



## Drug Enforcement Administration

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# Indian National Pleads Guilty To Plotting To

# **Assassinate U.S. Citizen In New York City**

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**For Immediate Release**

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**Nikhil Gupta Worked at the Direction of an Indian Government Employee to Arrange the Murder of U.S.-Based Leader of Sikh Separatist Movement**

**NEW YORK** - United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Jay Clayton, Assistant Director of the Counterintelligence

and Espionage Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”), Roman Rozhavsky, Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (“DEA”), Terrance C. Cole, Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”), James C. Barnacle, Jr., announced that NIKHIL GUPTA, a/k/a “Nick,” an Indian national, pled guilty to all three counts contained in the Second Superseding Indictment, charging him with murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and conspiracy to commit money laundering, in connection with his efforts to murder a U.S. citizen in New York City. GUPTA pled guilty today before U.S. Magistrate Judge

Sarah Netburn and is scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Judge Victor Marrero on May 29, 2026.

“Nikhil Gupta plotted to assassinate a U.S. citizen in New York City,” said U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton. “He thought that from outside this country he could kill someone in it without consequence, simply for exercising their American right to free speech. But he was wrong, and he will face justice. Our message to all nefarious foreign actors should be clear: steer clear of the United States and our people.”

***"It is often a slippery and dangerous slope from drug trafficking to deadly violence, as demonstrated by the murder-for-hire plot orchestrated by international narcotics and weapons trafficker Nikhil Gupta," said DEA Administrator Terrance Cole. "This case is a stark reminder of the ruthless lengths criminals will go to in order to further their illegal enterprises. I commend the men and women of DEA's New York Task Force Division for their outstanding investigative work successfully foiling Gupta's assassination plot. Let there be no doubt: DEA remains steadfast in its mission to protect America. We will continue to leverage our superior investigative expertise and unmatched***

***intelligence capabilities to dismantle the drug trafficking networks that threaten our safety and well-being of our communities.”***

***“Today’s guilty plea from Nikhal Gupta is the result of the hard work of our DEA New York Task Force Division, which first foiled this murder-for-hire plot. In this plot, Mr. Gupta, a known international narcotics trafficker, was recruited by a foreign government employee to facilitate the murder of a U.S. citizen here in New York City” stated DEA Northeast Regional Associate Chief of Operations Frank Tarentino. “This case highlights the extreme violence that often accompanies illicit drug traffickers. Those who believe they can orchestrate murder to protect their criminal enterprises should be on notice that the DEA’s reach is far greater than the United States and here in New York City.***

***This case demonstrates the global pursuit that the DEA and our law enforcement partners have in making sure those who traffic illicit drugs and use violence, face the justice they deserve.”***

“Nikhil Gupta was a key participant in a murder-for-hire plot against a U.S. citizen, a murder that was prevented thanks to the actions of U.S. law enforcement,” said FBI Assistant Director Roman Rozhavsky. “The U.S. citizen became a target of transnational repression solely for exercising their freedom of speech. The message from the FBI should be clear — no matter where you are located if you try to harm our citizens we will not stop until you are brought to justice.”

“At the direction and coordination of an Indian government employee, Nikhil Gupta plotted to assassinate a United States citizen on American soil, facilitating a foreign adversary’s unlawful effort to silence a vocal critic of the Indian government,” said FBI Assistant Director in Charge James C. Barnacle, Jr. “The FBI will continue to aggressively defend the homeland against any foreign adversaries who target our citizens for exercising their constitutionally protected rights.”

According to the allegations contained in the Second Superseding Indictment, other public court documents, and statements made in court:

In or about 2023, GUPTA worked together with others in India and elsewhere, including, as alleged in the Second Superseding Indictment, co-defendant VIKASH YADAV, who was at relevant times an Indian government employee, to plot the assassination of an attorney and political activist (the “Victim”) on U.S. soil.[1] The Victim, who is a U.S. citizen of Indian origin, is a vocal critic of the Indian government and leads a U.S.-based organization that advocates for the secession of Punjab, a state in northern India that is home to a large population of Sikhs, an ethnoreligious minority group in India. The Victim has publicly called for some or all of Punjab to secede from India and establish a Sikh

sovereign state called Khalistan, and the Indian government has banned the Victim and his separatist organization from India.

GUPTA is a citizen and was a resident of India, and he has described himself as an international narcotics and weapons trafficker in electronic communications with YADAV and others. YADAV was employed by the Government of India's Cabinet Secretariat, which houses India's foreign intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing.

In or about May 2023, YADAV recruited GUPTA to orchestrate the assassination of the Victim in the United States. At YADAV's direction, GUPTA contacted an individual whom GUPTA believed to be a criminal associate, but who was in fact a confidential

source working with the DEA (the “CS”), for assistance in contracting a hitman to murder the Victim in New York City. The CS introduced GUPTA to a purported hitman, who was in fact a DEA undercover officer (the “UC”). YADAV subsequently agreed, in dealings brokered by GUPTA, to pay the UC \$100,000 to murder the Victim. On or about June 9, 2023, YADAV and GUPTA arranged for an associate to deliver \$15,000 in cash to the UC as an advance payment for the murder.

In or about June 2023, in furtherance of the assassination plot, YADAV provided GUPTA with personal information about the Victim, including the Victim’s home address in New York City, phone numbers associated with the Victim, and details about the Victim’s day-to-day conduct, which GUPTA then

passed to the UC. GUPTA thereafter provided YADAV with regular updates on the assassination plot, including surveillance photographs of the Victim. GUPTA directed the UC to carry out the murder as soon as possible, but GUPTA also specifically instructed the UC not to commit the murder around the time of the Indian Prime Minister's official state visit to the United States, which was scheduled to begin on or about June 20, 2023.

On or about June 18, 2023, approximately two days before the Indian Prime Minister's state visit to the United States, masked gunmen murdered Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a Sikh temple in British Columbia, Canada. Nijjar was an associate of the Victim, and, like the Victim, was a leader of the Sikh separatist movement and an

outspoken critic of the Indian government. On or about June 19, 2023, the day after the Nijjar murder, GUPTA told the UC that Nijjar “was also the target” and “we have so many targets.” GUPTA also added that, in light of Nijjar’s murder, there was “now no need to wait” on killing the Victim.

On June 30, 2023, GUPTA was arrested in the Czech Republic and subsequently extradited to the United States.

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GUPTA, 54 of India, pled guilty to murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, and

conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

The maximum potential sentences in this case are prescribed by Congress and provided here for informational purposes only, as the sentencing of the defendant will be determined by a judge.

Mr. Clayton praised the outstanding investigative work of the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force and the Counterintelligence Division of the FBI's New York Field Office. Mr. Clayton also thanked the DEA's Special Operations Division, the DEA's Vienna Country Office, the FBI's Prague Country Office, the Department of Justice's National Security Division, and the Czech Republic's National Drug

Headquarters for their assistance. The Justice Department's Office of International Affairs worked with Czech authorities to secure the arrest and June 2024 extradition of Gupta.

This case is being handled by the Office's National Security and International Narcotics Unit, Violent Organizations and Crime Unit, and Narcotics Unit. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Camille L. Fletcher, Ashley C. Nicolas, and Alexander Li are in charge of the prosecution, with assistance from the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section and A.J. Dixon of the National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section.

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[1] YADAV has been charged in the Second Superseding Indictment but has not yet been arrested in connection with those charges.

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