Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

OpIndia article on USCIRF chair dismisses documented evidence of transnational repression

An OpIndia piece republished on DailyHunt asserts that allegations of Indian involvement in violence against Sikh activists abroad are conspiracy theories. The Lab assesses the article as Misleading: that characterization disregards US prosecution and Canadian police evidence.

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23 November 2026

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20 November 2026

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

OpIndia's November 20, 2026 article attacks USCIRF chair Asif Mahmood following the Commission's criticism of India's electoral-roll revisions. Although the article reproduces statements and identifiesareas of political disagreement, it relies heavily on personal attacks, selective legal references and unsupported dismissals of religious-freedom concerns.

Its most consequential claim for Sikh communities is that allegations of Indian involvement in violence against Sikh political activists overseas are conspiracy theories. This characterization disregards substantial evidence from Canadian authorities and the US Department of Justice. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in an assassination conspiracy targeting Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, and the US prosecution identified an Indian government employee as directing the scheme.

The article reflects recurring narratives that characterize international scrutiny of Sikh rights and transnational repression as foreign interference, while portraying allegations involving Indian state-linked activity as invented or politically motivated. The serious 2017 statement attributed to Mahmood concerning Hindus and Sikhs requires independent authentication and should be evaluated separately from the documented failures in the article's reasoning.

THE CLAIM

USCIRF under Asif Mahmood, fearmongers about India and its electoral democracy: Read how a Pakistani-origin rabid Islamist is heading the US Commission

THE ANALYSIS

Original publisher: OpIndia
Republished by: Dailyhunt
Publication date: November 20, 2026
Assessment: Misleading, Unsupported and Weaponized Claims
Severity: 4/5

What was published

On 20 November 2026, OpIndia published an article, carried on DailyHunt, headlined "USCIRF under Asif Mahmood, fearmongers about India and its electoral democracy: Read how a Pakistani-origin rabid Islamist is heading the US Commission."

The piece responds to criticism issued the previous day by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) regarding India's electoral-roll revisions. It states that the Commission "spread canards about Indian" institutions and characterizes concerns about India's alleged involvement in the killing of Sikh activists in the United States, Canada and Pakistan as a "theory."

Although the immediate subject was electoral-roll revisions, the article developed a broader attack on Mahmood's credibility by revisiting his previous statements about India. It repeatedly emphasized his Pakistani origin and

religious identity, portraying his criticism of the Indian government as evidence of hostility toward India rather than examining each allegation on its merits.

Of particular relevance to Sikh communities, the article dismissed concerns about Indian involvement in violence against Sikh political activists in the United States, Canada and Pakistan as conspiracy theories. It also accused international news organizations, including The Guardian and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, of falsely implicating India in overseas killings.

The article further reproduced an alleged 2017 social-media statement attributed to Mahmood containing hostile language toward Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan. It used this allegation to question his credibility as a human-rights advocate and his suitability to lead USCIRF.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab identifies the article's treatment of Sikh political activists, its dismissal of documented transnational repression concerns and its attempts to discredit international religious-freedom scrutiny as the principal issues requiring examination.

The Lab's assessment

The Lab assesses the article as Misleading, with a severity rating of 4 out of 5.

The article does reproduce statements accurately in places and identifies genuine areas of political disagreement. However, it relies heavily on personal attacks, selective legal references and unsupported dismissals of religious-freedom concerns.

The claim with the greatest consequence for Sikh communities is the article's framing of allegations of Indian involvement in violence against Sikh political activists overseas as conspiracy theories. That framing disregards substantial evidence from Canadian authorities and the US Department of Justice. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in an assassination conspiracy targeting Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The US prosecution identified an Indian government employee as directing the scheme.

The article reflects a recurring pattern in which international scrutiny of Sikh rights and transnational repression is recast as foreign interference, while allegations involving Indian state-linked activity are portrayed as invented or politically motivated.

