Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

When the Assassination Victim Is Identified as a Terrorist: Examining ANI's Coverage of Nikhil Gupta's Sentencing

Asian News International reported that Nikhil Gupta was sentenced to 235 months in a US federal prison over a foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, whom the headline calls a "designated terrorist". The Lab assesses the report as Misleading: the core facts of the conviction and sentence hold up, but the designation is presented without attribution and key context about the Indian official implicated is omitted.

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23 November 2026

SOURCE POSTED
20 November 2026

NARRATIVES
Portraying Advocacy for Khalistan as Terrorism

OUR ASSESSMENT

ANI's November 20, 2026 report confirms that Nikhil Gupta was sentenced to 235 months in US federal prison for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. However, its headline identifies Pannun as a designated terrorist without immediately explaining that the designation originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The article attributes the designation to India only in its concluding paragraph.

The report also reproduces an October 2024 Indian government statement that the employee implicated in the conspiracy was no longer in government service, while continuing to identify that individual as CC-1. US prosecutors had publicly named and charged Vikash Yadav in October 2024. The article does not explain the more recent allegations concerning Yadav's government position or the documented communications referring to Hardeep Singh Nijjar's assassination.

The article's principal information-integrity concern is therefore selective contextual framing and fabrication of Gupta's conviction or sentence. It reflects a recurring pattern in which Indian security designations receive prominent placement while the institutional and political context of violence targeting Sikh activists receives less attention.

THE CLAIM

Indian national Nikhil Gupta sentenced to 235 months in US prison over foiled assassination plot against designated terrorist Pannun

THE ANALYSIS

Publisher: Asian News International (ANI)
Publication date: November 20, 2026
Assessment: Misleading Framing
Severity: 3/5
What was published

On November 20, 2026, Asian News International (ANI) published a report confirming that Indian national Nikhil Gupta had been sentenced to 235 months in a United States federal prison for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York. The article reported that Gupta had pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. It also described the undercover investigation conducted by the US Drug Enforcement Administration and reproduced statements from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York.

Although the article reported Gupta's sentence and guilty plea, it introduced Pannun in both its headline and opening paragraph as a “designated terrorist and Khalistani separatist.” The report did not immediately identify the Government of India as the authority responsible for that designation, although it acknowledged India's designation in its concluding paragraph. The placement of this terminology is significant because the

central subject of the report was the sentencing of an individual convicted of attempting to arrange Pannun's assassination.

The article also reproduced a statement issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs in October 2024, confirming that the Indian government employee implicated in the conspiracy was no longer employed by the government. ANI continued to identify that employee as CC-1, the designation used in the original US indictment, despite American prosecutors having publicly named and charged Vikash Yadav in October 2024.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab identifies the article's principal information-integrity concerns as the prominence given to India's terrorism designation, the incomplete presentation of the Indian government employee's alleged involvement and the omission of significant details from US prosecution records concerning threats directed against Sikh political activists.

The Central Problem

The central issue is not whether ANI accurately reported Gupta's conviction or sentence. Both are confirmed by official American judicial and prosecutorial records. The concern lies in how the article frames the intended assassination victim while providing comparatively limited information about the individual accused of directing the conspiracy.

The US Department of Justice's November 20, 2026 sentencing announcement described Gupta's participation in a scheme directed by an Indian government employee to assassinate an attorney and political activist in the United States. The prosecution identified Pannun as a US citizen, an outspoken critic of the Indian government and an advocate for the establishment of an independent Khalistan. It also publicly identified Vikash Yadav, who was employed by India's Cabinet Secretariat during the period relevant to the conspiracy.

ANI's headline instead foregrounded India's terrorism designation of Pannun, while its discussion of government involvement relied on an earlier statement about the implicated employee's subsequent employment status. Although neither reference is inherently false, their relative prominence creates an imbalance in the presentation of the criminal proceedings.

The question of whether India has designated Pannun under its domestic legislation is distinct from the established criminal responsibility of Gupta and the separate allegations against Yadav. A designation issued by the Indian government does not constitute a finding by the American court that Pannun committed terrorism, nor does it alter the fact that Gupta was sentenced for participating in an assassination conspiracy against him.

The verdict

The Lab assesses the item as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3.

The substance of the reporting is sound. The problem is in how the report frames Pannun and how much context it withholds about the Indian official implicated in the plot.

Claim by claim

The Lab assessed fourteen claims in the report.

Twelve are assessed as True and require no correction. That Gupta received a 235-month prison sentence from a US federal court on 20 November 2026; that Gupta is an Indian national; that the case concerns an

attempted assassination of Pannun in New York; that Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, to conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and to conspiracy to commit money laundering; that the US Drug Enforcement Administration prevented the planned assassination through an undercover operation; that India's Ministry of External Affairs stated in October 2024 that the implicated government employee was no longer employed by the Indian government; that an Indian government employee was implicated in directing the plot, which is supported by the US prosecution record; that the employee recruited Gupta to arrange Pannun's killing; that Gupta worked with others to arrange the assassination; that US law enforcement foiled the conspiracy; and that the sentencing marked a further development in the US investigation.

