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Subject: Complaint against show “Coffee Par Kurukshetra” that aired on IndiaTV on August 7, 2024

Dear Ma'am,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), are writing to you with regards to a news segment that aired on India TV on August 7, 2024, titled “*Coffee Par Kurukshetra: बांग्लादेशी हिंदुओं को कौन बचाएगा?*”. The said show was surrounding significant turn of events that took place in Bangladesh recently.

As you must be aware, on August 5, in a significant turn of events, Bangladesh saw a turn in their government with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigning and leaving the country on Monday in the afternoon and Army chief Waker uz Zaman stating that an interim government will take over the power in the country. It is to be noted that Hasina's decision was prompted by the weeks-long protest against 30% reservations to select groups in government jobs and educational institutions. After this decision for reservation was made public, protestors took to the streets to question the quota of reservation being granted to the third generation of freedom fighters, and demanding a total merit-based recruitment. While the protests had begun peacefully in June against the quota system, the student-led movement later turned into a people's movement against her increasingly autocratic 15-year rule. This escalated to a protest to oust Sheikh Hasina.

Soon after Hasina left the country, jubilant crowds waved flags and danced in front of cameras. Videos showing tens of thousands of people surrounding government offices and residences in the capital Dhaka started coming up on social media. People could be seen entering the official residence of ex-PM Hasina and stealing things from her house, which included fishes, utensils, clothes, etc. However, the celebratory protests also took a turn for the worst as videos of people vandalising an imposing statue of Hasina's father, independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in Dhaka, attacking the head with an axe also emerged.

In the days following the ouster of Hasina, multiple incidents of attacks on the Hindu minorities also emerged. As per the report of the *The Daily Star*, in Dhaka's Dhanmondi, the home of band Joler Gaan's frontman Rahul Ananda was set on fire and burnt to the ground. The report also provided that on the same day, the Dhanuka Manasa Bari temple in Shariatpur was ransacked

by an angry mob. It has been reported that the mob crushed the idols of Radha-Krishna and razed the temple to the ground. They also damaged all 16 CCTV cameras installed inside the temple premises. According to *The Dhaka Tribune*, the warehouse of Babul Saha, chairman of Narikelbaria in Bhagarpara, Jessore, was attacked and looted, along with 22 shops belonging to the local Hindu community. Several homes were also vandalized and plundered during the incident.

However for those that look for representative news even in times of acute crisis, what was reassuring was that even before the new fledgling government under unusual circumstances took oath in neighbouring Bangladesh, four-to five days later, even before some formal order was brought to the streets, Bangladeshis from the majority Muslim community came forward to protect the vulnerable minority Hindus. These episodes were widely shared on social media and also by authors from India, who while *not underplaying the threat of majoritarianism in Bangladesh recognised these efforts at maintaining intra-community peace*. That, we believe is what responsible journalism is about.¹ In fact this message relayed from a local Bangladeshi mosque is worth recording.² As are several posts and photographs on social media that show ordinary and organised Muslims protecting the Hindus there. It would have been apt and responsible, given the volatility of social relations across borders and within and between our communities in India –and given the fact that this reality is in no way alleviated by politicians who use such opportunities to stoke the fires of ill will, for a television channel like India TV to have portrayed this reality as well.

On August 9, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus took the oath of office as head of Bangladesh's interim government, and raised call to protect the Hindu minority present in Bangladesh as well as restoring peace in the country.

Sir, we aware of the turmoil that is taking place in Bangladesh and the incidents of violence that have occurred in the country against the minority community of Hinds in Bangladesh. The complainant takes into account that Indian citizenry, including many political leaders, human rights defenders, activists and students, have raised their voice against the targeted atrocities being unleashed against the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

While it is understandable that the unpredictable situation prevailing in Bangladesh as well as the history of violence against minorities in the country would lead to people being apprehensive regarding the safety of Hindus and Christians, the false sense of panic that is being created through propaganda is only contributing to the chaos. The said “*charcha*” is also a part of those who are using the activities taking place in Bangladesh to cause unrest in India and to build a narrative of an impending Muslim takeover of India.