The article also attributes a serious 2017 statement to Mahmood concerning Hindus and Sikhs. That attribution requires independent authentication and has not been assessed by the Lab. It should be evaluated separately from the documented failures in the article's reasoning.

##The central problem

The article's most significant problem from a Sikh community perspective is its presentation of concerns about violence against Sikh political activists overseas as fabricated or politically motivated, despite substantial evidence documented by American and Canadian authorities.

OpIndia characterizes Mahmood's references to Indian involvement in overseas violence as conspiracy theories and describes international reporting on these allegations as attempts to falsely implicate India. This framing overlooks the distinction between allegations that remain under investigation and evidence already established through official criminal proceedings.

By the time the article was published, the United States had prosecuted Nikhil Gupta for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York. Gupta pleaded guilty in February 2026, and US prosecutors identified an Indian government employee as having directed the scheme.

Canadian authorities had also publicly documented serious concerns involving threats and violence against Sikh political activists. In October 2024, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police reported evidence linking agents of the Government of India to homicides, violent activity, organized crime and intimidation in Canada.

These findings do not establish responsibility for every alleged incident involving Sikh activists overseas. They do, however, provide a substantial evidentiary foundation that contradicts the article's categorical treatment of such concerns as conspiracy theories.

The article also employs terrorism-related terminology when discussing Sikh political activists reportedly targeted abroad. This is significant because it introduces the alleged victims through a criminalizing description while questioning the credibility of investigations into threats against them.

The result is a narrative in which documented concerns about violence against Sikh activists receive less scrutiny than the political identity and perceived loyalties of the individuals raising those concerns.

Claim by claim

1. That USCIRF accused India of targeting Muslims through electoral-roll revisions and deportations. True. The attribution is verified; USCIRF published the criticism on 19 November 2026.

2. That the Special Intensive Revision removes only deceased, relocated, duplicate or untraceable voters. Misleading as an exhaustive claim. These are official categories, but they do not rule out erroneous removals.

3. That there is no evidence Muslim citizens have been unfairly excluded from electoral rolls. Misleading. This is a categorical dismissal; disproportionate impact has been reported, while intent remains disputed.

4. That the Citizenship Amendment Act is exclusively humanitarian and that concerns about religious discrimination are baseless. Misleading. This is a contested characterization: the law explicitly specifies religious groups and excludes Muslims from the special pathway it creates.

5. That Mahmood supplied no evidence for his concerns about Indian transnational repression. Misleading as a blanket dismissal of the wider evidentiary record.

6. That The Guardian and ABC falsely implicated India in overseas killings. Unsupported blanket characterization.

7. That Mahmood called for scrutiny of Indian involvement in Nijjar's killing and of Canadian electoral interference. True, as an account of his stated position.

8. That Mahmood criticized India's treatment of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and other minorities. True.

9. That raising religious-freedom concerns about Sikhs and other minorities amounts to tarnishing India's reputation. Misleading; an unsupported blanket dismissal.

10. That the Kuki–Meitei conflict and associated religious-freedom concerns were fabricated or improperly communalized by USCIRF. Misleading; an unsupported blanket dismissal of a complex conflict.

11. That USCIRF's treatment of alleged foreign interference involving Sikhs has no evidentiary foundation. Unsupported. As a blanket claim it is contradicted by US prosecution and Canadian police findings.

12. That USCIRF's statements are anti-India propaganda rather than religious-freedom monitoring. Unsupported.

Context: What the article leaves out about Sikh communities

The article's central discussion concerns India's electoral-roll revision process, but its attack on Mahmood also challenges the credibility of international scrutiny concerning Sikh political rights and transnational repression.

The most important missing context is the established record of threats against Sikh activists outside India.

In October 2024, the RCMP disclosed that its investigations had identified more than a dozen credible and imminent threats to life that resulted in police warnings. The agency specifically identified members of the pro-Khalistan movement among those affected.

The RCMP further reported evidence linking agents of the Government of India to violent criminal activity and the use of organized-crime networks in Canada.

