Sikh Disinformation Lab

MISLEADING

NewsBytes report on Doval lawsuit conflates rejecting allegations with rejecting a US court summons

A NewsBytes India report asserts that India "rejects US court's summons" to NSA Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel. The Lab assesses the report as Misleading: India rejected the lawsuit and its allegations, while the court's order remained in effect.

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

NewsBytes reported India's rejection of a US civil lawsuit filed by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun against senior Indian officials, including National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel. Its headline conflates India's rejection of the allegations with rejection of the US court's summons.

The article also introduces Pannun as a “Khalistani terrorist” without attributing the designation to India's UAPA legislation. More significantly, it describes the assassination conspiracy as “purported” despite acknowledging Nikhil Gupta's February 2026 guilty plea. The allegations against Doval and Goel remain unproven, but Gupta's admitted participation in the conspiracy is an established criminal fact.

The report reflects recurring narrative patterns involving the adoption of Indian security designations, emphasis on official denials and insufficient distinction between proven criminal conduct and unresolved civil allegations. Its principal concerns involve misleading terminology, selective contextualization and the framing of judicial accountability proceedings.

THE CLAIM

India rejects US court's summons to NSA Doval, ex-RAW chief

THE ANALYSIS

What was published

On 20 November 2026, the Indian outlet NewsBytes (newsbytesapp.com) published a report headlined "India rejects US court's summons to NSA Doval, ex-RAW chief." The piece covers a civil lawsuit filed in the United States District Court against senior Indian officials, including National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and former Research and Analysis Wing chief Samant Goel, by Sikh political activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.

The report also described a significant procedural development in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. The court had authorized service of judicial documents on Doval and Goel through designated district courts in Delhi, following unsuccessful earlier attempts through India's central authority.

NewsBytes identified Patiala House District Court as the designated court for Doval and Dwarka and Tis Hazari district courts for Goel. It also described the requirements for a proposed service packet that Pannun had been directed to submit by November 30, 2026.

The article concluded by briefly discussing the underlying assassination conspiracy, the US investigation, Nikhil Gupta's arrest and guilty plea, and the FBI's pursuit of Vikash Yadav.

Although the report includes substantially accurate information about the judicial process, its presentation raises concerns about the distinction between India's rejection of the allegations and the authority of the US court, the characterization of the intended assassination victim, and the treatment of criminal conduct already established through Gupta's guilty plea.

The Lab assesses the report as Misleading. Its core factual reporting on the procedural history is accurate, but the headline, its terminology and its characterisation of the underlying conspiracy are not.

The claims, one by one

1. That India rejected the US court's summons to Doval and Goel: Misleading. The headline conflates two different things. India rejected the lawsuit and the allegations contained in it. That is a diplomatic and legal position. It is not the same as nullifying a summons. The judicial order remained in effect notwithstanding India's rejection of the allegations, and the headline leaves readers with the impression that the court's process had been set aside.

2. That Pannun is a "Khalistani terrorist": Misleading. The report introduces Pannun with this description without attributing it to its source. The designation derives from India's domestic legal framework under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Presented without that attribution, a contested domestic designation is carried into the reporting as an unqualified descriptor.

3. That a US District Court ordered service through Delhi courts: True. This element of the report is accurate.

4. That India argued service requests must proceed through the Ministry of Law and Justice: True. This element of the report is accurate.

5. That the US court authorised alternative service under Indian law and the Hague Service Convention: True. This element of the report is accurate.

6. That the conspiracy was merely "purported": Misleading. The report describes the assassination conspiracy as "purported" while also acknowledging Nikhil Gupta's February 2026 guilty plea. The qualifier is misleading when applied to the criminal conspiracy as a whole. Gupta's admitted participation is an established criminal fact. The distinct civil allegations against Doval and Goel remain unproven and unresolved, and nothing in this assessment suggests otherwise.

The Central Problem

The article's most significant weakness is the way its framing combines India's official rejection of the lawsuit with an insufficiently qualified account of the underlying assassination conspiracy.