One claim is assessed as Misleading: the description of Pannun as a "designated terrorist". The designation is accurate only when attributed to its source, India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The ANI headline carries the label with no attribution at all, and the article attributes it to India only in its concluding paragraph. A reader encountering the headline is given a security designation as though it were a neutral descriptor rather than a determination by one state, which is also the state whose employee US prosecutors say directed the plot.

The omitted context

The report reproduces the October 2024 Indian government statement that the employee implicated in the conspiracy was no longer in government service, while continuing to identify that individual only as CC-1.

US prosecutors publicly named and charged Vikash Yadav in October 2024. The ANI report does not explain the more recent allegations concerning Yadav's government position, nor does it address the documented communications referring to the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

The result is a report in which an Indian designation of Pannun is given the most prominent placement available, in the headline, while the institutional and political context of violence directed at Sikh activists is compressed or left out.

Why this matters

This is not a case of invented facts. Gupta's conviction and sentence are reported accurately, and the Lab's assessment does not disturb them.

The information-integrity concern is selective contextual framing. Where a report concerns an assassination plot that US prosecutors link to an Indian government employee, the unattributed use of an Indian terrorism designation in the headline shifts the reader's starting point before any of the prosecution record is presented.

The pattern is a recurring one: Indian security designations receive prominent placement, while the institutional context surrounding violence targeting Sikh activists receives comparatively little.

The missing context: Hardeep Singh Nijjar's assassination

Another significant omission concerns the references to Hardeep Singh Nijjar's assassination contained in the US prosecution record. Nijjar, a Canadian Sikh political activist, was killed outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023. His killing subsequently became central to the diplomatic dispute between Canada and India.

The Department of Justice documented communications involving Gupta following Nijjar's death. According to prosecutors, Gupta referred to Nijjar as another target during discussions with the undercover officer and indicated that the planned assassination of Pannun could proceed without further delay. These statements formed part of the official account presented in connection with the criminal proceedings.

The communications do not establish who ordered Nijjar's assassination or determine whether the same individuals were responsible for both incidents. However, they provide important evidence concerning the circumstances in which the assassination conspiracy against Pannun was being planned.

The wider Canadian context is also relevant. On October 14, 2024, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police publicly reported evidence linking agents of the Government of India to serious criminal activity in Canada. The RCMP identified threats to life affecting members of the South Asian community, specifically including individuals associated with the pro-Khalistan movement.

Canadian intelligence reporting has also identified transnational repression and foreign interference as significant concerns affecting Sikh political activists. In its 2025 public report, CSIS explicitly recognized peaceful advocacy for Khalistan as lawful political activity in Canada.

ANI was reporting a specific sentencing development and was not required to reproduce the entire history of the Nijjar investigation. Nevertheless, the omission of these connections is relevant when assessing the article's framing, particularly because it foregrounds the Indian government's designation of the intended victim and includes an older government statement concerning the implicated employee.

How Sikh political activism is framed

The article's headline places two substantially different forms of legal information alongside each other: Gupta's established criminal sentence and India's terrorism designation of Pannun. The former arises from criminal proceedings in the United States, while the latter reflects a classification made under India's domestic anti-terrorism law.

The distinction is important because the subject of the US prosecution was an attempt to murder a political activist because of his activities and criticism of the Indian government. The American criminal case did not determine whether Pannun's political advocacy was legitimate or whether India's designation was justified. It concerned the criminal responsibility of individuals who participated in arranging his assassination.

By placing India's designation prominently in the headline, the report introduces the intended victim through a security-related characterization that is not necessary to explain the sentence imposed on Gupta. The description may influence how readers understand the victim's position in the criminal proceedings, particularly when the article provides limited information about the political motive and the alleged role of an Indian government employee.

This does not mean that Indian legal designations should be excluded from reporting. They may be relevant background when properly attributed. The information-integrity concern arises when such designations receive greater prominence than the context necessary to understand the established offence and the political circumstances surrounding it.

The distinction also matters in the broader Canadian context. Peaceful advocacy for Sikh self-determination is separate from criminal conduct, and Canadian security authorities expressly recognize that distinction. Accurate reporting should preserve it when describing Sikh political activists who have been targets of threats or violence.

Recurring narrative patterns

ANI's report can be examined alongside other Indian media coverage of the Pannun assassination conspiracy that uses India's domestic terrorism designation when identifying the intended victim. The recurring feature is not necessarily a false account of the judicial proceedings, but the placement of security terminology alongside reporting about violence targeting Sikh political activists.

Prominence of Indian security designations

The article introduces Pannun as a designated terrorist before identifying the source of that classification. Similar terminology appears in other reports concerning the same assassination case. Repetition of this formulation can normalize an Indian domestic designation as the principal description of a Sikh political activist, even when the relevant proceeding concerns criminal violence directed against him.

