Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

NDTV report on Pannun lawsuit omits guilty plea in murder-for-hire conspiracy

An NDTV report distributed through MSN presents India's rejection of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's US civil lawsuit while describing the assassination plot against him as merely alleged. The Lab assesses the report as Misleading: a defendant pleaded guilty to the murder-for-hire conspiracy in February 2026, a development the article does not mention.

PUBLISHED
12 November 2026

SOURCE POSTED
10 November 2026

NARRATIVES
Labelling Sikh Individuals as Terrorists Without Evidence · Portraying Advocacy for Khalistan as Terrorism · Labelling Sikhs as “Good” or “Bad” Sikhs · Portraying Sikh Protests as Extremist Activity

OUR ASSESSMENT

What was published

On 10 November 2026, NDTV published a report titled "'Fabricated, Malicious': India Rejects Khalistani Terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's US Lawsuit," subsequently distributed through MSN.

The article reports India's rejection of a civil lawsuit filed by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh political activist and legal counsel for Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), concerning a 2023 conspiracy to assassinate him 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.

The article prominently reproduces the Indian Ministry of External Affairs' description of the allegations as fabricated and malicious and the lawsuit as frivolous. It also reports that the US State Department transmitted court documents to the Indian Embassy in Washington through diplomatic channels in October 2026.

While acknowledging the existence of a related American criminal investigation, the report repeatedly describes the assassination plot as alleged or purported. It refers to Nikhil Gupta as someone accused of participating in the conspiracy and mentions an unnamed Indian government employee, without acknowledging major developments in the criminal proceedings.

The Lab's assessment

Verdict: Misleading.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab (SDL) identifies a significant distortion in how the article presents the attempted assassination of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun and the legal proceedings arising from it.

The central concern is the article's treatment of India's denial as the dominant account while presenting the underlying assassination conspiracy as though it remains entirely unverified.

The criminal proceedings had already moved substantially beyond the stage described in the article.

On 13 February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty in a US federal court to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. His guilty plea establishes his participation in a criminal conspiracy to assassinate Pannun on American soil.

The article, published nearly nine months later, nevertheless describes Gupta primarily through the charges brought against him in November 2023. It does not mention his guilty plea.

This omission materially changes the reader's understanding of the case. The Indian government's rejection of allegations against its senior officials is presented alongside repeated descriptions of a purported assassination plot, without the established criminal outcome that demonstrates the conspiracy was real.

The article also refers to an unnamed Indian government employee allegedly involved in the operation. However, on 17 October 2024, the US Department of Justice publicly identified Vikash Yadav, whom prosecutors described as an Indian government employee at the relevant time, and charged him in connection with directing the assassination plot.

By November 2026, both Gupta's guilty plea and Yadav's identification had been part of the public American legal record for months or years. Their absence is therefore not simply a lack of detail. It leaves readers with an outdated account of the evidence while giving prominence to India's rejection of the civil proceedings.

Another important concern is the article's description of Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist."

India designated Pannun a terrorist under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in July 2020. The article adopts this Indian designation as an unqualified description rather than identifying it as the Indian government's legal classification.

Pannun is also an American citizen and an advocate for Sikh self-determination who was targeted in an assassination conspiracy prosecuted by US authorities. The Indian government's designation does not diminish the seriousness of the criminal plot or the protection owed to him under American law.

The US Department of Justice and FBI have explicitly characterised the attempted assassination as an act of transnational repression targeting an American citizen for exercising his freedom of speech. This is a central finding in the official American account, yet the article gives it no meaningful attention.

The wider assassination and transnational repression context

The significance of the Pannun case extends beyond the individual civil lawsuit.

US prosecutors explicitly connected the investigation to the June 2023 assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia.

According to the American prosecutorial record, Gupta told an undercover law-enforcement officer the day after Nijjar's killing that Nijjar had also been a target and that the planned assassination of Pannun no longer needed to be delayed.

