Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

Times Now report on Nikhil Gupta sentencing rated Misleading over unattributed "terrorist" label

A Times Now article on the 235-month US sentence handed to Nikhil Gupta accurately reports the core facts of the case, but repeatedly describes Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as a "designated terrorist" without clarifying that the label comes from Indian domestic law, not the American proceedings. The Lab's verdict is Misleading.

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

Times Now's November 20, 2026 report concerns Nikhil Gupta's 235-month prison sentence for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The article repeatedly identifies Pannun as a “designated terrorist” without initially clarifying that the classification originates from India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation, rather than the American criminal proceedings.

The report also reproduces India's denial of involvement and Gupta's assertion that he acted alone, despite US prosecutors identifying Indian government employee Vikash Yadav as the alleged director of the conspiracy. Gupta's guilty plea establishes his own participation, while the allegations against Yadav remain subject to separate legal proceedings.

The article includes significant prosecution evidence concerning Hardeep Singh Nijjar's assassination and discussions about additional overseas targets. Its principal information-integrity concerns are therefore the unqualified terrorism designation, the prominence of official denials and defence assertions, and insufficient distinction between documented evidence and unresolved allegations.

THE CLAIM

In Murder For Hire Plot, US Court Sentences Indian Citizen Nikhil Gupta To 235 Months

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 20, 2026, Times Now published a report headlined "In Murder For Hire Plot, US Court Sentences Indian Citizen Nikhil Gupta To 235 Months." The article covers the sentencing of Nikhil Gupta for his participation in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York. It discusses Gupta's arrest in the Czech Republic, his extradition to the United States, the prosecution's allegations concerning Indian government employee Vikash Yadav, and communications referencing the assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

The report repeatedly describes Pannun as a "designated terrorist" and gives prominence to India's denial of involvement in the conspiracy and Gupta's assertion that he acted alone. I

The verdict

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assesses the article as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3/5. The principal information-integrity concerns involve the use of India's domestic terrorism designation without immediate attribution, the prominence given to official denials and defence assertions, and insufficient distinction between established criminal responsibility and allegations concerning other individuals.

The terrorism designation

The article repeatedly identifies Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as a "designated terrorist" without initially explaining that the classification originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The designation was issued by the Government of India in July 2020 and does not constitute a finding by the American criminal court that sentenced Gupta.

The US Department of Justice identifies Pannun as an attorney and political activist targeted because of his advocacy for Khalistan and criticism of the Indian government. Introducing the intended assassination victim primarily through India's terrorism designation places a domestic security classification at the centre of reporting about a politically motivated assassination conspiracy.

This framing is particularly significant because peaceful advocacy for Sikh self-determination must be distinguished from allegations of criminal conduct. The Indian government's designation does not determine Pannun's criminal responsibility in the United States or alter the established nature of the conspiracy targeting him.

Denials and defence assertions

The report reproduces India's denial of involvement in the assassination conspiracy and Gupta's assertion that he acted alone. India's denial is recorded as True in the Lab's assessment insofar as it represents an official government statement. However, the statement does not constitute a judicial determination concerning the allegations of government-linked involvement.

The US Department of Justice identified Vikash Yadav, an individual employed by India's Cabinet Secretariat during the relevant period, as the alleged director of the assassination conspiracy. Prosecutors charged Yadav in October 2024 and documented communications and operational arrangements involving Gupta. These allegations remain subject to separate criminal proceedings, but they cannot be dismissed solely through India's denial or Gupta's defence assertions.

Gupta's position that he acted alone must also be distinguished from the prosecution's account of a coordinated operation. His guilty plea establishes his participation in the conspiracy, while Yadav's individual criminal responsibility remains unresolved. The article's presentation does not sufficiently develop these distinctions.

The claims that check out

The Lab reviewed 16 claims from the article, including the sentencing, prosecution evidence, government statements and communications concerning Nijjar's assassination. Claims involving prosecution allegations were assessed according to what the available records establish, without treating unresolved allegations as convictions.

The claims classified as True include Gupta's 235-month prison sentence and his participation in a murder-for-hire conspiracy targeting Pannun. US prosecutors alleged that Gupta and Vikash Yadav participated in a coordinated assassination operation and discussed additional arrangements involving potential targets in Nepal or Pakistan. These allegations appear in sentencing materials, although the records do not establish that additional killings occurred.