¹ <https://thewire.in/south-asia/the-new-bangladesh-government-should-prevent-majoritarianism-in-the-wake-of-pro-democracy-revolts>; Lessons from a ‘Democratic Revolt’: Prevent the slide into majoritarianism <https://sabrangindia.in/lessons-from-a-democratic-revolt-prevent-the-slide-into-majoritarianism/>

² <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x93m7ta>

It is essential to highlight here that the said show has been removed from YouTube, and is now only available on the official website of IndiaTV. The show can be viewed here:

<https://www.indiatv.in/video/kurukshetra/coffee-par-kurukshetra-who-will-save-bangladeshi-hindus-2024-08-07-1065867>

At the outset, we would like state that in his 30 minutes '*Coffee Par Kurukshetra*' show on India TV, we would like to highlight that albeit the theme of the show was to discuss the situation of Hindus in Bangladesh, the discussion kept diverting to the Muslims of India wanting to eradicate the Hindus in India so that they can convert India into an Islamic nation. In short, the discussion which could have been regarding ensuring protection of minorities in the neighbouring countries as well as in India was manipulated into spreading fear and causing alarm against the Muslim takeover of India.

Contents of the show:

Here is what transpired throughout the show. The host of the show was Saurabh Sharma, and the participants of the discussion included Pradeep Singh, Supreme Court lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay and Shantanu Gupta.

The host introduced the show by stating that the focus of the discussion will be on the 1 crore and 30 lakh Bangladeshi Hindus and the situation that they might be facing now that “the wall standing between the Hindus and the Jihadi elements, namely Shiekh Hasina, has now been broken”. [Time stamp- 00:40- 00:49]

Throughout the show, the word “Jihadi” has been used multiple times by the host. Another example of the same is when the host, in the beginning itself, described the mentality of the students and those involved in breaking of the statutes and stealing as “Jihadi”. [Time stamp- 02:00- 02:07]

The host Sharma then explains the situation which led to the influx of refugees from Bangladesh into India prior to Bangladesh being formed, which had resulted in India intervening into the war between erstwhile East and West Pakistan. The discussion then started with Pradeep Singh speaking about the history of the formation of Bangladesh and differentiating with the situation in the past and the present by stating that “before, both Hindus and Muslims were targeted, and now only Hindus are being targeted in Bangladesh.”

Sharma then points to there being a lack of research on the atrocities that Hindus had to face prior to the formation of Bangladesh, and that the sufferings of the Hindus of Bangladesh are not recognised or accepted anywhere. As Sharma starts talking about the decreasing population of Hindus in Bangladesh, with them running to India, converting to Islam or being murdered, Sharma compares the situation with the state of West Bengal by stating “are we able to safeguard the Hindus in our own country, in West Bengal? Whatever is happening in West Bengal post the 2021 state elections, the way Hindus are being targeted and killed, what are we able to do?” [Time stamp- 07:38- 08:00]

Sharma then makes the following statements, calling for the unity for Hindus in India “UP CM Yogi Adityanath recently said in Ayodhya that Hindus are being killed selectively, this is the time for them to unite. He also said that Ram Temple in Ayodhya is not our aim, but it is a milestone. He said that we need to do more. In my opinion, we need to ensure that this mentality is put forth in India.” [Time stamp- 08:00 - 08:24]

“Till the time this is done, this fraud that has been circulated amongst us regarding there being a *Ganga- Jamuni Tehzeeb* is corrected as if this had really existed in your country, there would not have been any partition. It was Muslims who wanted a different country from Hindus, Hindus did not have any problem with them.” [Time stamp- 08:24 - 09:03]

