03 https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/lokmattimes+english-epaper-lokmaten/indian+national+nikhil+gupta+jailed+for+19+years+in-

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

05 Primary confirmation of Gupta's sentence and the prosecution's account of the assassination conspiracy, including the alleged government-employee connection and communications concerning Nijjar's killing.

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 Official confirmation of the three offences admitted by Gupta, establishing his criminal participation in the attempted assassination.

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 Designations, July 1, 2020

14 Primary record establishing the Indian legal origin of the terrorism designation applied to Pannun.

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

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.

This project has been made possible with support from the Government of Canada.

> This document was generated from the published assessment at sikhdisinfolab.ca. The version of record is the one on the site, which carries any corrections issued after this file was made.