Limited attention to alleged government involvement

The report acknowledges that an Indian government employee was implicated in the conspiracy but does not identify Vikash Yadav despite his public indictment in 2024. Instead, it reproduces a historical statement about the implicated employee's subsequent employment status. These editorial choices can leave the reader with less information about the alleged institutional connection than was available in the official prosecution record.

Separation of the assassination conspiracy from the wider Sikh context

The article reports Gupta's sentence without addressing the documented references to Nijjar's assassination or the wider investigation of threats against Sikh political activists in North America. While the omission is not inherently inaccurate in a short sentencing report, it narrows the context in which the attempted assassination is understood.

Repetition through news-agency distribution

ANI is a news agency whose reporting is reproduced by other publishers. When a report is syndicated without substantial editorial changes, its headline, terminology and contextual omissions can circulate across multiple outlets. This is relevant to assessing narrative amplification, but republication of common agency material does not itself establish a coordinated disinformation operation.

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate how a report can communicate genuine criminal developments while giving disproportionate prominence to particular descriptions of the intended victim. The available evidence does not establish that ANI deliberately attempted to mislead readers or acted under external direction.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab therefore identifies misleading contextual framing as the article's principal information-integrity concern. The assessment concerns the prominence given to India's domestic security classification, the incomplete presentation of alleged government involvement and the limited discussion of the political circumstances surrounding the assassination conspiracy, rather than the accuracy of Gupta's sentence.

The established legal outcome is that Gupta was convicted and sentenced for participating in an assassination conspiracy targeting a Sikh political activist. The allegations against Vikash Yadav remain subject to separate legal proceedings, and India's designation of Pannun does not determine the findings of the American criminal court.

Accurate coverage of the case requires distinguishing these legal circumstances while ensuring that the political identity of an intended assassination victim does not obscure the evidence concerning the criminal conduct directed against him.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	Nikhil Gupta received a 235-month prison sentence. A US federal court sentenced him on November 20, 2026.	TRUE
02	Gupta is an Indian national.	TRUE
03	The case concerns an attempted assassination of Pannun in New York.	TRUE
04	Pannun is a designated terrorist.	MISLEADING
05	Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire.	TRUE
06	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire.	TRUE
07	Gupta pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit money laundering.	TRUE
08	The DEA prevented the planned assassination through an undercover operation.	TRUE
09	India's MEA stated in October 2024 that the implicated government employee was no longer employed by India.	TRUE
10	An Indian government employee was implicated in directing the plot.	TRUE
11	The employee recruited Gupta to arrange Pannun's killing.	TRUE
12	Gupta worked with others to arrange the assassination.	TRUE
13	US law enforcement foiled the conspiracy.	TRUE
14	Gupta's sentencing marked a further development in the US investigation.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 https://aninews.in/news/world/us/indian-national-nikhil-gupta-sentenced-to-235-months-in-us-prison-over-foiled-assassination-plot-a

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

03 Primary official confirmation of Gupta's 235-month sentence, the alleged government-employee involvement, assassination arrangements and communications concerning Nijjar's murder.

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

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

06 Official confirmation of Gupta's guilty plea to three offences arising from the attempted assassination.

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

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

09 Official announcement identifying the Indian government employee charged in connection with the conspiracy and describing his alleged role.

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

11 United States Department of Justice — Second Superseding Indictment, October 17, 2024

12 Primary court filing containing the specific allegations against Yadav, descriptions of the assassination arrangements and references to communications concerning Nijjar. The charges against Yadav remain allegations until established through judicial proceedings.

13 https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/media/1373851/dl?inline=

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

15 Official confirmation that India designated Gurpatwant Singh Pannun under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

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

17 Reuters — Indian Ex-Official Indicted by US Dismisses Allegations, October 20, 2024

18 Independent contemporaneous reporting documenting the Indian government's statement that Yadav was no longer an employee and the response to the US indictment.

19 https://www.reuters.com/world/india/indian-ex-official-indicted-by-us-dismisses-allegations-family-says-2024-10-20/

20 Royal Canadian Mounted Police — Violent Criminal Activity Linked to Agents of the Government of India, October 14, 2024

21 Primary Canadian police statement describing evidence concerning threats to life, violent acts and alleged Indian state-linked criminal activity affecting members of the South Asian community, including pro-Khalistan activists.

22 https://rcmp.ca/en/news/2024/10/rcmp-statement-violent-criminal-activity-occurring-canada-connections-agents-government-india

23 Canadian Security Intelligence Service — Public Report 2024, Intelligence Operations

24 Official intelligence reporting discussing Indian foreign interference, transnational repression and the distinction between peaceful Khalistan advocacy and criminal violence.

25 https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/publications/csis-public-report-2024/intelligence-operations.html

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

27 Official intelligence assessment recognizing peaceful advocacy for Khalistan as lawful political activity and discussing continuing foreign-interference and transnational-repression concerns.

28 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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