SC advocate Ashwini Upadhyay spoke next. Upadhyay began by underscoring how India is a democracy only because Hindus are in majority in the country. “India follows a constitution only because Hindus are a majority, India is a democracy because the Hindus are in majority, and the army of India does not revolt because the majority of those enrolled into Army are Hindus. Even the bureaucracy in India is formed by majority Hindu, which is why they do not revolt. If anything is going right in India, it is because Hindus are in majority unlike Pakistan and Bangladesh. [Time stamp- 09:53 - 10:21]

Continuing with his one-sided narrative of how India is at the target of Muslims, Upadhyay says “India has 9 neighbouring countries, and all of them are on “their” target. They want to commit Ghazwa-e-Hind on the whole cluster. They just do not want to convert India, but the whole cluster of countries. This is their Jihadi doctrine.” [Time stamp- 10:22 - 10:42]

“East Bengal became Bangladesh, and in the next two to three years, the remaining Hindu majority will either convert or run to India. So, they have ended the Hindu population in Bangladesh as well. Now the 5 countries which have a Hindu population is on the target of these Jamaatees- which are India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. In all these countries, the demography is changing so fast. In India itself, there are 28 states and 8 Union Territories, which makes it a total of 36. Out of these 36, in at least 9 states and UTs, the Hindu population had been erased.” [Time stamp- 11:26 - 12:04]

“On the multiple borders of India, both land and waters, we must have at least 300 villages and districts, and I can bet if a study is conducted by the Home Ministry, they will see that the demography of all these villages on the borders have changed.” [Time stamp- 12:20 - 12:45]

Referring to Salman Khurshid’s comment on how there can be a similar uprising of the people in India in the future, Upadhyay says that “the Jamaat-E-Islami in Bangladesh is the one behind the violence against Hindus in Bangladesh. These organisations, which are in Pakistan and India in the form of PFI, are well connected and have the same goal which is of Ghazwa-E-Hind.” [Time stamp- 15:19 - 15:37]

The third speaker, Shantanu Gupta, then starts referring to the Hindu temples that were broken during the Mughal Raj. He states “I have lived in Europe and denying Holocaust there can lead to punishment. While in India, we are constantly denying the atrocities unleashed on Hindus.

During the reign of the Muslims, multiple Hindu temples were broken. According to a book, at least 40,000 temples were broken but we brush it off as if only 3-4 temples were broken. **[Time stamp- 17:52 - 18:18]**

To this, Upadhyay adds that “In order to justify these demolitions of the temples, the Places of Worship Act was introduced. They normalised the acts.” **[Time stamp- 18:18 - 18:25]**

Gupta then continues by stating “People are justifying the protests in Bangladesh. Yogendra Yadav anyway states that people need to get on the roads to bring a change and that Parliament and voting is not the way. Have we not seen the Shaheen Bagh, or the Khalistani flags during the farmer protest? So, this is no longer a conspiracy theory, but there is data on how the demography is changing in India.” **[Time stamp- 19:12 - 19:35]**

Pradeep Singh, who was the first speaker, then again takes charge of the conversation and brings it back to Hindus being targeted everywhere, including India. He then states “It is easy to fight with someone who is outside our borders because we know our enemies, but how to we fight these snakes who are living inside our country. We have to be completely ruthless in dealing with these people that is our only solution.” **[Time stamp- 22:40 - 22:59]**

Host Sharma then states “tomorrow the Waqf Board bill is being introduced, tomorrow itself we will get to see how strong these forces that are inside our country. We see ruckus tomorrow I can bet, there will be a loud ruckus.” **[Time stamp- 22:59 - 23:10]**

Upadhyay then speaks to the host and states “When we talk about where this thinking is coming from, let me tell you something. We have CBSE board, ICSE board, and other state boards. You can go to any shop to buy the books on their curriculum. Show me the books that are there on the Madrasa curriculum.” **[Time stamp- 23:11 - 23:32]**

