Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

Firstpost's summons report is accurate on the facts but misleading in its framing

A Firstpost report on a US court authorizing summonses for Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel labels Gurpatwant Singh Pannun a "Khalistani terrorist" in its headline. The Lab assesses the piece as Misleading: the core procedural facts hold, but the framing subordinates a prosecuted assassination plot to an Indian security designation.

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NARRATIVES
Labelling Sikh Individuals as Terrorists Without Evidence · Portraying Advocacy for Khalistan as Terrorism · Portraying Foreign Governments as Safe Havens for Sikh Activists

OUR ASSESSMENT

The Sikh Disinformation Lab (SDL) identifies a significant framing concern in Firstpost's reporting of the U.S. legal proceedings involving Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The article reports a consequential development in litigation concerning an attempted assassination on American soil, but repeatedly frames the individual seeking legal accountability through India's terrorist designation rather than examining the broader implications of the attempted killing of a Sikh political activist.

The distinction is important because the plot against Pannun is no longer supported solely by allegations made in a civil complaint. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty in a U.S. federal court to murder-for-hire and related conspiracy charges. American prosecutors have also charged Vikash Yadav, whom they identified as an Indian government employee at the time of the alleged operation. The allegations against Yadav remain subject to judicial determination, but Gupta's guilty plea establishes that the attempted assassination was not simply an unverified political accusation.

Firstpost's headline nevertheless identifies Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist." India designated him a terrorist under its domestic legislation in 2020, but the article presents that designation as an unqualified description rather than an attribution to the Indian government. Pannun is also a U.S. citizen and Sikh political advocate whose life was targeted in a criminal conspiracy prosecuted by American authorities. His political activities and any specific allegations against him can be examined independently, but an Indian security designation does not diminish his protection under American law or the seriousness of an attempted assassination.

The wider significance becomes clearer when the Pannun case is considered alongside the June 2023 assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia. U.S. prosecutors explicitly referenced Nijjar's killing in their investigation, alleging that Gupta told an undercover officer the day after the assassination that Nijjar had also been a target and that the operation against Pannun no longer needed to be delayed. These statements are important investigative evidence of a possible connection between the targeting of Sikh political figures in Canada and the United States, although they do not independently establish that every individual or official named in the separate proceedings participated in both operations.

The article also leaves out important developments in Canada's investigations. In October 2024, the RCMP publicly identified links between agents of the Government of India and violent criminal activity in Canada, including homicides, intimidation and the use of organized crime networks to target members of the South Asian community. Canadian intelligence reporting has separately documented transnational repression affecting individuals associated with the Khalistan movement.

These concerns acquired further significance in July 2026 through Operation Hard Ball, a joint U.S.–Canadian investigation into transnational criminal organizations. American prosecutors charged Lawrence Bishnoi and associates in an indictment alleging involvement in Nijjar's assassination. The investigation also documented allegations of corrupt relationships between a separate India-based criminal syndicate and Indian law-enforcement personnel. The criminal proceedings reinforce the importance of investigating the operational relationships between organized crime, political targeting and foreign-state activity.

Against this background, Firstpost's portrayal of Canada as a safe haven for Sikh separatists provides a one-sided account of the security concerns involved. It emphasizes allegations concerning Sikh political organizations while giving substantially less attention to official findings about threats directed against Sikh activists themselves. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service explicitly distinguishes lawful, non-violent advocacy for Khalistan from violent extremism.

The U.S. State Department transmitted the civil complaint and summons to the Government of India through diplomatic channels. Separately, a federal judge authorized a procedure through which Pannun may seek to serve Ajit Doval and Samant Goel via Indian courts. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that the allegations are being pursued through an identifiable judicial process involving senior officials of a foreign government.

The Lab's concern is the article's unequal treatment of competing allegations: Pannun's Indian terrorist designation is presented as an established characterization, while the independently documented attempted assassination and the broader official findings concerning transnational repression receive comparatively limited contextual attention.

The wider information-integrity concern is the framing of a Sikh political activist primarily as a security threat even when the subject of the news is an attempted assassination against him and the legal pursuit of accountability. Such framing can shift readers' attention from the potential misuse of state power and organized criminal networks toward the political identity of the person targeted, obscuring the significance of the legal proceedings and the protections owed to political dissidents regardless of their views.

