

6 August 2026

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Via electronic delivery

Re: “Operation Hard Ball” and Growing Evidence of Indian Transnational Repression Against Sikh Americans

Dear Mr. Riley Barnes,

We write to draw your attention to significant new developments concerning transnational threats to the Sikh community based in California and elsewhere in the United States and serious, persistent concerns about potential involvement of officials within the Government of India in such threats. Last month, federal authorities announced “Operation Hard Ball,” a major international law enforcement operation targeting three India-linked organized crime networks.¹ The operation resulted in 24 arrests and charges against 37 individuals whose alleged activities include murder, extortion, drug trafficking, and other crimes across the United States and abroad.²

For the Sikh community, these developments are particularly significant. Federal prosecutors have now alleged that Lawrence Bishnoi and his associates executed the June 2023 assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, marking the first time the India-based Bishnoi gang has been criminally charged in connection with a killing that has stood at the center of concerns about Indian transnational repression.³ The indictments also provide new insight into the reach of these criminal networks inside the United States and the ways in which high-profile acts of violence against Sikh political activists have allegedly been used to further intimidate and extort the Sikh diaspora community.⁴

These revelations take on even greater significance in light of the Government of India's longstanding efforts to distance itself from acts of transnational repression against Sikhs. Indian officials have repeatedly dismissed and characterized such incidents—including Mr.

¹ U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California, “International Crackdown on India-Based Organized Crime Gangs Results in 24 Arrests in U.S., Canada, and Europe,” *U.S. Department of Justice*, July 7, 2026, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/international-crackdown-india-based-organized-crime-gangs-results-24-arrests-us-canada>.

² Amy Judd, “Bishnoi Gang Members Charged with Ordering Hit on B.C. Sikh Leader, U.S. Announces Arrests,” *Global News*, July 7, 2026, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11956792/gangster-lawrence-bishnoi-charged-ordering-bc-hardeep-singh-nijjar-hit-fbi-operation-hard-/>.

³ CBC News, “Sikh advocates, Canadian politicians respond to 'Operation Hard Ball' crackdown on 3 India-based crime gangs,” *CBC News*, July 8, 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/organized-crime-groups-india-based-arrest-charges-us-canada-resp>.

⁴ Rita Trichur, “Two dozen arrests won't stop India-based organized crime from extorting small business owners in Canada,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 10, 2026, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-two-dozen-arrests-wont-stop-india-base>.



Nijjar's assassination and the related plot to assassinate a Sikh activist in New York—as the conduct of rogue or criminal actors. Yet U.S. and Canadian investigations have increasingly revealed an overlapping landscape of Indian government agents, consular staff, intelligence officials, and hired criminal operatives implicated in an organized campaign of violence targeting Sikh communities across North America.⁵

These developments therefore cannot be viewed in isolation from evidence already uncovered by U.S. and Canadian authorities; similarly, accountability for transnational repression cannot end with the street-level actors who carry it out. While disrupting criminal syndicates and prosecuting those responsible for violence are essential to ensuring public safety, there must also be a full accounting of any foreign government officials who may have directed, facilitated, or enabled these operations, regardless of their seniority. As the Sikh Coalition has long maintained, any comprehensive response to transnational repression must account for the use of criminal proxies by foreign governments to pursue repressive objectives beyond their borders.

Nijjar's Murder as an Instrument of Intimidation on U.S. Soil

During the announcement of “Operation Hard Ball” in Los Angeles, First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bilal A. Essayli stated that the released indictments allege that Lawrence Bishnoi and a key associate, Goldy Brar, directed the 2023 assassination of Mr. Nijjar in Canada and that the organization “used this assassination and other high-profile acts of violence to terrorize Sikh and other Indian communities.”⁶ This latter point is particularly important for understanding the significance of Mr. Nijjar's assassination to the threat now confronting U.S.-based Sikhs.

According to federal prosecutors, the Bishnoi gang allegedly used the instance of Mr. Nijjar's assassination, together with other acts of violence, to establish the credibility of its threats and reinforce its capacity to intimidate victims of extortion across North America.⁷ As a result, victims were not only confronted with demands for extortion, but to an organization that pointed to high-profile acts of lethal violence as evidence of what might follow noncompliance.