CSIS's 2024 public report identified Indian transnational repression as an important component of foreign interference in Canada. Its 2025 report continued to discuss Indian activities involving surveillance, intimidation and efforts to suppress criticism of the Indian government.

These findings are particularly relevant because OpIndia's article portrays international attention to such allegations as a politically motivated campaign against India.

The US criminal prosecution provides an additional dimension. Gupta's February 2026 guilty plea established his involvement in a conspiracy to assassinate Pannun in New York. On November 20, 2026, Gupta was sentenced to 235 months in prison. The sentence was announced on the same day as the OpIndia article and is therefore best treated as a subsequent or contemporaneous development, depending on the precise publication times.

The judicial record does not establish responsibility for every alleged overseas killing, nor does Gupta's conviction determine the guilt of other individuals accused in related proceedings. However, it provides direct evidence that violence targeting Sikh political advocacy was the subject of a genuine criminal conspiracy.

Another significant omission concerns USCIRF's own work relating specifically to Sikhs.

The Commission has examined the use of Indian anti-terrorism legislation against Sikh activists, raised concerns about the detention of Jagtar Singh Johal and received testimony concerning transnational repression affecting Sikh communities in North America.

The article does not meaningfully engage with these findings. Instead, it attempts to undermine the credibility of the institution through allegations about its chair's background, political statements and supposed loyalties.

This approach leaves readers without the documentary context necessary to assess the substance of international concerns about Sikh rights.

##How Sikh political activism is framed

The article's framing is especially significant because it treats international attention to Sikh political activists as a problem of foreign hostility rather than a question of possible rights violations and criminal accountability.

When discussing alleged overseas targeting, the article characterizes the individuals involved through terrorism-related terminology. It then dismisses concerns about their safety as conspiracy theories and portrays those raising the issue as prejudiced against India.

These elements reinforce one another. The criminalizing description can reduce attention to the individuals' status as possible victims of violence, while the attack on those documenting the allegations can undermine confidence in investigative and human-rights institutions.

The resulting narrative does not need to deny that Sikh activists were targeted directly. Instead, it questions the credibility of the people, institutions and sources bringing attention to those threats.

This is particularly relevant in the Canadian context, where national security agencies have identified foreign interference and transnational repression affecting communities associated with the Khalistan movement.

The distinction between peaceful political advocacy and criminal conduct is essential. Canadian intelligence authorities recognize advocacy for Khalistan as lawful political activity, while maintaining the responsibility to investigate specific offences involving violence.

The article does not adequately preserve that distinction when discussing Sikh activists overseas.

##Recurring narrative patterns

The article reflects several recurring patterns relevant to the Sikh Disinformation Lab's monitoring of narratives concerning Sikh political advocacy, foreign interference and transnational repression.

Delegitimizing Sikh victims through security terminology

The use of terrorism-related descriptions when discussing individuals allegedly targeted abroad places their political identity ahead of the evidence concerning the violence directed against them. This framing can obscure the distinction between political advocacy, government allegations and established criminal responsibility.

Dismissing transnational repression as foreign propaganda

The article portrays concerns about Indian involvement in overseas violence as conspiracy theories or attempts to malign India. This characterization conflicts with the existence of public investigative findings by Canadian authorities and established criminal proceedings in the United States. The pattern is significant because it replaces examination of specific evidence with categorical rejection of the wider issue.

Attacking the credibility of international institutions

Rather than examining USCIRF's Sikh-related findings individually, the report emphasizes Mahmood's Pakistani origin, religion and previous political statements. These personal characteristics do not establish whether the Commission's findings about Sikh communities are accurate. The allegations concerning Mahmood's past statements should be investigated on their own merits, without substituting for examination of the institutional evidence.

Presenting international scrutiny as hostility toward India

The article repeatedly interprets criticism of Indian state policies as evidence of an anti-India agenda. In the Sikh context, this framing can make discussion of alleged political repression or violations of fundamental rights appear inherently suspect, regardless of the sources supporting the concerns.