These communications are particularly significant because they place the targeting of two Sikh political activists in Canada and the United States within the same criminal investigation.

The Canadian context adds another important dimension. In October 2024, the RCMP publicly identified evidence linking agents of the Government of India to serious criminal activity in Canada, including homicides, intimidation, organized crime and threats against members of the South Asian community, particularly individuals associated with the pro-Khalistan movement.

Canadian intelligence reporting has also documented Indian transnational repression involving surveillance, intimidation and efforts to suppress criticism of the Indian government.

Further developments emerged in July 2026 through Operation Hard Ball, a multinational investigation involving American and Canadian law-enforcement agencies. US prosecutors charged Lawrence Bishnoi and associates in proceedings that included allegations concerning Nijjar's assassination. A separate indictment involving the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria criminal organization described alleged corruption involving Indian law-enforcement personnel.

Although these are separate investigations involving different defendants and allegations, they provide substantial context for understanding why the targeting of Sikh political activists in North America has become a matter of serious criminal and national-security investigation.

The article excludes this wider background while repeatedly emphasizing Pannun's Indian terrorist designation and the Indian government's rejection of his lawsuit.

The significance of the US court proceedings

The legal development itself also requires careful distinction.

The US State Department transmitted the summons and complaint concerning the Government of India to the Indian Embassy in Washington on 9 October 2026. Separately, on 9 November, a federal judge authorised a procedure through which Pannun could seek to serve Ajit Doval and Samant Goel through Indian courts.

These are procedural developments rather than findings establishing the personal responsibility of the officials named in the civil lawsuit.

However, the proceedings are consequential because they concern an attempt to pursue civil accountability in connection with an assassination conspiracy already established through Gupta's guilty plea.

India's objection to the method of serving judicial documents is a separate legal question from the existence of the criminal conspiracy. The article gives considerable prominence to the procedural objection without adequately explaining that distinction.

The claims

"Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun." Misleading attribution. The designation originates with the Indian government under its domestic legislation. The article presents it as an uncontested description of an American citizen who was targeted in a murder-for-hire conspiracy.

Nikhil Gupta was accused of arranging Pannun's assassination. Outdated and materially incomplete. Gupta pleaded guilty in February 2026 to murder-for-hire and related conspiracy charges. Reporting only the earlier accusations obscures a major development in the criminal case.

An unnamed Indian government employee was implicated in the plot. Outdated. US prosecutors publicly identified Vikash Yadav in October 2024 and charged him in connection with the operation. His individual guilt has not yet been determined.

The US State Department transmitted court-issued summonses to India. Supported. The documents were delivered through diplomatic channels in October 2026. A separate November 2026 court order addressed the proposed service of summonses on Doval and Goel through Indian courts.

Context

The Lab's principal concern is the unequal evidentiary treatment of the Indian government's allegations against Pannun and the American criminal proceedings concerning the attempt to assassinate him.

The Indian government's designation of Pannun as a terrorist is presented as established fact. Its rejection of the lawsuit is prominently reproduced. By contrast, the attempted assassination is repeatedly described as purported, despite Gupta's guilty plea and the public identification of an Indian government employee in related criminal charges.

The result is a striking imbalance: **the intended victim's alleged criminality is presented with greater certainty than the murder-for-hire conspiracy to which a defendant has already pleaded guilty.**

For Sikh political activists in North America, the implications extend beyond this particular publication. The assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the attempted assassination of Pannun and Canadian findings

concerning transnational repression raise serious questions about the protection of Sikh political dissent across national borders.

The article's framing shifts attention away from those questions and toward the political identity of the person targeted, while treating the Indian government's denial as the principal explanation of the legal dispute.

The Lab's concern is the omission of established criminal proceedings and the continued presentation of a documented assassination conspiracy as though it remains merely speculative.

