Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

MSN report on Doval summons presents India's denials with missing context: Misleading

An NDTV report republished by MSN on 20 November 2026 covers India's rejection of a US civil lawsuit naming National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel. The Lab assesses the item as Misleading: it labels the plaintiff a terrorist without attributing that designation, and omits that a co-accused has already pleaded guilty in the related US criminal case.

PUBLISHED
23 November 2026

SOURCE POSTED
20 November 2026

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

OUR ASSESSMENT

NDTV's November 20, 2026 report, subsequently reproduced by MSN, describes India's rejection of a US civil lawsuit filed by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials, including Ajit Doval and Samant Goel. However, the report repeatedly characterizes Pannun as a terrorist without explaining that this designation originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The report also emphasizes India's description of the lawsuit as baseless while omitting significant context concerning the related US criminal proceedings. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in the assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun. Although the allegations against Doval and Goel remain unproven, Gupta's criminal responsibility had already been established.

The article reflects a recurring narrative in which Indian government designations and official denials receive prominence in reporting on accountability proceedings involving Sikh political activists. Its principal concerns are misleading terminology, selective contextualization and insufficient distinction between government assertions, procedural court decisions and established criminal conduct.

THE CLAIM

"Baseless lawsuit": India as US court orders summons to Ajit Doval in Pannun case

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On 20 November 2026, NDTV published a report headlined "'Baseless lawsuit': India as US court orders summons to Ajit Doval in Pannun case". The report was subsequently reproduced on MSN.

The item describes India's response to a civil lawsuit filed in a US court by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials, including National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and former Research and Analysis Wing chief Samant Goel. As captured, the report states that India "has repeated that the allegations against National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) chief Samant Goel by Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun are baseless."

The article reported a significant development in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York. Judge Katherine Polk Failla had directed the court's clerk to transmit summonses and accompanying judicial documents through designated district courts in Delhi, following unsuccessful earlier attempts through India's central authority.

NDTV accurately identified Patiala House District Court as the designated court for Doval and Dwarka and Tis Hazari district courts for Goel. It also described the court's reliance on Article 19 of the Hague Service Convention and provisions of India's Code of Civil Procedure.

However, the report repeatedly described Pannun as a terrorist without identifying that characterization as a designation made by the Government of India under its domestic anti-terrorism legislation. It also presented

India's rejection of the lawsuit without discussing the established US criminal proceedings involving the attempted assassination of Pannun.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab identifies these framing choices as the article's principal information-integrity concerns.

The Lab's assessment

The Lab assesses the item as Misleading, with a severity rating of 3 of 5.

The central problems are terminology, selective context and an insufficient distinction between three different categories of information: government assertions, procedural decisions by a court, and criminal conduct already established in court.

The report repeatedly characterises Pannun as a terrorist without explaining that the designation originates from India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Presented without that attribution, a contested domestic designation reads as an established fact.

The report also foregrounds India's description of the lawsuit as baseless while omitting context about the related US criminal proceedings. In February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in the assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun. The allegations against Doval and Goel remain unproven, but Gupta's criminal responsibility had already been established at the time of publication. Readers of the report are not given that distinction.

The claims, one by one

"India rejected allegations against Ajit Doval and Samant Goel." True. The rejection is accurately reported as an official Indian position.

"The allegations against the two officials are baseless." Unsupported. This is an attributed government denial, not a judicial determination. The allegations remain unproven, which is not the same as established to be baseless.

Pannun described as a "Khalistani terrorist." Misleading. The characterisation is misleading without attribution to India's UAPA designation.

Pannun is wanted by India on various terrorism charges. Misleading. Indian government records confirm the existence of allegations and cases, so the statement is partially supported, but the present status of those cases is not independently established in the report.

India's rejection establishes that the lawsuit lacks legal merit. Unsupported. This implication is conveyed by the framing rather than expressly claimed as a court finding. A government denial does not determine the merits of a civil suit, and the court's order on summons is a procedural step.

Earlier service attempts through India's central authority were rejected. True. This is verified in the US court record.

On 10 November, India described Pannun's allegations as fabricated and malicious. True, as an attributed official statement.

India characterised the legal proceedings as frivolous. True, as an attributed official statement.

##The central problem

The article's central problem is not the accuracy of its reporting on the court's procedural order. Those details are substantially supported by the judicial record. The concern lies in how the report presents India's official rejection of the allegations while providing limited context about the underlying assassination conspiracy.

The headline places India's description of the lawsuit as baseless at the centre of the story. Although the statement is correctly attributed, the report does not explain that India's rejection is a government position rather than a judicial determination concerning the merits of Pannun's allegations.

The US court had already authorized an alternative method of serving summonses on Doval and Goel. That order did not establish their liability, but it also was not invalidated by India's rejection of the lawsuit.

The second concern involves the article's characterization of Pannun. He is introduced through a terrorism designation issued by the government whose officials are named in his lawsuit. The source of that designation is not explained, creating an impression that the characterization is an independently established fact rather than a domestic legal classification.

The third issue concerns the absence of significant criminal-proceeding context. By November 20, 2026, Nikhil Gupta had already pleaded guilty to participating in the assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun. The allegations against Doval and Goel remained unresolved, but the underlying conspiracy had produced an established criminal conviction.

