Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

India Today report on Pannun lawsuit summonses: accurate on procedure, misleading in framing

An India Today report on a US court's summonses to Ajit Doval and a former RAW chief over Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's civil lawsuit is procedurally accurate, but the Lab assesses it as Misleading for labelling Pannun a "Khalistani terrorist" without qualification and omitting the related US criminal conviction.

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

India Today's November 21, 2026 report focuses on India's rejection of a US civil lawsuit brought by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials. Although the article documents the court's direction to serve summonses through Delhi courts, it repeatedly describes Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without attributing that designation to India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation.

The report also gives prominence to India's description of the lawsuit as baseless while omitting the related US criminal proceedings in which Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in an assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun. The allegations against Ajit Doval and Samant Goel remain unresolved, but the broader conspiracy has resulted in an established criminal conviction and sentence.

The central concern is the use of Indian security terminology and official denial to frame legal proceedings concerning alleged violence against a Sikh political activist, without adequately distinguishing government assertions, unresolved civil allegations and established criminal conduct.

THE CLAIM

Baseless: India on US summons to Ajit Doval, ex-RAW chief over Gurpatwant Pannun's lawsuit

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 21, 2026, India Today published a report concerning India's rejection of a civil lawsuit filed by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States. The lawsuit names senior Indian officials, including National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and former Research and Analysis Wing chief Samant Goel, and concerns allegations of a conspiracy to assassinate Pannun in New York.

The report led with a statement from India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, who reiterated the government's position that the lawsuit was baseless. It also described a November 2026 order issued by the US District Court for the Southern District of New York directing the transmission of summonses and judicial documents to designated courts in Delhi.

The article explained that the civil lawsuit was separate from US criminal proceedings involving Nikhil Gupta and Vikash Yadav. It identified Patiala House District Court as the court designated for service on Doval and Dwarka and Tis Hazari district courts for Goel. It also described the rejection of earlier service attempts through India's designated central authority and the US court's authorization of an alternative procedure.

However, the report repeatedly introduced Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without identifying India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation as the source of that designation. The description appeared in both the article's introductory summary and its opening paragraph, despite the subject being a civil lawsuit initiated by an individual who was targeted in an assassination conspiracy.

The article also gave prominence to India's rejection of the allegations without discussing the established findings from the related US criminal proceedings. By the time of publication, Nikhil Gupta had pleaded guilty to participating in the assassination conspiracy, and American prosecutors had publicly identified and charged Indian government employee Vikash Yadav in connection with the plot.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab identifies the article's principal concerns as its unqualified use of Indian security terminology, the prominence given to official denials and the limited contextual distinction between allegations that remain unresolved and criminal conduct already established in the United States.

The Lab's verdict on the item is **Misleading**, at severity 3 of 5.

What the review found

The analyst's review found that the report's account of the legal procedure is largely accurate. The problem lies in its framing: the repeated use of Indian security terminology, combined with prominence given to the Indian government's denial, without adequately distinguishing between government assertions, unresolved civil allegations and established criminal conduct.

Specifically, the report describes Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist" without attributing that designation to India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation. It also gives prominence to India's characterisation of the lawsuit as baseless while omitting the related US criminal proceedings in which Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in an assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun. The allegations against Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel remain unresolved, but the broader conspiracy has produced an established criminal conviction and sentence.

The claims, one by one

The Lab assessed eleven claims in the item. Ten were assessed as True. One was assessed as Misleading, and it carries the assessment.

The assertion that **Pannun is a "Khalistani terrorist"** is assessed as **Misleading**. The analyst's reasoning is that this is an unqualified use of India's designation under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Presented without that attribution, a domestic Indian legal designation reads as an established fact about a person who is, in the matter being reported, a civil plaintiff alleging that he was targeted for assassination.

The following claims were assessed as **True**:

- That **a US court has issued summonses to Ajit Doval and a former RAW chief** in connection with Pannun's lawsuit.
- That **India has called the allegations in those summonses baseless**.
- That **Pannun is seeking damages over an alleged plot to kill him**. True as an attributed allegation.
- That **Pannun claims Doval orchestrated the plot**.
- That **Vikash Yadav is a former RAW officer**. US prosecutors identified Yadav as an Indian government employee in the Cabinet Secretariat, which houses RAW.
- That **an earlier attempt at service under the Hague Service Convention was rejected by India's central authority**.
- That **the US court requested Indian judicial assistance in serving the documents**.
- That **the State Department said the transmission did not indicate its position on completed service or on the lawsuit's merits**. Verified as an attributed statement.

-That **India maintained foreign judicial documents should be routed through the Ministry of Law and Justice.** True as India's procedural position.
-That **Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal previously described the allegations as fabricated and malicious.** True as an attributed government statement.



India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal addresses a press briefing in New Delhi on November 20, 2026. Responding to a US court order directing service of summons on National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel through Delhi courts, Jaiswal reiterated India's position that it rejects the civil lawsuit filed by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as baseless. The court's order concerns service of legal documents and does not determine the allegations against the defendants. — Source: ANI/X, November 20, 2026.

