Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

Indian Defence News report on Pannun lawsuit against Doval assessed as Misleading

A November 21, 2026 article on indiandefensenews.in reports India's rejection of a US civil suit filed by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials. The Lab assesses the item as Misleading: it labels Pannun a terrorist without attributing the designation, and presents India's characterisation of the case while omitting the related US criminal proceedings.

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

Indian Defence News' November 21, 2026 report foregrounds India's rejection of a US civil lawsuit filed by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials. The article describes Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without initially clarifying that this designation originates from India's domestic anti-terrorism legislation rather than the American court hearing his case.

The report presents India's characterization of the lawsuit as baseless while omitting the related US criminal proceedings. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in the assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun and was sentenced to 235 months in prison on November 20. US prosecutors also identified Indian government employee Vikash Yadav as the alleged director of the operation.

The article reflects a recurring framing pattern in which Indian security classifications and official denials receive prominence while the established criminal proceedings concerning violence targeting Sikh political activists receive limited attention. India's rejection does not determine the merits of Pannun's civil lawsuit, and the court's service order does not establish liability against Doval or Goel.

THE CLAIM

'Baseless Lawsuit': Case Against Ajit Doval In US Court Sparks Fresh India-Pannun Row

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On November 21, 2026, Indian Defence News published a PTI-attributed report headlined "'Baseless Lawsuit': Case Against Ajit Doval In US Court Sparks Fresh India-Pannun Row." The article opens by describing Gurpatwant Singh Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist" while emphasizing India's rejection of allegations against National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and former Research and Analysis Wing chief Samant Goel.

The report concerns a US court order directing the transmission of summonses through Delhi courts in connection with Pannun's civil lawsuit over an alleged conspiracy to assassinate him in the United States. The article presents India's rejection of the allegations as the dominant development while providing limited context concerning the underlying assassination conspiracy.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assesses the article as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3/5.

What the review found

The article foregrounds India's rejection of a civil lawsuit brought by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials. It introduces Pannun through India's terrorism designation without immediately identifying its legal origin under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Although the article later acknowledges that New Delhi made the designation, its opening presents the classification as an unqualified description of the individual seeking legal accountability.

The report also repeatedly emphasizes India's characterization of the lawsuit as baseless, fabricated and malicious. These statements reflect the Indian government's position and do not establish that the allegations have been disproven. The US court's order concerns the service of judicial documents and makes no determination concerning the defendants' responsibility for the alleged conspiracy.

More significantly, the report omits the related US criminal proceedings. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in the assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun. On November 20, 2026, he was sentenced to 235 months in federal prison. US prosecutors also identified Indian government employee Vikash Yadav as the alleged director of the operation, although the charges against Yadav remain subject to separate legal proceedings.

The article reflects a recurring framing pattern in which Indian domestic security classifications and official denials receive prominence while established criminal proceedings concerning violence targeting Sikh political activists receive comparatively limited attention.

The individual claims

1. That India has firmly rejected allegations made by Pannun against National Security Adviser Ajit Doval. True. India's rejection of the allegations is a matter of record.

2. That Pannun is a "Khalistani terrorist". Misleading. The designation originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and is not a determination of the US court hearing his civil case. Presented without immediate attribution to the Indian designation, the label is misleading.

3. That a case has been filed against Ajit Doval in a US court. Not assessed. The Lab has not ruled on this claim.

4. That the US court case has sparked a fresh row between India and Pannun. Not assessed. The Lab has not ruled on this claim.

5. That the allegations against the officials are baseless, fabricated and malicious. Misleading. These descriptions originate from the Indian government and have not been established through a judicial determination. Although the article attributes them to Indian officials, their repeated prominence frames the lawsuit through the position of the government whose officials are named in the proceedings. The US court has not determined the merits of the allegations against Doval or Goel.

6. That the US District Court directed transmission of judicial documents through Delhi courts. True. The US District Court for the Southern District of New York authorized service through designated Delhi courts. The order directed transmission of judicial documents but did not establish that service was completed or determine the defendants' liability.

7. That on November 10, India rejected the allegations as fabricated and malicious and the proceedings as frivolous. True, as an accurate report of India's stated position.

8. That India maintained foreign judicial documents should be routed through the Ministry of Law and Justice. True.

Context

The article presents the proceedings primarily through India's rejection of the allegations and its objections concerning the service of judicial documents. This framing gives limited attention to the circumstances in

which Pannun brought the civil lawsuit and the established criminal proceedings arising from the assassination conspiracy.

The distinction is particularly significant because Gupta's guilty plea and sentence had already established his participation in a plot to assassinate Pannun. American prosecutors also identified Vikash Yadav, an Indian government employee during the relevant period, as the individual accused of directing the operation. These developments provide essential context for understanding the seriousness of the allegations surrounding the civil proceedings.

The report also adopts India's domestic terrorism designation when introducing the intended victim. Although Pannun's advocacy for Khalistan is a documented political position, it must be distinguished from allegations of criminal conduct. A classification issued by the Indian government does not determine the legal status of peaceful Sikh political advocacy in the United States or Canada.

The article's characterization of the proceedings as a fresh India–Pannun dispute further shifts emphasis from the alleged assassination conspiracy toward a political confrontation. Combined with the repeated official denials and limited reference to the criminal prosecution, this narrows the context available to readers.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab's assessment concerns the prominence of India's security terminology, the framing of unresolved civil allegations through official denials, and the omission of established criminal proceedings involving the targeting of a Sikh political activist. The allegations against Doval and Goel remain subject to judicial determination, while Gupta's criminal participation has already been established.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	India has firmly rejected allegations made by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.	TRUE
02	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a Khalistani terrorist.	MISLEADING
03	A case has been filed against Ajit Doval in a US court.	NOT ASSESSED
04	The US court case against Doval has sparked a fresh row between India and Pannun.	NOT ASSESSED
05	The allegations against the officials are baseless, fabricated and malicious.	MISLEADING
06	The US District Court directed transmission of judicial documents through Delhi courts.	TRUE
07	On November 10, India rejected the allegations as fabricated and malicious and the proceedings as frivolous.	TRUE
08	India maintained that foreign judicial documents should be routed through the Ministry of Law and Justice.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 https://www.indiandefensenews.in/2026/11/baseless-lawsuit-case-against-ajit.html

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

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

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

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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