Concluding with his speech, Upadhaya then makes the claim that the agenda of Ghazwa-E-Hind before 2047 has been brought in for both India and Nepal and it will be successful unless strict control is there on judiciary, police, and cases regarding “Naxalism, Maoism and Jihad” are heard and disposed within a heard, and strict punishment is given. **[Time stamp- 25:15 - 26:07]**

Shantanu Gupta then makes his conclusion by stating “The world-wide problem that is there is because of the fight that is going on between Islam and Christianity, and their task is to get the maximum subscribers. Hinduism and its allied religions is the only thing standing between this.” **[Time stamp- 26:50 - 27:07]**

Towards the end, when the host brings the discussion to a close, the host states that while they cannot do much about the situation of Bangladesh as it is a sovereign state, what the people in India can do is to “open our eyes that we have closed and see things for how they are in India.” **[Time stamp- 28:45 - 29:12]**

What this show entailed

It is clear from the extracts we have mentioned above that throughout the half an hour show that under the guise of the attack of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh, the Muslim minorities of India were unnecessarily into an issue that did not warrant for the same. Throughout the show, the alleged conspiracy theories of Muslims changing the demography of India to take over the country and make it an Islamic nation were propagated. With an aim of spreading social disharmony and fear-mongering, a unique environment was created wherein the three participants as well as the hosts targeted the Muslims of India and showed them under a suspicious light. It was their case that the Muslims of India want to become the majority population of India through “forced religious conversions, population increase and illegal migration” to ensure that India goes through a similar situation as Bangladesh. It is ironic that such conversations took place in a show that was discussing the targeting of minorities in another country while indulging in peddling anti-Muslim sentiments in India.

IndiaTV did this, while wilfully choosing to ignore stellar examples of—in that critical period between August 5/6 and 9 when the new government took over—ordinary and organised Muslims stepping up to provide protection to isolated and insecure Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh (these have been referred to and referenced above). It would have been especially apt and responsible for a television anchor running a show with such a wide reach to have done so, given the volatility of social relations across borders and within and between our communities in India—and given the fact that this reality is in no way alleviated by politicians who use such opportunities to stoke the fires of ill will, for a television channel like India TV to have portrayed this reality as well.

Not only has the speakers selectively manipulated the crucial issue of Hindus and Christians being attacked in Bangladesh, they have also brushed off all the attempts made by Muslims of Bangladesh to come out in protection of the Hindu community. Knowing that the words spoken by them at this national platform can also be a cause of disharmony and communal conflicts in India, the speakers have indulged in distorting the history of both India and Bangladesh, as well as made this a total Hindu-Muslim issue that India should learn from. Not once did the speakers speak about the issue of protecting minorities, rather when it came to India, they have shown the majority Hindus as the ones in danger of being erased by the minority Muslims. Every opportunity was taken up by each of the speakers to encourage misconceptions against Muslims, by speaking about the alleged agenda of “Ghazwa-E-Hind”, “Jihad”, “Madrasa”, “Shaheen Bagh”, and “Waqf Board”.

Instead of framing an issue in a sober fashion with an intent to explore various aspects of the discussion, both the host and the participants continued the discussion by disguisedly making religiously coloured statements, fear-mongering, and presenting on-sided facts with an agenda. This displays partisan coverage and does not fit well with democratic, constitutional principles of independent journalism. Both the host and the speakers made some extremely problematic statements too.

Reporting on news involves an exercise of imparting information. Questioning of the bit of news information in a prejudicial or hysterical way, without any rational basis to that

questioning, with an intention to pitch views of only one segment/community amounts to stigmatising another section that is thus portrayed. Laws, statutory guidelines and evolving jurisprudence have tested and assessed this kind of portrayal and held it to be, in fact, creating an unequal, partisan playing field that both demeans the right to life and right to life with dignity of that particular targeted section. In practice, therefore it attacks the right to equality and non-discrimination, too.