Context

India Today's report places the Indian government's rejection of the lawsuit at the centre of a story concerning legal proceedings arising from an alleged attempt to assassinate a Sikh political activist. Although the report correctly attributes the rejection to the Ministry of External Affairs, it provides limited information about the established criminal proceedings that form part of the wider circumstances surrounding the civil lawsuit.

This distinction is important because an official denial and a judicial determination are fundamentally different. India's description of Pannun's lawsuit as baseless represents the government's position concerning allegations made against its senior officials. The US court's order authorizing service through Indian courts does not establish the defendants' liability, but neither does India's rejection invalidate the procedural order or determine the truth of the underlying allegations.

The article's framing becomes more consequential when considered alongside its description of Pannun. Rather than introducing him primarily as a Sikh political activist seeking judicial accountability for an alleged assassination conspiracy, India Today identifies him through a terrorism-related designation issued by the government whose officials are named in the lawsuit.

India formally designated Pannun under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in July 2020. This is an established fact concerning India's domestic legal classification. However, the designation is not a finding made by the American court hearing his civil action, and it does not determine whether his political advocacy constitutes criminal conduct under US law.

The combination of these two elements creates the article's principal information-integrity concern. The government's rejection receives prominent attention, while its classification of the person bringing the lawsuit is presented without qualification. Meanwhile, the established US criminal proceedings concerning the attempted assassination receive comparatively limited consideration.

What the article leaves out

The most important context missing from the India Today report concerns the established American criminal proceedings and the alleged involvement of an Indian government employee in arranging the assassination.

The US Department of Justice's October 2024 announcement identified Vikash Yadav as the individual charged with directing Gupta to arrange Pannun's murder. Prosecutors alleged that Yadav was employed by India's Cabinet Secretariat, which houses the Research and Analysis Wing, during the relevant period.

According to the prosecution, the conspiracy involved a proposed payment of $100,000 for the assassination, an advance payment of $15,000, and the collection and transmission of information concerning Pannun's location, personal contacts and daily activities.

Gupta's February 2026 guilty plea established his criminal participation in the operation. The November 2026 sentence represented a further judicial development in a case that American authorities described as involving an attempt to silence a political critic through violence.

This context matters because the India Today report introduces the civil lawsuit primarily through India's rejection of the allegations. Without explaining the established criminal proceedings, readers may not understand the evidentiary background against which the civil action was brought.

The civil complaint contains separate allegations against senior Indian officials that remain unproven. However, the existence of those unresolved allegations does not diminish the significance of the criminal proceedings concerning Gupta or the charges publicly brought against Yadav.

The Nijjar connection and transnational repression

The wider context of the Pannun case also includes the assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023.

The US Department of Justice documented communications in which Gupta referred to Nijjar's killing while discussing the planned assassination of Pannun with an undercover officer. Prosecutors reported that Gupta described Nijjar as another target and discussed accelerating the planned operation following his death.

These communications are part of the American prosecution's public account. They do not independently establish who ordered Nijjar's murder or determine whether the same individuals were responsible for both incidents.

Nevertheless, they are relevant to the broader investigation of threats and violence directed against Sikh political activists in North America.

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, including homicides, violent acts and threats to life. The RCMP specifically identified individuals associated with the pro-Khalistan movement among those who had received credible threats.

Canadian intelligence reporting has also identified Indian transnational repression as a national security concern. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service's 2025 public report expressly recognizes peaceful advocacy for Khalistan as lawful political activity in Canada.

The India Today article does not explore this broader context. Its immediate subject is the civil lawsuit and India's response, so the absence of an extensive discussion of Canadian investigations is not itself evidence of fabrication. However, the omissions become relevant to the article's framing because the report devotes significant attention to India's denial and its security-related characterization of Pannun without providing comparable context concerning the threats that gave rise to the legal proceedings.

How Sikh political advocacy is framed

India Today's use of the description “Khalistani terrorist” is particularly significant because it appears in coverage of legal proceedings initiated by an individual who was targeted in an assassination conspiracy.

Pannun's advocacy for Khalistan is a documented political position. India's designation of him as a terrorist is a separate legal classification made under Indian domestic legislation. Neither should be confused with a finding by the American court concerning his criminal responsibility.

The US prosecution identified Pannun's political activities as central to the motive for the attempted assassination. The case therefore concerns not only an attempted killing but also an effort to target an individual because of his political expression.

The article's framing does not consistently preserve that distinction. By introducing Pannun through a terrorism-related description without attribution, it places emphasis on the classification assigned by the Indian government rather than the legal circumstances in which he was targeted.

The same distinction applies to Sikhs for Justice. India Today's final paragraph specifies that SFJ is banned in India, which identifies the jurisdiction of the prohibition. However, the article does not provide equivalent clarification when describing Pannun himself.