The headline presents India's rejection of the US court's summons as the defining development. However, the Indian government's quoted statements primarily concern its rejection of Pannun's allegations and the legitimacy of the lawsuit. Indian officials also disputed the appropriate procedure for serving judicial documents.

These positions are distinct from the US court's decision authorizing service through Indian courts. A government's rejection of the allegations does not automatically invalidate a foreign court's procedural order, just as the issuance of that order does not establish the defendants' liability.

A second issue concerns the article's identification of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. NewsBytes introduces him through a terrorism designation without clearly identifying it as an Indian government classification under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

This is particularly consequential because the report concerns proceedings initiated by an individual who was the intended victim of an assassination conspiracy prosecuted in the United States.

The third issue involves the article's description of that conspiracy as “purported,” even after acknowledging that Gupta pleaded guilty in February 2026.

The distinction between established criminal responsibility and unresolved allegations against other individuals is central to an accurate account of the case. The article does not sufficiently develop that distinction.

The report also reflects patterns the Lab has documented: the adoption of Indian security designations as neutral description, heavy emphasis on official denials, and framing that treats accountability proceedings as illegitimate rather than as ongoing legal process.

##Context: What the report leaves out

The most significant contextual omission concerns the difference between India's political and diplomatic rejection of the allegations and the established findings from the US criminal prosecution.

The report gives substantial attention to India's statements describing the lawsuit as baseless and the allegations as malicious. It also provides useful procedural information concerning the court's authorization of alternative service.

However, its discussion of the assassination conspiracy is comparatively brief.

In November 2023, the US Department of Justice announced criminal charges against Nikhil Gupta in connection with a foiled plot to assassinate Pannun in New York City. The prosecution alleged that Gupta worked with an Indian government employee to arrange the murder, including negotiating payment with an individual whom Gupta believed to be a contract killer. The supposed killer was an undercover Drug Enforcement Administration officer.

US prosecutors further described the collection and transmission of identifying information about Pannun, including his residential address, telephone numbers and details of his daily activities.

In October 2024, the Department of Justice identified Vikash Yadav as the Indian government employee charged in connection with the conspiracy. The allegations against Yadav remain unresolved.

On February 13, 2026, Gupta pleaded guilty to all three charges in the superseding indictment.

These developments had already occurred when NewsBytes published its November 20 article.

On November 20, 2026, Gupta was also sentenced to 235 months in federal prison. This subsequent sentencing development further established the consequences of his criminal conduct. Because the sentencing occurred on the same date as NewsBytes' publication, it should be treated as an additional development rather than automatically characterized as information omitted at the time of publication.

The broader investigative record also contains references to the June 2023 assassination of Canadian Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

According to the US Department of Justice, Gupta made statements referring to Nijjar's killing during communications concerning the planned assassination of Pannun. These communications were documented in the prosecution's account of the conspiracy.

Their inclusion in the investigative record is significant to the broader examination of threats against Sikh political activists in North America. It does not, by itself, determine who was responsible for Nijjar's assassination.

The combined record demonstrates why the Pannun proceedings cannot be understood solely through India's rejection of the civil allegations.

The civil lawsuit presents unresolved questions about the alleged responsibility of senior Indian officials. The criminal proceedings have already established Gupta's participation in a politically motivated assassination conspiracy. Both dimensions require accurate and separate treatment.

##The significance of the terminology

The article's use of the term “Khalistani terrorist” is significant because it introduces the intended victim of an assassination conspiracy through a domestic designation issued by the state whose officials are named in the lawsuit.
This creates an important evidentiary problem.

India's UAPA designation is a verifiable legal fact about India's position toward Pannun. However, the designation does not establish criminal liability in the United States and does not determine the legitimacy of violence directed against him. In the US proceedings, Pannun is identified as an attorney, American citizen and political activist. His advocacy for Khalistan is relevant to understanding the motive attributed to the assassination conspiracy.

Accurate reporting should distinguish India's accusations, the American legal proceedings and the criminal conduct established through Gupta's guilty plea.