It is clear from the extracts we have mentioned above, that the show appeared more like a one-sided show promoting the host's take on the Bangladesh issue and agenda of the Indian Muslims to take over India and make it an Islamic nation or a religious/sectarian debate rather than a news room debate.

As per the guidelines of the NBDSA, the hosts are supposed to and expected to take a neutral stand, introduce a neutral theme and not side with a particular community to put any other community on the spot, but that clearly did not happen. As is apparent from the videos and the statements highlighted by us, both the host as well as the participants were keen on leading the discussion with the question of whether the Hindus of India should "open their eyes" and "see the agenda of the Muslims in India". As the anchor of a show on a news channel, that is supposed to have a neutral and unbiased theme, the hosts did not even attempt to have any non-communal theme on the debate.

This does not only violate the made guidelines issued by the News Broadcasting Digital and Standards Authority (NBDSA) from time to time of which the channel is a member but also stands in violation of our constitutional principles. With the vast viewership of the channel, it can be presumed that this prejudicial view has already reached large sections of the people through the TV channel and also through the social media platforms.

Violations

The Violations of NBDSA principles:

Following are some of the codes of ethics and principles of self-regulation as laid out by the NBDSA, violated by IndiaTV:

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

- 1) Professional electronic journalists should accept and understand that they operate as trustees of public and should, therefore, make it their mission to seek the truth and to report it fairly with integrity and independence. Professional journalists should stand fully accountable for their actions.

- 4) Broadcasters shall, in particular, ensure that they do not select news for the purpose of either promoting or hindering either side of any controversial public issue. News

shall not be selected or designed to promote any particular belief, opinion or desires of any interest group.

5) The fundamental purpose of dissemination of news in a democracy is to educate and inform the people of the happenings in the country, so that the people of the country understand significant events and form their own conclusions.

6) Broadcasters shall ensure a full and fair presentation of news as the same is the fundamental responsibility of each news channel. Realizing the importance of presenting all points of view in a democracy, the broadcasters should, therefore, take responsibility in ensuring that controversial subjects are fairly presented, with time being allotted fairly to each point of view. Besides, the selection of items of news shall also be governed by public interest and importance based on the significance of these items of news in a democracy.

PRINCIPLES OF SELF REGULATION

2. Ensuring neutrality: TV News channels must provide for neutrality by offering equality for all affected parties, players and actors in any dispute or conflict to present their point of view. Though neutrality does not always come down to giving equal space to all sides (news channels shall strive to give main view points of the main parties) news channels must strive to ensure that allegations are not portrayed as fact and charges are not conveyed as an act of guilt.

9. Racial & Religious Harmony:

9.1 Racial and religious stereotyping should be avoided.

9.2 Caution should be exercised in reporting content which denigrates or is likely to offend the sensitivities of any racial or religious group or that may create religious intolerance or disharmony.

It may be noted that adding a Disclaimer to any programme including debates does not absolve Editorial personnel, Anchors, Journalists and Producers of their responsibility in case of violation of the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines. Editorial Policy of a particular channel cannot be a defence to a breach of the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines.

The channel also stands in violation of **the Cable Television Network Rules, whereby the programme Code under Rule 6 states that**

(1) No programme should be carried in the cable service which: -

(c) Contains attack on religions or communities or visuals or words contemptuous of religious groups or which promote communal attitudes;

- (e) Is likely to encourage or incite violence or contains anything against maintenance of law and order or which promote-anti-national attitudes;
- (h) Contains anything affecting the integrity of the Nation;
- (i) Criticises, maligns or slanders any individual in person or certain groups, segments of social, public and moral life of the country;

Further, the inflammatory and unverified content of the show amounts to inciteful, hate speech which is a punishable offence under various sections of the **Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, 2023 (BNS)**:

Sections 196 [promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony],

298 [deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs],

302 [uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person] and

356 (1) and (2) [publication or circulation of any statement, rumour or report causing public mischief and enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes].