The indictment provides a particularly disturbing illustration of this dynamic in the United States. On December 5, 2024, prosecutors allege that a Bishnoi co-conspirator contacted an individual identified as “S.S.” in Fontana, California, through multiple Punjabi-language

⁵ Associated Press, “Indian Diplomats Put ‘On Notice’ in Canada After Links to Anti-Sikh Activity Uncovered,” *The Guardian*, Oct. 18, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/18/canada-india-diplomats-warned-anti-sikh>.

⁶ Brittny Mejia & James Queally, “Gangsters Jailed in India Smuggled Drugs, Orchestrated Crimes in California, Feds Charge,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 2026, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2026-07-07/feds-lapd-rcmp-arrests-transnational-organized-crime-case>

⁷ Alex Sundby, “Federal Prosecutors Announce Charges Against Indian Organized Criminal Group Tied to Sikh Leader's Killing,” *CBS News*, July 7, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/federal-prosecutors-los-angeles-charges-bishnoi-indian-organized-criminal/>.



voice calls as part of an extortion effort.⁸ The co-conspirator identified himself as a member of the “Lawrence group,” expressly referenced Mr. Nijjar’s murder, and told the individual, “I have got all your information.”⁹ Nijjar’s assassination was thus leveraged as a means of intimidation, to invoke fear and demonstrate capacity to inflict further violence.

This pattern extends beyond a single incident. Public reporting has documented a broader wave of extortion, threats, shootings, and intimidation targeting members of California’s Sikh community and linked to these same India-based criminal networks.¹⁰ Sikh business owners have reported extortion demands reaching hundreds of thousands and, in some cases, as much as one million dollars, accompanied by threats against themselves, their businesses, and relatives in both the United States and India.¹¹ The resulting fear has also contributed to significant underreporting, as community members have reportedly refrained from coming forward out of concern for retaliation against themselves, their businesses, or family members.¹² Local law enforcement agencies in California counties like Fresno and San Joaquin have similarly acknowledged that the actual scale of these crimes likely exceeds official reporting.¹³

Bishnoi has allegedly continued to direct this international criminal enterprise from within a high-security prison in India, including through smuggled cellular phones and encrypted communications. The apparent ability of an incarcerated individual to direct such criminal operations across international borders from within Indian custody raises serious questions about the extent to which Indian authorities are aware of, tolerate, and/or enable his activities.¹⁴

The Role of the Bishnoi Gang as an Indian State-Sponsored Proxy

The newest U.S. indictments cannot be fully understood without considering Canadian findings concerning the relationship between the Bishnoi gang and the Government of India. Evidence revealed through the U.S. prosecution in *United States v. Gupta, et al.*¹⁵ has

⁸ *United States v. Bishnoi et al.*, No. 2:26-cr-00428-WLH, U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, p. 15.

⁹ *United States v. Bishnoi et al.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Gagandeep Singh, “How Gangs Connected to India Are Terrorizing a California Immigrant Community,” *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 18, 2026, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2026-04-18/how-gangs-connected-to-india-are-terrorizing-california-immigrant-community>.

¹¹ Lynn La, “Sikhs Threatened in Central Valley Campaign of Terror,” *Cal Matters*, Apr. 15, 2026, <https://calmatters.org/newsletter/sikh-gang-violence/>.

¹² Joe Rubin, “FBI Targets India Crime Mob California Connections. ‘What the Real Thing Looks Like,’” *The Sacramento Bee*, July 8, 2026, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article316429818.html>.

¹³ Gagandeep Singh, “How Gangs Connected to India Are Terrorizing a California Immigrant Community,” *Cal Matters*, Apr. 15, 2026, <https://calmatters.org/justice/2026/04/bishnoi-california-extortion/>.

¹⁴ Atul Dev, “‘Lawrence Is Karma’: The Gangster Who Became an Icon of Modi’s India,” *The Guardian*, Apr. 23, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/apr/23/lawrence-bishnoi-gangster-icon-modi-india>.