Selective attention to religious-minority rights

The report invokes an alleged hostile statement concerning Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan to discredit Mahmood but dismisses his subsequent concerns about threats directed at Sikhs in other countries. The allegation concerning his earlier statement deserves scrutiny, but the rights and safety of Sikh communities should not be treated differently depending on the country or political actor involved.

These patterns are relevant to understanding the article's information-integrity concerns. They do not, by themselves, establish coordinated publication, external direction or deliberate deception.

Assessment

OpIndia's article contains identifiable statements by Asif Mahmood and references genuine disputes concerning India's electoral processes, religious-freedom conditions and international criticism of Indian government policies.

However, its treatment of Sikh-related issues is materially misleading.

The article dismisses concerns about Indian involvement in violence against Sikh political activists abroad as conspiracy theories, despite public US criminal proceedings and Canadian investigative findings that establish a substantial evidentiary basis for those concerns.

It also characterizes the individuals involved through terrorism-related language without adequately distinguishing peaceful advocacy from criminal conduct. At the same time, it portrays international human-rights scrutiny as evidence of political hostility toward India and attacks the credibility of USCIRF primarily through allegations concerning its chair.

The alleged 2017 statement attributed to Mahmood concerning Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan requires separate authentication. If established, the statement would warrant direct criticism, but it would not invalidate independent investigations or judicial records concerning threats against Sikh communities elsewhere.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab therefore identifies the article's principal problems as the dismissal of documented transnational repression concerns, the criminalizing framing of Sikh political activists and the use of personal attacks to discredit institutional scrutiny of Sikh rights.

The broader political disagreement over India's religious-freedom record should not obscure the established evidence.

By November 2026, American criminal proceedings had established Nikhil Gupta's participation in an assassination conspiracy targeting a Sikh political activist, while Canadian authorities had publicly documented evidence of Indian state-linked criminal activity and threats affecting members of the Sikh community.

These developments do not resolve every allegation involving Indian officials or overseas incidents, but they cannot accurately be dismissed as mere conspiracy theories.

An evidence-based assessment must distinguish allegations from established facts while recognizing that peaceful Sikh political advocacy is separate from violence, and that threats against political activists require scrutiny regardless of their political beliefs.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	USCIRF accused India of targeting Muslims through electoral-roll revisions and deportations.	TRUE
02	The SIR removes only deceased, relocated, duplicate or untraceable voters.	MISLEADING
03	There is no evidence that Muslim citizens have been unfairly excluded from electoral rolls.	MISLEADING
04	The CAA is exclusively humanitarian and concerns about religious discrimination are baseless.	MISLEADING
05	Mahmood supplied no evidence for his concerns about Indian transnational repression.	MISLEADING
06	The Guardian and ABC falsely implicated India in overseas killings.	UNSUPPORTED
07	Mahmood called for scrutiny of Indian involvement in Nijjar's killing and Canadian electoral interference.	TRUE
08	Mahmood criticized India's treatment of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and other minorities.	TRUE
09	Raising religious-freedom concerns about Sikhs and other minorities amounts to tarnishing India's reputation.	MISLEADING
10	The Kuki–Meitei conflict and associated religious-freedom concerns were fabricated or improperly communalized by USCIRF.	MISLEADING
11	USCIRF's treatment of alleged foreign interference involving Sikhs has no evidentiary foundation.	UNSUPPORTED
12	USCIRF's statements are anti-India propaganda rather than religious-freedom monitoring.	UNSUPPORTED

SOURCES

01 https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/opindia+english-epaper-opinden/uscirf+under+asif+mahmood+fearmongers+about+india+an

02 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom statement, 19 November 2026

03 United States Department of Justice prosecution of Nikhil Gupta; guilty plea entered February 2026

04 Canadian police findings regarding the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar

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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