These distinctions are particularly important when the person described through terrorism-related terminology is also the intended victim of a politically motivated killing. The article's unqualified wording can shift readers' attention from the alleged perpetrators and established criminal acts toward the political identity of the person targeted.

##Assessment

NewsBytes' report contains a substantial amount of accurate factual information concerning the US court's procedural orders, the designated Delhi courts, the November 30 service-packet deadline and India's official response.

The article also acknowledges Gupta's guilty plea and accurately reports that Vikash Yadav is wanted by US authorities.

Its principal concerns arise from the way these facts are framed.

The headline conflates India's rejection of the lawsuit with rejection of the US court's summons. The introduction adopts India's terrorism designation of Pannun without identifying its jurisdictional origin. The report also describes the assassination conspiracy in tentative terms despite Gupta's established guilty plea.

The Sikh Disinformation Lab assesses the article as Misleading, primarily because of its unqualified security terminology, imprecise description of India's legal response and insufficient differentiation between established criminal conduct and unresolved civil allegations.

India's rejection of the allegations does not invalidate the US court's procedural order. Likewise, unresolved allegations against senior officials do not erase the criminal responsibility already established through Gupta's guilty plea.

CLAIMS ASSESSED

01	India rejected the US court's summons to Ajit Doval and Samant Goel.	MISLEADING
02	Pannun is a “Khalistani terrorist.”	MISLEADING
03	A US District Court ordered service through Delhi courts.	TRUE
04	India argued that service requests must proceed through the Ministry of Law and Justice.	TRUE
05	The US court authorized alternative service under Indian law and the Hague Service Convention.	TRUE
06	The conspiracy was merely “purported.”	MISLEADING

SOURCES

01 https://www.newsbytesapp.com/news/india/india-rejects-allegations-in-us-court-case/story

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

03 Primary judicial order granting Pannun's motion to pursue service through Indian courts and specifying the November 30 deadline for submitting the proposed service materials.

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

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

06 Primary judicial document directing the transmission of summonses and supporting materials through Patiala House, Dwarka and Tis Hazari district courts. The order also identifies the legal provisions governing the proposed method of service.

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

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

09 Official announcement confirming that India designated Gurpatwant Singh Pannun under its domestic anti-terrorism legislation. Establishes the origin of the designation used without qualification in the NewsBytes article.

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

11 NDTV / PTI — India Rejects Pannun's Lawsuit as Baseless, November 20, 2026

12 Contemporaneous reporting documenting the Ministry of External Affairs' rejection of the lawsuit and its position on the appropriate procedure for serving foreign judicial documents.

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

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

15 Official statement identifying the Indian government employee charged in connection with directing the assassination conspiracy and outlining the allegations against him.

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

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

18 Primary record confirming Gupta's guilty plea to murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Includes the prosecution's account of the plot and references to Nijjar's assassination.

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

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

21 Official confirmation of Gupta's 235-month prison sentence. Describes the established criminal proceedings and the prosecution's allegations concerning the role of an Indian government employee.

22 https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/indian-national-sentenced-over-19-years-prison-plotting-assassinate-us-citizen-new-york-city

23 Federal Bureau of Investigation — Vikash Yadav Wanted Notice

24 Official wanted notice confirming the federal charges involving Yadav and the allegations concerning his role in the attempted assassination.

25 https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/counterintelligence/vikash-yadav

26 NewsBytes — India Dismisses Pannun's Lawsuit Against NSA Doval and Former RAW Chief, November 11, 2026

27 Earlier reporting from the same publisher concerning India's rejection of the allegations. Useful for identifying repeated framing and distinguishing an ongoing narrative from the specific November 20 article.

28 https://www.newsbytesapp.com/news/india/india-dismisses-us-lawsuit-allegations/story

29 NewsBytes — Pannun Allowed to Serve Summons on NSA Doval and Former RAW Chief, November 10, 2026

30 Earlier coverage by the same outlet confirming the court's authorization of alternative service. Provides comparative context for the November 20 headline.

31 https://www.newsbytesapp.com/news/world/us-court-issues-summons-to-indian-officials/story

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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