These distinctions are necessary to understand both the civil lawsuit and the broader legal questions surrounding violence directed against Sikh political activists.

Context

Several individual statements in the report are accurate, and the Lab records them as such. The assessment of Misleading rests on how the accurate elements are combined: an unattributed state designation applied as a descriptor, official denials given prominence, and the omission of an established guilty plea in the connected criminal matter.

The item reflects a recurring pattern in which Indian government designations and official denials receive prominence in reporting on accountability proceedings involving Sikh political activists. Readers assessing such coverage should note whether terrorism labels are attributed to the authority that issued them, and whether denials are clearly separated from determinations made by a court.

##Assessment

NDTV's November 20 report accurately documents India's official rejection of Pannun's lawsuit and the US court's direction to transmit judicial documents through Delhi courts.

The article correctly identifies the relevant judicial institutions, describes the procedural framework and attributes the government's rejection to the Ministry of External Affairs.

Its principal weaknesses arise from the characterization of Pannun and the limited contextual information concerning the underlying assassination conspiracy.

The repeated use of India's terrorism designation without attribution presents a domestic legal classification as though it were an uncontested description. The prominence given to India's rejection also risks leaving readers with an incomplete understanding of the established criminal proceedings involving Gupta.

These concerns do not establish that NDTV fabricated the court's order, misquoted India's official response or deliberately sought to deceive its audience.

They do, however, identify weaknesses in the article's framing of a legal dispute involving serious allegations of politically motivated violence.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab therefore assesses the article as Misleading, primarily because of its unqualified security terminology and selective treatment of the broader evidentiary record.

India's rejection of the civil lawsuit remains an official government position, not a judicial finding. The allegations against Doval and Goel remain unresolved, while Gupta's participation in the assassination conspiracy has been established through his guilty plea and sentence.

Accurate reporting requires these distinctions to be maintained, particularly when legal proceedings concern violence directed against individuals advocating Sikh self-determination.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	India rejected allegations against Ajit Doval and Samant Goel	TRUE
02	The allegations against the two officials are baseless.	UNSUPPORTED
03	Gurpatwant Singh Pannun is a “Khalistani terrorist.”	MISLEADING
04	Pannun is wanted by India on various terrorism charges.	MISLEADING
05	India's rejection establishes that the lawsuit lacks legal merit.	UNSUPPORTED
06	Earlier service attempts through India's central authority were rejected.	TRUE
07	On November 10, India described Pannun's allegations as fabricated and malicious.	TRUE
08	India characterized the legal proceedings as frivolous.	TRUE

SOURCES

01 NDTV — "Baseless Lawsuit": India As US Court Orders Summons To Ajit Doval In Pannun Case, November 20, 2026

02 Original article being assessed. Reports India's rejection of the lawsuit, the US court's service order and allegations against Doval and Goel.

03 https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/baseless-lawsuit-india-as-us-court-orders-summons-to-ajit-doval-in-pannun-case-12355439

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

05 Primary judicial document authorizing service on Ajit Doval and Samant Goel through designated Delhi courts. Confirms the legal framework, previous rejected attempts and directions to the court clerk.

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

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

08 Earlier judicial order granting the motion to pursue service through Indian courts and specifying the procedural documents to be submitted.

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

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

11 Court docket documenting the September 2024 filing of Pannun's civil lawsuit, the named defendants and subsequent proceedings.

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

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

14 Official announcement confirming India's designation of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun under its domestic anti-terrorism legislation. Establishes the source of the terminology used by NDTV.

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

16 NDTV — "Fabricated, Malicious": India Rejects Pannun's US Lawsuit, November 10, 2026

17 Earlier report documenting the Indian Ministry of External Affairs' rejection of the allegations. Relevant to the repeated terminology and official-denial framing.

18 https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/fabricated-malicious-india-rejects-khalistani-terrorist-gurpatwant-singh-pannuns-us-lawsuit-123092

19 United States Department of Justice — Charges Against Indian Government Employee Vikash Yadav, October 17, 2024

20 Official criminal prosecution announcement identifying the Indian government employee charged in connection with the assassination conspiracy and detailing his alleged role.

21 https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-charges-against-indian-government-employee-connection-foi

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

23 Primary confirmation of Gupta's guilty plea to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Contains the prosecution's account of the plot and communications relating to Nijjar's assassination.

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

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

26 Official confirmation that Gupta was sentenced to 235 months in prison for participating in the assassination conspiracy targeting Pannun.

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

28 Bar & Bench — US Court Seeks Assistance from Delhi Courts to Serve Summons, November 19, 2026

29 Independent legal reporting explaining the procedural order, the designated Delhi courts and the distinction between service of documents and determination of the underlying allegations.

30 https://www.barandbench.com/amp/story/news/litigation/us-court-seeks-help-from-delhi-courts-to-serve-summons-on-ajit-doval-ex-

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.

This project has been made possible with support from the Government of Canada.

> This document was generated from the published assessment at sikhdisinfolab.ca. The version of record is the one on the site, which carries any corrections issued after this file was made.