¹⁵ Office of Public Affairs, “Justice Department Announces Charges Against Indian Government Employee,” *U.S. Department of Justice*, Oct. 17, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-charges-against-indian-government-employee-tion->



already helped make clear that the foiled assassination plot against a Sikh activist in New York and the assassination of Mr. Nijjar in Canada were, in part, coordinated and overseen by Indian intelligence official Vikash Yadav. Although the recent indictment on India-linked crime networks does not connect Indian government officials to Mr. Nijjar's murder, the absence of such an allegation cannot resolve the broader question of the Indian state's involvement.¹⁶

In October 2024, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) took the extraordinary step of publicly disclosing findings from ongoing investigations because of the threat that continued extortion and targeted violence by India-based gangs posed to public safety. The RCMP identified troubling links between agents of the Government of India and the use of organized crime to instill fear within communities in Canada.¹⁷ Emphasizing this nexus, RCMP Commissioner Mike Duheme subsequently stated that investigators possessed "strong evidence—not intelligence, but evidence" extending "all the way up to the highest level" of the Indian government.¹⁸

These disclosures followed Canada's expulsion of several senior Indian diplomatic personnel.¹⁹ Then-National Security and Intelligence Adviser Nathalie Drouin stated that "senior levels" of the Indian government directed serious criminal activities against Canadians through the "kinetic capabilities" of the Bishnoi gang.²⁰ Strikingly, then-Deputy Foreign Minister David Morrison also publicly identified India's Home Minister Amit Shah as the senior Indian official connected to this campaign of violence.²¹ Early this year, once again, an RCMP report had stated that the Bishnoi gang has been "acting on behalf of the Indian government."²²

The relevance of these developments to the United States is clear: the Bishnoi gang, now alleged by U.S. prosecutors to have orchestrated Mr. Nijjar's murder, had previously been identified by Canadian authorities as working in tandem with agents of the Government of India and later categorized as a terrorist entity.²³ The fact that this particular indictment

¹⁶ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Canadian Police Accuse India of Working with Criminal Network to Kill Dissidents," *The Guardian*, Oct. 15, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/15/canadian-police-accuse-india-criminal-network-kill-dissidents>.

¹⁷ Royal Canadian Mounted Police, "RCMP Statement on Violent Criminal Activity Occurring in Canada with Connections to Agents of the Government of India," *Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, Oct. 14, 2024, <https://rcmp.ca/en/news/2024/10/rcmp-statement-violent-criminal-activity-occurring-canada-connections-agents-government-india>.

¹⁸ Evan Dyer, "Senior RCMP Officer's 'No Evidence' Comment About India Seems to Contradict Past Statements," *CBC News*, July 17, 2026, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/operation-hardball-rcmp-india-modi-nijjar-9.7272978>.

¹⁹ Greg Miller & Gerry Shih, "Canada Alleges Much Wider Campaign by Modi Government Against Sikhs," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 14, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/10/14/canada-modi-sikhs-violence-india/>.

²⁰ Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Canada Alleges Indian Minister Amit Shah Behind Plot to Target Sikh Separatists," *The Guardian*, Oct. 30, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/30/canada-alleges-indian-minister-amit-shah-plot-to-target-sikh-separatists>.

²¹ Associated Press, "Canada Accuses India's Home Minister Amit Shah of Targeting Sikh Separatists," *CNN*, Oct. 30, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/30/americas/canada-india-amit-shah-allegations-sikhs-intl-lata>.

²² Stewart Bell, "RCMP Report Says Bishnoi Gang 'Acting on Behalf of' Indian Government," *Global News*, Jan. 13, 2026, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11609940/rcmp-report-bishnoi-gang-acting-on-behalf-of-indian-government/>.

²³ Jessica Murphy, "Canada Lists India's Bishnoi Gang as Terrorist Entity," *BBC News*, Sept. 29, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj07vzm9n11o>.



does not address involvement of Indian state actors does not diminish the broader evidence of this criminal nexus. As former senior Canadian intelligence officer Dan Stanton recently warned, foreign states like India have increasingly begun using criminal organizations to outsource surveillance, intimidation, and violence precisely because these networks afford them plausible deniability.²⁴ Any meaningful accounting for such transnational operations must therefore look beyond the individuals who carry out these acts to those who are ultimately directing and enabling them.

Concerns About Criminal Nexus with Indian Law Enforcement Officials

A separate indictment announced through “Operation Hard Ball” further demonstrates how officials within Indian government institutions have allegedly collaborated with these criminal networks to facilitate harassment and intimidation on American soil. Federal prosecutors allege that members of the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria organized crime group collaborated with an Indian police official to extort a Los Angeles family.²⁵ U.S. authorities specifically charged Punjab police officer Gurinderjit Singh Nagra in connection with the alleged scheme, as he sought approximately \$400,000 from the family by threatening to implicate their relatives in a fraudulent murder case in India.²⁶