THE CLAIM

US judge allows summons for NSA Doval, ex-RAW chief Goel on Khalistani terrorist Pannun's petition

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On 10 November 2026, Firstpost published a report headlined "US judge allows summons for NSA Doval, ex-RAW chief Goel on Khalistani terrorist Pannun's petition." The article reports that, at the instruction of a US court, the Department of State served summonses on the Government of India in a civil lawsuit filed by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, legal counsel for Sikhs for Justice (SFJ). The lawsuit names National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) chief Samant Goel and other defendants in connection with an alleged conspiracy to assassinate Pannun in New York in 2023.

The article describes Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist" and refers to SFJ as an unlawful organisation. It further alleges that Sikh separatist groups have threatened violence and found safe havens abroad, particularly in Canada, while briefly discussing the US Justice Department's criminal prosecution arising from the attempted assassination.

The Lab's verdict is **Misleading**. The concern lies in how the article characterises the plaintiff and how little weight it gives to the criminal proceedings and wider transnational repression investigations that underlie the litigation.

What the review found

The lawsuit does not rest on allegations in a civil complaint alone. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty in a US federal court to murder-for-hire and related conspiracy charges. US prosecutors have separately charged Vikash Yadav, whom they identified as an employee of the Indian government at the time of the alleged operation. The allegations against Yadav remain subject to judicial determination, but Gupta's guilty plea establishes that the attempted assassination was not merely an unverified political accusation.

The US Justice Department and FBI have explicitly described the plot as an attempt to target an American citizen for exercising his freedom of speech. This is a significant aspect of the case that receives limited attention in Firstpost's account. The proceedings concern not simply a dispute involving a separatist leader, but an attempted killing on US soil involving an individual whom American prosecutors identified as a foreign government employee.

Firstpost's headline nonetheless describes Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist." India designated him a terrorist under its domestic legislation in 2020. The article presents that designation as an unqualified description rather than attributing it to the Indian government. Pannun is also a US citizen and a Sikh political advocate whose life was targeted in a criminal conspiracy prosecuted by American authorities. An Indian security designation does not diminish his protection under American law or the gravity of an attempted assassination.

The article also characterises Sikhs for Justice and its members as having called for violence against Indian diplomats and threatened attacks in India. Such allegations require specific attribution to the individuals, statements or incidents concerned. India's designation of SFJ as an unlawful organisation does not, by itself, establish that everyone associated with the organisation has engaged in violent activity. Nor does it establish that peaceful advocacy for Khalistan constitutes terrorism under Canadian or American law.

US prosecutors explicitly referenced the June 2023 assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia, alleging that Gupta told an undercover officer the day after the killing that Nijjar had also been a target and that the operation against Pannun no longer needed to be delayed. Prosecutors also documented discussions concerning the timing of the planned assassination around Prime Minister Narendra Modi's June 2023 visit to the United States.

These are significant investigative statements because they connect the targeting of two prominent Sikh political activists across Canada and the United States within the American prosecutorial record. They do not, however, independently establish that every individual or official named in the separate proceedings participated in both operations.

The article also omits relevant Canadian developments. In October 2024, the RCMP publicly identified links between agents of the Government of India and violent criminal activity in Canada, including homicides, intimidation and the use of organised crime networks against members of the South Asian community, particularly individuals associated with the pro-Khalistan movement. Canadian intelligence reporting has separately documented transnational repression targeting critics of the Indian government.

In July 2026, **Operation Hard Ball**, a multinational law-enforcement investigation, produced further criminal charges involving India-based organised crime networks. US prosecutors alleged that Lawrence Bishnoi and Satinderjeet Singh, also known as Goldy Brar, ordered Nijjar's assassination. A separate indictment involving the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria organisation alleged corrupt relationships between gang members and Indian law-enforcement personnel, including the misuse of criminal proceedings for intimidation and extortion. These

investigations are significant because they raise wider questions about the relationships between organised crime, political targeting and foreign-state activity.

The November 2026 court development is also important. The US State Department transmitted legal documents concerning the Government of India to the Indian Embassy in Washington through diplomatic channels in October. Separately, on 9 November, a US federal judge authorised a procedure through which Pannun could seek to serve Doval and Goel through Indian courts. The court required further documentation before that procedure could proceed. This order is a significant procedural development in a lawsuit seeking accountability from senior Indian security officials. India has rejected the allegations and disputed the proposed method of serving the summonses.