The review also confirmed the documented prosecution account concerning Yadav's alleged provision of Pannun's residential address, telephone numbers and daily-routine information. Gupta transmitted this information to an undercover officer, provided surveillance photographs and updates, and communicated instructions concerning

the timing of the assassination. The prosecution also documented Gupta's instruction that the killing should not occur during the Indian Prime Minister's June 2023 visit to the United States.

The Canadian dimension is particularly significant. Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar was assassinated in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023. The US prosecution documented communications in which Gupta referred to Nijjar as another target, indicated that multiple targets existed, and stated that there was no longer a need to delay Pannun's assassination following Nijjar's killing. These communications form part of the official prosecution record. They do not independently establish responsibility for Nijjar's assassination, but they provide important evidence concerning the wider circumstances surrounding threats against Sikh political activists in North America.

Context

Times Now includes the prosecution's documented communications about Bhai Nijjar's assassination and allegations concerning additional overseas targets. These details are significant because they place the attempted assassination of Pannun within a broader set of concerns about violence directed against Sikh political activists beyond India's borders.

However, the article continues to frame the intended victim through India's terrorism designation while placing official denials and defence assertions alongside documented prosecution evidence. This creates an imbalance between the political identity assigned to Pannun and the evidentiary record concerning the conspiracy to kill him.

The article reflects a recurring narrative pattern in which Indian domestic security classifications are presented as defining descriptions of Sikh political activists, while allegations concerning Indian state-linked involvement in violence abroad are accompanied by prominent official denials. Although the allegations against Yadav remain unresolved, the prosecution's documented evidence and Gupta's guilty plea cannot be reduced to competing political statements.

The Lab's principal finding is that the article combines an unqualified Indian security designation with competing official and defence narratives in its presentation of a politically motivated assassination conspiracy. Such framing can obscure the distinction between peaceful Sikh political advocacy, established criminal conduct and allegations that remain subject to judicial determination.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	A US court sentenced Indian citizen Nikhil Gupta to 235 months in a murder-for-hire plot.	TRUE
02	Nikhil Gupta was arrested in Prague in June 2023.	NOT ASSESSED
03	Gupta participated in a murder-for-hire conspiracy targeting Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.	TRUE
04	Pannun is a “designated terrorist.”	MISLEADING
05	India denied having links to the assassination conspiracy.	TRUE
06	Prosecutors alleged that Gupta and Vikash Yadav participated in a coordinated assassination operation.	TRUE
07	Gupta and Yadav discussed additional assassination arrangements in Nepal or Pakistan.	TRUE
08	Yadav allegedly provided Gupta with Pannun's residential address, telephone numbers and daily-routine details.	TRUE
09	Gupta forwarded the personal information to an undercover officer.	TRUE
10	Gupta provided Yadav with surveillance photographs and updates.	TRUE
11	Gupta instructed the undercover officer to carry out the killing quickly.	TRUE
12	Gupta instructed that the killing should not occur around the Indian Prime Minister's June 2023 US visit.	TRUE
13	Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar was assassinated in British Columbia on June 18, 2023.	TRUE
14	Gupta referred to Nijjar as another target following his assassination.	TRUE
15	Gupta referred to the existence of multiple targets.	TRUE
16	Gupta said there was no longer a need to delay Pannun's assassination following Nijjar's killing.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 Times Now — In Murder For Hire Plot, US Court Sentences Indian Citizen Nikhil Gupta To 235 Months, November 20, 2026

02 Original article under assessment. Contains the descriptions of Pannun, India's denial, Gupta's defence position, prosecution submissions and Nijjar-related communications.

03 https://www.timesnownews.com/india/in-murder-for-hire-plot-us-court-sentences-indian-citizen-nikhil-gupta-to-235-months-article-15

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 conspiracy, including the Indian government-employee connection, surveillance and 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 Gupta's guilty plea to 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 Yadav as the Indian government employee charged with directing the assassination conspiracy and describing his employment in India's Cabinet Secretariat.

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

13 United States District Court — Nikhil Gupta Defence Sentencing Memorandum, November 13, 2026

14 Primary defence submission requesting a 144-month sentence and discussing Gupta's role and additional alleged targets in Nepal or Pakistan. The submission contains defence arguments, not judicial findings.

15 https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/11/nikhil-gupta-sentencing-memo.pdf

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

17 Official record establishing the domestic legal origin of India's designation of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.

18 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.

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