The wider information-integrity concern is the normalization of allegations against Sikh political activists while minimizing documented efforts to silence them through violence. Such reporting risks obscuring the seriousness of transnational repression and the distinction between a government's political characterization of an individual and the independent criminal evidence concerning an attempt on that individual's life.

THE CLAIM

Fabricated, malicious: India rejects Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's US lawsuit

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On 10 November 2026, NDTV published a report titled "'Fabricated, Malicious': India Rejects Khalistani Terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's US Lawsuit." The report was subsequently distributed through MSN.

The article reports India's rejection of a civil lawsuit filed by Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh political activist, US citizen and legal counsel for Sikhs for Justice, concerning a 2023 conspiracy to assassinate him 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.

The report prominently reproduces the Indian Ministry of External Affairs' description of the allegations as fabricated and malicious and of the lawsuit as frivolous. It also reports that the US State Department transmitted court documents to the Indian Embassy in Washington through diplomatic channels in October 2026.

While acknowledging the existence of a related American criminal investigation, the article repeatedly describes the assassination conspiracy as alleged or purported. It refers to Nikhil Gupta as someone accused of participating in the conspiracy and mentions an unnamed Indian government employee, without acknowledging significant developments in the American criminal proceedings.

The Lab's assessment

Verdict: Misleading.

The central concern is that the article treats India's denial as the dominant account while presenting the underlying assassination conspiracy as though it remains entirely unverified.

The criminal proceedings had already moved substantially beyond the stage the article describes. On 13 February 2026, Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty in a US federal court to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. The plea establishes his participation in a criminal conspiracy to assassinate Pannun on American soil. The article, published nearly nine months later, describes Gupta primarily through the charges brought against him in November 2023 and does not mention the plea.

The US Justice Department's investigation also documented the operational details of the conspiracy, including the recruitment of a purported hitman, discussions of a $100,000 payment and the delivery of $15,000 as an advance. The intended hitman was working with American law enforcement, allowing authorities to disrupt the operation. These details demonstrate that the investigation involved evidence of an organized murder-for-hire conspiracy, not merely competing political allegations.

The article also refers to an unnamed Indian government employee allegedly involved in the operation. On 17 October 2024, the US Department of Justice publicly identified Vikash Yadav, whom prosecutors described as an Indian government employee at the relevant time, and charged him in connection with directing the plot. His individual guilt has not yet been determined.

American prosecutors alleged that Yadav supplied Gupta with Pannun's personal information, including his residential address and details of his daily activities, and received surveillance photographs and updates concerning the planned assassination. This raises serious questions about the alleged use of information and resources connected to a foreign intelligence apparatus to target a political dissident abroad.

The US Department of Justice and FBI have characterized the attempted assassination as an act of transnational repression targeting an American citizen for exercising his freedom of speech. The article gives this no meaningful attention.

This distinction is particularly important because the intended target was not simply a participant in a diplomatic dispute. Pannun was a Sikh political activist advocating for Khalistan who, according to the American criminal proceedings, was targeted for assassination in the country of his citizenship. The case therefore raises questions about the protection of political expression, foreign-state activity and the ability of Sikh activists to participate in political movements without facing threats of violence across international borders.

Another significant concern is the article's description of Pannun as a "Khalistani terrorist." India designated him a terrorist under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in July 2020. The article presents this Indian legal designation as an uncontested description, without identifying its jurisdiction or distinguishing it from the criminal allegations being examined by American authorities.

The result is a striking difference in how the article communicates certainty. India's designation of Pannun is presented as an established characterization, while the assassination conspiracy to which Gupta has already pleaded guilty continues to be described as purported. The article consequently directs attention toward the political identity and alleged criminality of the intended victim rather than the documented attempt on his life.

The claims

"Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun." Verdict: Misleading. India designated Pannun a terrorist under its Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in July 2020. The designation originates with the Indian government

under its domestic legislation. The article adopts it as an uncontested description of an American citizen who was targeted in a murder-for-hire conspiracy, rather than identifying it as a legal classification made by one government.