The legal status of peaceful political advocacy varies across jurisdictions, and criminal responsibility must be assessed through evidence of specific unlawful conduct. India's classification of a political activist does not determine the legality of that person's advocacy in the United States or Canada.

This distinction is essential to reporting on Sikh self-determination without treating political opposition, government allegations and proven criminal conduct as interchangeable.

Recurring narrative patterns

The article reflects a recurring pattern in Indian media coverage of the Pannun assassination-plot proceedings in which official denials and Indian domestic security designations receive prominence in reporting on legal action brought by Sikh political activists.

One feature of this pattern is the repeated adoption of terrorism-related terminology when identifying Pannun. Similar wording appears in other Indian reports about the US civil lawsuit and Gupta's criminal proceedings. The terminology is frequently introduced before explaining the legal origin or jurisdictional limits of the designation.

A second feature is the emphasis on Indian government rejection of allegations involving senior officials. Such responses are legitimate subjects of news coverage, but their prominence can shape the interpretation of legal proceedings when they are not accompanied by information distinguishing government positions from judicial findings and established criminal outcomes.

A third pattern involves the treatment of the assassination conspiracy as an unresolved allegation without consistently acknowledging Gupta's guilty plea and sentence. This is particularly important because uncertainty about the responsibility of Doval, Goel or Yadav does not extend to Gupta's admitted participation in the conspiracy.

The article also illustrates how procedural developments may become the principal focus of reporting while the broader circumstances of political targeting receive limited attention. The court's directions concerning service are significant, but their relevance arises from a civil lawsuit connected to an assassination conspiracy against a Sikh political activist.

Similar framing across publications may reflect repeated use of official statements, common reporting sources or shared editorial terminology. The available evidence does not establish that these reports form part of a coordinated information operation. The information-integrity concern lies in the recurring presentation of Indian security classifications and government denials without consistently distinguishing them from the independent judicial record.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	A US court has issued summons to Ajit Doval and a former RAW chief in connection with Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's lawsuit.	TRUE
02	India has called the allegations in the US summons to Ajit Doval and the ex-RAW chief baseless.	TRUE
03	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani terrorist.	MISLEADING
04	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is seeking damages over an alleged plot to kill him.	TRUE
05	Pannun claims Ajit Doval orchestrated the plot to kill him.	TRUE
06	Vikash Yadav is a former RAW officer.	TRUE
07	An earlier attempt under the Hague Service Convention was rejected by India's central authority.	TRUE
08	The US court requested Indian judicial assistance in serving the documents.	TRUE
09	The State Department said the transmission did not indicate its position on completed service or the lawsuit's merits.	TRUE
10	India maintained that foreign judicial documents should be routed through the Ministry of Law and Justice.	TRUE
11	Jaiswal previously described the allegations as fabricated and malicious.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/gurpatwant-singh-pannun-lawsuit-india-rejects-us-court-delhi-summon-ajit-doval-3043551-202

02 Asian News International — Statement by MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, November 20, 2026

03 Original social-media video showing Jaiswal reiterating India's rejection of Pannun's lawsuit. This is the source of the embedded image accompanying the report.

04 https://x.com/ANI/status/2123744946293485585

05 United States District Court, Southern District of New York — Order Directing Service Through Indian Courts, November 13–17, 2026

06 Primary judicial record authorizing service on Ajit Doval and Samant Goel through designated Delhi courts. Confirms the relevant legal provisions and the court's procedural directions.

07 https://cases.justia.com/federal/district-courts/new-york/nysdce/1%3A2024cv07021/628431/48/0.pdf

08 United States District Court, Southern District of New York — Order Granting Alternative Service, November 9, 2026

09 Earlier order authorizing an alternative service procedure following unsuccessful attempts through India's central authority.

10 https://docs.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/new-york/nysdce/1%3A2024cv07021/628431/46

11 United States District Court — Pannun v. Government of India, Civil Docket

12 Record of Pannun's civil lawsuit, the named defendants and procedural developments. Relevant to distinguishing the civil allegations from the separate criminal prosecution.

13 https://dockets.justia.com/docket/new-york/nysdce/1%3A2024cv07021/628431

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

15 Primary government record establishing that India's terrorism designation of Pannun originates from its domestic anti-terrorism legislation.

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

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

18 Official announcement identifying the Indian government employee charged in connection with the assassination conspiracy. The allegations against Yadav remain subject to criminal adjudication.

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

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

21 Primary confirmation that Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering in connection with the attempted assassination of Pannun.

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

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

24 Official confirmation of Gupta's 235-month sentence. Documents the prosecution's account of the assassination conspiracy and the alleged involvement of an Indian government employee.

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

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

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

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

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

30 Official Canadian intelligence assessment recognizing peaceful advocacy for Khalistan as lawful political activity and discussing Indian foreign interference and transnational repression.

31 https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/publications/csis-public-report-2025/operations-and-analysis.html

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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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