The claims

"Khalistani terrorist Pannun." Misleading attribution. India designated Pannun a terrorist under its domestic legislation in 2020. Firstpost presents that jurisdiction-specific designation as an uncontested description, without distinguishing it from the separate US criminal proceedings concerning an attempt to assassinate him.

"Sikh separatist leaders found safe havens abroad, particularly in Canada." Misleading. The generalisation does not distinguish lawful political advocacy from individual violent-extremist conduct, a distinction CSIS makes explicitly. Canadian intelligence reporting recognises that peaceful advocacy for Khalistan is lawful and separately identifies the limited number of individuals involved in violent extremism.

"SFJ and its members have called for violence against Indian diplomats and threatened attacks in India." Insufficiently substantiated as a collective claim. Such allegations require evidence identifying the individuals, statements and incidents involved. The activities or statements of particular individuals should not automatically be attributed to everyone associated with a political organisation.

The US State Department transmitted summonses to India. Supported. Documents concerning the Government of India were delivered through diplomatic channels in October 2026. A federal judge separately authorised a procedure through which Pannun may seek to serve Ajit Doval and Samant Goel via Indian courts. The November order concerns service of documents, not a determination of responsibility.

Nikhil Gupta was involved in a plot to assassinate Pannun. Supported by Gupta's February 2026 guilty plea to murder-for-hire and related conspiracy charges in a US federal court.

Vikash Yadav was involved in directing the plot. Alleged in formal US criminal charges. Prosecutors identified him as an Indian government employee at the relevant time and accused him of directing Gupta. His individual guilt remains unresolved.

The Government of India investigated the allegations concerning the assassination plot. Supported with qualification. India established an enquiry committee that recommended legal action against an unnamed individual. This did not amount to a judicial determination of the allegations against Doval or Goel. The separate Indian criminal proceedings involving Yadav concern kidnapping and extortion allegations, not an Indian prosecution of the US assassination conspiracy.

Context

The Lab's concern is the article's unequal treatment of competing allegations. Pannun's Indian terrorist designation is presented as settled characterisation, while the documented assassination plot and official findings on transnational repression receive comparatively limited attention.

The distinction is particularly important given the wider pattern of threats affecting Sikh political activists in North America. The assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the foiled plot against Pannun, the RCMP's findings concerning Indian government agents and the criminal allegations emerging from Operation Hard Ball represent separate but relevant developments that require careful examination.

The article's description of Canada as a safe haven for Sikh separatists also overlooks that Canadian authorities have identified threats against Sikh activists themselves. The security concerns in this case do not run in only one direction. Canadian investigations have addressed both violent extremism and alleged foreign-state efforts to intimidate or silence political critics.

The central information-integrity concern is how a Sikh political activist is portrayed primarily as a security threat even when the subject of the reporting is an attempted assassination against him and his pursuit of legal accountability. Such framing shifts attention from the documented criminal conspiracy, the allegations of foreign-state involvement and the broader implications for transnational repression toward the political identity of the person targeted.

The wider significance of the case lies in the protection of political dissent across national borders. Whether an individual advocates for Khalistan or opposes it, allegations of foreign-directed assassination, intimidation and organised criminal violence require independent investigation and accountability. A disputed security designation cannot substitute for that scrutiny.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	Sikh separatist leaders found safe havens abroad, particularly in Canada.	MISLEADING
02	The U.S. State Department transmitted summonses to India.	TRUE
03	Nikhil Gupta was involved in a plot to assassinate Pannun.	TRUE
04	Vikash Yadav was involved in directing the plot.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 https://www.firstpost.com/world/united-states/us-judge-department-of-state-summons-ajit-doval-ex-raw-chief-samant-goel-sikhs-for

02 Sikh Disinformation Lab analyst review of the above item (verdict: Misleading; severity 3)

03 Reporting of the November 9 Court proceddings *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-11.*

04 U.S. Department of Justice — Charges Against Indian Government Employee Vikash Yadav *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-11.*

05 The US Lawsuit Docket *External fact-check · Retrieved 2026-11-11.*

06 Royal Canadian Mounted Police — Indian Government Agents and Criminal Activity in Canada *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-11.*

07 U.S. Department of Justice — Operation Hard Ball *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-11.*

08 Guilty Plea by Gupta *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-11.*

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.

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