The allegations against Indian officials are "fabricated and malicious." Verdict: Unsupported as an established finding. This is India's stated characterization, not a determination by a US court. The specific allegations against Doval and Goel remain unresolved in civil proceedings, but India's denial does not negate Gupta's guilty plea or the criminal evidence underlying the attempted assassination.

The lawsuit is frivolous. Verdict: Unsupported as a judicial finding. The article reproduces India's dismissal of the proceedings without establishing that an American court has rejected the lawsuit as frivolous. A dispute concerning the service of judicial documents is not a determination of the merits of the case.

The assassination conspiracy remains merely alleged. Verdict: Misleading as applied to the plot as a whole. Gupta pleaded guilty to participating in the conspiracy. The involvement of additional individuals, including those named in the separate civil proceedings, remains subject to the relevant legal processes.

Nikhil Gupta was only accused of organizing the assassination. Verdict: Misleading. The account is materially incomplete because it omits his February 2026 guilty plea.

An unnamed Indian government employee was implicated. Verdict: Misleading. The description is outdated: Vikash Yadav was publicly identified and charged in October 2024.

The US State Department transmitted court-issued summonses to India. Supported. The documents were delivered through diplomatic channels on 9 October 2026. The transmission was a procedural obligation and did not constitute an endorsement by the US State Department of the civil allegations.

The Lab notes separately that, on 9 November, a federal judge authorized a procedure through which Pannun could seek to serve Doval and Goel through Indian courts. The court required additional documentation before the proposed service process could proceed. These are procedural developments, not findings establishing the personal responsibility of the officials named.

India's objection to the method of service is a separate legal question from the existence of the criminal conspiracy, a distinction the article does not adequately explain. The Indian government's insistence on routing judicial documents through its Ministry of Law and Justice does not address the evidence produced in the American murder-for-hire prosecution.

Context

US prosecutors connected the investigation to the June 2023 assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia. According to the American prosecutorial record, Gupta told an undercover law-enforcement officer the day after the killing that Nijjar had also been a target and that the planned assassination of Pannun no longer needed to be delayed.

The American indictment also alleges that, shortly after Nijjar's assassination, Yadav sent Gupta a video showing Nijjar's body and subsequently provided information concerning Pannun's location. These alleged communications are significant because they place the targeting of two prominent Sikh political activists in Canada and the United States within the same prosecutorial record. Their broader implications require consideration without treating every allegation concerning the individuals involved as judicially established.

In September 2023, then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau informed Parliament that Canadian security agencies were investigating credible allegations of a potential connection between agents of the Government of India and Bhai Nijjar's assassination. The killing of a Canadian Sikh political leader on Canadian soil subsequently became a major issue concerning Canadian sovereignty, foreign interference and transnational repression.

In October 2024, the RCMP publicly identified evidence linking agents of the Government of India to serious criminal activity in Canada, including homicides, intimidation, organized crime and threats against members of the South Asian community, particularly individuals associated with the pro-Khalistan movement.

The RCMP also disclosed that law-enforcement agencies had issued warnings concerning more than a dozen credible and imminent threats to life. Its findings included allegations that Indian diplomatic and consular personnel had gathered information through intermediaries and that such information was used to identify and target individuals in Canada.

Canadian intelligence reporting has separately documented Indian transnational repression involving surveillance, intimidation and efforts to suppress criticism of the Indian government. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has also recognized that advocacy for Khalistan is lawful political activity in Canada, distinguishing peaceful political expression from activities involving violent extremism.

In July 2026, through Operation Hard Ball, a multinational investigation involving American and Canadian agencies, US prosecutors charged Lawrence Bishnoi and associates in proceedings that included allegations concerning Nijjar's assassination. A separate indictment involving the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria criminal organization described alleged corruption involving Indian law-enforcement personnel. These are distinct investigations with different defendants, and the allegations concerning one criminal organization do not automatically establish the responsibility of another.