On January 13, 2023 while hearing a batch of petitions seeking action against hate speech the bench of Justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna (Supreme Court of India) said that the news anchors who promote or indulge in hate speech should be punished by imposing a fine and taken off air. The bench also said that the news media must realise that they occupy a position of great strength and what they are saying impacts the whole country. “They should realise that they have no right to speak their minds whichever way they want,” said Justice Joseph. The bench also said that news channels were creating a rift in the society. During a hearing in September 2022, in the Hon’ble Supreme Court, a Justice of 7 the Court (Justice Joseph) had expressly stated that TV channels were using hate to increase their ratings.

From the multiple complaints that we have raised before NBDSA over the years, it is evident that certain news channels are always seeking a communal agenda to increase their viewership. Controversial and communal topics attracts viewer attention as it is a matter of debate and thus, these channels tend to pick up any news that can be given a communal turn and sometimes even create a news point to further their divisive agenda.

In the case of *Amish Devgan vs. Union of India and others* [Writ Petition (Criminal) No. 160 OF 2020 decided on December 7, 2020], the Supreme Court held thus,

“The unity and integrity of the nation cannot be overlooked and slighted, as the acts that ‘promote’ or are ‘likely’ to ‘promote’ divisiveness, alienation and schematism do directly and indirectly impinge on the diversity and pluralism, and when they are with

the objective and intent to cause public disorder or to demean dignity of the targeted groups, they have to be dealt with as per law....Such threats not only insidiously weaken virtue and superiority of diversity, but cut-back and lead to demands depending on the context and occasion, for suppression of freedom to express and speak on the ground of reasonableness. Freedom and rights cannot extend to create public disorder or armour those who challenge integrity and unity of the country or promote and incite violence.”

“In this context, it is necessary to draw a distinction between ‘free speech’ which includes the right to comment, favour or criticise government policies; and ‘hate 10 speech’ creating or spreading hatred against a targeted community or group....The object of criminalising the latter type of speech is to protect the dignity (as explained above) and to ensure political and social equality between different identities and groups regardless of caste, creed, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, linguistic preference etc.”

In ***Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan v. Union of India and ors.***, reported in AIR 2014 SC 1591, while hearing a plea urged in public interest that the existing laws of the country are not sufficient to cope with the menace of "hate speeches", had the occasion to consider what a "hate speech" is. The court stated thus,

"7. Hate speech is an effort to marginalise individuals based on their membership in a group. Using expression that exposes the group to hatred, hate speech seeks to delegitimise group members in the eyes of the majority, reducing their social standing and acceptance within society. Hate speech, therefore, rises beyond causing distress to individual group members. It can have a social impact. Hate speech lays the groundwork for later, broad attacks on vulnerable that can range from discrimination, to ostracism, segregation, deportation, violence and, in the most extreme cases, to genocide. Hate speech also impacts a protected group's ability to respond to the substantive ideas under debate, thereby placing a serious barrier to their full participation in our democracy."

If the channel truly cared about values of secularism and fraternity, it would abide by them. However, it is clear that in utter disregard of these constitutional values, the channel has brazenly forwarded its anti-minority narrative and gone full throttle in showing Muslim community in a suspicious light and furthered the Islamophobic discourse prevalent in the current times.

We are sure that a channel such as yours is aware of the recent matters pending in the Hon'ble Supreme Court, wherein specifically the role of television channels and anchors has come in for sharp questioning. In view of this, it is in best interest, that you remove the above-mentioned content from all social media accounts of your channel and your own website, and issue a public apology for the communal reportage. In an event we do not receive a satisfactory



response from you, we will be compelled to submit a complaint to the NBDSA. You are also put on notice that failure on your part to satisfy the complainants with an apology on your news channel may result in legal consequences for your channel at the appropriate fora, at your risk to costs. We urge more sensitive and responsible coverage of issues in future.

Yours sincerely,

Nandan Maluste, CJP President

Teesta Setalvad, CJP Secretary