For the Sikh community, these allegations carry particular weight given the longstanding impunity surrounding serious human rights abuses committed by Indian police forces during the 1980s and 1990s. The failure to meaningfully hold perpetrators accountable has left an enduring concern that impunity fosters a culture in which further abuses can continue unchecked.²⁷ “Operation Hard Ball” brings that concern into the present, illustrating how the consequences of police misconduct can extend far beyond India’s borders.²⁸ The alleged willingness of an Indian police official to collaborate with organized criminals and wield his official authority to extort an American family underscores that when abuses of power carry no meaningful consequences, there is little to deter their repetition, whether at home or abroad.²⁹

Recommendations: Ensuring Accountability and Protecting Americans

²⁴ Greg Mercer, “Ex-CSIS Officer Briefs U.S. Congressional Staff on India and Transnational Crime,” *The Globe and Mail*, July 14, 2026, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-ex-csis-officer-briefs-us-congressional-staff-on-india-and/>.

²⁵ *United States v. Jaggu Bhagwanpuria et al.*, No. 2:26-cr-00418-CV, U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, p. 25.

²⁶ Shawn Hubler, “Authorities Arrest Members of India-Based Gangs in Sweeping Crackdown,” *The New York Times*, July 7, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/07/us/india-gang-arrests.html>.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Protecting the Killers: A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India,” *Human Rights Watch*, Oct. 17, 2007, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/10/17/protecting-killers/policy-impunity-punjab-india>.

²⁸ Anju Agnihotri Chaba, “Punjab Police Officer Arrested in FBI-Linked Extortion Case Tied to Gangster Probe,” *The Indian Express*, July 18, 2026, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/punjab-ex-sho-fbi-extortion-case-operation-hard-ball-nagra-10792188/>.

²⁹ Greg Miller, Gerry Shih & Ellen Nakashima, “An Assassination Plot on American Soil Reveals a Darker Side of Modi’s India,” *The Washington Post*, Apr. 29, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/04/29/india-assassination-raw-sikhs-modi/>.



We commend federal officials and their local and international partners for the investigation underlying “Operation Hard Ball.” Their work has disrupted dangerous networks and brought accountability to networks who have intimidated our communities across North America. No one should ever have to fear that operating a business, maintaining family relationships abroad, or exercising constitutional rights will expose them or their loved ones to surveillance, extortion, or targeted violence. But accountability for transnational repression cannot end with the triggermen and intermediaries who carry out these crimes; where credible evidence exists, it must extend to those who direct, enable, or facilitate them.

Criminal proxies must be recognized as a contemporary instrument of transnational repression. Without consequences at the highest levels, the faces of criminal networks may change while those ultimately responsible will remain unquestioned. Foreign governments that can outsource coercion to criminal proxies while insulating senior officials from consequences will have every incentive to continue doing so. “Operation Hard Ball” should therefore serve as the foundation for a broader policy response.

We respectfully urge the State Department, in coordination with relevant federal agencies, to:

1. **Continue investigating links between India-based criminal organizations and Indian government officials wherever the evidence leads.** The United States should coordinate closely with Canadian authorities to assess the relationship between “Operation Hard Ball,” the Gupta and Yadav prosecutions, and Canada’s findings concerning Indian government agents and the Bishnoi network.
2. **Ensure accountability reaches those who direct or enable transnational repression.** We reiterate our previous call for the pursuit, extradition, and prosecution of Vikash Yadav. Where credible evidence establishes the culpability of other foreign officials, the United States should consider appropriate legal, diplomatic, visa, and economic consequences regardless of seniority.
3. **Improve mechanisms for diaspora communities to safely report transnational extortion, threats, surveillance, and intimidation.** The State Department should coordinate with the Department of Justice, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and state and local law enforcement to strengthen reporting pathways and community liaison relationships, particularly where these crimes may be underreported.
4. **Strengthen information-sharing and training on transnational repression for state and local law enforcement.** Individual acts of extortion, surveillance, arson, shootings, and threats may appear individually to be ordinary and separate crimes,



but can have an underlying commonality in the context of transnational repression. Frontline agencies should be equipped to recognize indicators of transnational repression and rapidly communicate them to federal partners. Specifically, the federal government should develop more resources to inform state and local law enforcement training around these issues that are increasingly being pursued in states from California to Texas.

We appreciate your continued attention to the safety of the Sikh community and the broader challenge of transnational repression. We urge the U.S. government to remain fully engaged in confronting this threat through both diplomatic and law enforcement channels. We are grateful for your attention to this urgent matter and remain available for any further clarification or discussion.

Sincerely,



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