Nevertheless, these developments provide important context for examining the use of organized criminal networks in cross-border violence and the allegations of foreign-state involvement in targeting Sikh political activists.

The Pannun and Nijjar cases are particularly significant because both concern prominent advocates of Sikh self-determination who were targeted in North America. The American criminal investigation documented communications referring to both individuals, while Canadian authorities have independently raised serious concerns about threats directed against members of the pro-Khalistan movement.

The article excludes this wider context while repeatedly emphasizing Pannun's Indian terrorist designation and the Indian government's rejection of his civil lawsuit.

The result is an evidentiary imbalance: the intended victim's alleged criminality is presented with greater certainty than the murder-for-hire conspiracy to which a defendant has already pleaded guilty.

The distinction between India's denial and the established criminal proceedings is central. India has denied the allegations against its senior officials, and their personal responsibility has not been established by the civil court. However, the existence of the assassination conspiracy is no longer merely an accusation. Treating both matters as equally unresolved obscures the difference between a documented criminal offence and allegations concerning who directed or authorized it.

The broader concern is how the political identity of a Sikh activist becomes the dominant feature of reporting about an attempted assassination against him. By foregrounding India's terrorist designation and characterizing

the lawsuit as frivolous, while omitting a guilty plea and the wider findings concerning transnational repression, the article shifts attention away from the potential misuse of state power and the protection of political dissent.

The central information-integrity concern is the minimization of an established assassination conspiracy through selective reporting, while the intended victim is identified primarily through a disputed security designation. This framing risks obscuring the seriousness of threats facing Sikh political activists and the unresolved questions of accountability for violence directed against them across national borders.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.	MISLEADING
02	The allegations against Indian officials are "fabricated and malicious.	UNSUPPORTED
03	The assassination conspiracy remains merely alleged.	MISLEADING
04	Nikhil Gupta was only accused of organizing the assassination.	MISLEADING
05	An unnamed Indian government employee was implicated.	MISLEADING

SOURCES

01 https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/other/fabricated-malicious-india-rejects-khalistani-terrorist-gurpatwant-singh-pannun-s-us-lawsuit/

02 Official RCMP statement concerning the joint Canadian–American investigation into the Lawrence Bishnoi, Ravinder Dhanda and Jaggu Bhagwanpuria criminal networks. Discusses arrests, cross-border criminal activity and allegations involving Nijjar's assassination *Archive snapshot · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

03 Official U.S. Department of Justice announcement confirming that Nikhil Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire and related conspiracy charges concerning the plot to assassinate Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York. This is the principal evidence missing from the NDTV/MSN report. *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

04 Official Canadian intelligence reporting on foreign interference, transnational repression and violent extremism. Provides important context regarding threats to Sikh political activists and distinguishes lawful, non-violent Khalistan advocacy from extremist violence. *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

05 Public docket index identifying the parties and proceedings in Pannun's civil lawsuit against the Government of India, Ajit Doval, Samant Goel and other defendants. The case seeks civil accountability for the alleged assassination conspiracy. Justia is a third-party docket index, not the court's official filing service *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

06 Official U.S. announcement concerning Operation Hard Ball, a multinational investigation into India-based organized crime networks. Includes allegations relating to the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar and separate allegations concerning criminal syndicates and corrupt law-enforcement relationships. *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

07 Official RCMP statement concerning investigations linking Indian government agents to serious criminal activity in Canada. Documents threats to life, intimidation, homicides and threats specifically affecting individuals associated with the pro-Khalistan movement. *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

08 Official announcement identifying Vikash Yadav as an Indian government employee charged in connection with the attempted assassination. Includes allegations about his role in directing Nikhil Gupta and details connecting the investigation to the period surrounding Hardeep Singh Nijjar's assassination. *Other · Retrieved 2026-11-12.*

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.

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