

**Date: September 9, 2024**

To,  
Times Now,  
Grievance Officer,  
Kirtima Maravoor  
Email: [legalnow@timesgroup.com](mailto:legalnow@timesgroup.com)

**Subject: Complaint against show “Desh Ka Mood Meter: सनातन संस्कृति..कट्टरपंथियों के लिए सॉफ्ट टारगेट? | CM Himanta Biswa Sarma News” that aired on Times Now Navbharat on September 2, 2024**

Dear Madam,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), are writing to you with regards to a news segment that aired on **Times Now Navbharat on September 2, 2024, titled “Desh Ka Mood Meter: सनातन संस्कृति..कट्टरपंथियों के लिए सॉफ्ट टारगेट? | CM Himanta Biswa Sarma News”**. The show refers to the recent arrest of a Bengali-speaking Muslim singer, namely Altaf Hussain, in Assam for allegedly inciting hatred against the state’s ethnic communities through a protest song he released last month.

On August 31, Altaf Hussain was arrested in Assam after a local youth had filed a complaint against him at Abhayapuri police station. The case was referred to Gauripura, following which, he was apprehended. Altaf’s lawyer Adam Ali had stated that his client was booked under Section 196 (promoting enmity between different groups) and 299 (deliberate attempt to insult a religion or religious feelings) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

“The complainant sought police action stating that Altaf’s song was targeted and disrespecting the Bihu song. So, he was arrested based on the complaint. We will soon file a petition seeking his bail,” Ali had said.

After the news of the arrest hit the news, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma referred to the arrest during one of his regular Facebook live sessions, stating that the song was part of an “attack” and calling it an attempt to “change Bihu into Miya Bihu”. Sarma called the song derogatory towards Assamese culture. This statement made by CM Sarma was then picked up commercial corporate backed media, and was used by them to spread misinformation and cast suspicion regarding the intentions of Altaf behind singing this song.

It is crucial to note the lyrics of the song sung by Altaf in Bengali resembles a Bangladeshi protest song, “*Desh ta tomar baper naki?* (Is this country owned by your father?)”, reported *The Sentinel*. Through his lyrics, Altaf hoped to draw attention to the discrimination faced by “Miyas”—a term often used to refer to Bengali-speaking, Muslims in Assam. He

points out that while individuals from all communities may commit crimes, it is predominantly the *Miyas* who are targeted, often being falsely accused of being undocumented immigrants.

**The time frame for filing this complaint to the broadcaster is seven days and hence, given that today is September 9, 2024 we are within this limitation period.**

The news show can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj3bskouEKg>

At the outset, we would like to state that the show in question exemplifies the dangers of biased, inflammatory reporting, using provocative language and divisive rhetoric to frame communal tensions in a highly skewed manner. From the outset, the anchor's statements, such as referring to "Jihadi syndicates" and questioning whether Hindu festivals are being deliberately targeted, create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. The repeated portrayal of Bengali Muslims as "illegal immigrants" and "threats" to Hindu culture not only distorts the facts but also incites communal animosity. By sensationalising isolated events and weaving them into a broader narrative of cultural warfare, the show dangerously pits Hindus against Muslims, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and reinforcing communal divisions. This type of reporting, laden with name-calling and fearmongering, is not only unethical but deeply harmful in a democratic society that thrives on pluralism and peaceful coexistence.

#### **Contents of the show:**

The show itself begins with the anchor, namely Ranjit Kumar, asking the question whether "the Sanatani festivals of India becoming easy target for the extremists? Who are these people from Assam to Kerala who are making these festivals a communal issue?" the premise for the show is set by the anchor by raising these highly suggestive and volatile statements.

The anchor further states "Are the Hindu festivals in India on the target of extremists? Is there an open communal conspiracy to attempt to change the meaning of the Hindu festivals? Is there a clever plan to break the culture of the Sanatani Hindus in India? Is there a big plan being enforced in India through a *Jihadi* syndicate to end the Hindu culture in India? From North to South, is there a communal attempt to change the Sanatan History?" [Time stamp: 1:18- 1:51]

This statement uses exaggerated and fear-inducing language to create a sense of alarm among Hindus, framing Muslims as part of a sinister "communal conspiracy" without any evidence. It amplifies the narrative of a threat to Hindu festivals and culture, which can incite fear and animosity against Muslims.

Pursuant to this, the anchor reinforces unfounded fears of a Muslim "invasion" by linking the alleged "takeover" of Hindu festivals with the controversial and disputed concept of "Love Jihad" and illegal immigration. This further strengthens the communal divide by portraying Muslims as aggressors. The anchor states "After listening to these questions, you might think that the same is not possible, as prior to this, one had only heard of how illegal immigrants have been able to illegally takeover the land of the Border States, such as Assam. You must have also heard about Love-Jihad. However, this conspiracy of taking over the festivals is something that will shock you to the core as it is said that one a religion loses its culture, its

existence itself comes into questioning. And this time, the alarm bells have rung in the state of Assam.” [Time stamp: 1:59- 2:43]

The anchor then brings in focus the arrest of a Muslim singer, using it to paint the entire Muslim community as provocative or extremist. By framing the incident within a broader communal context, the statement implies that this act is part of a larger conspiracy against Hindus. The anchor provides “A singer named Altaf Hussain was arrested by the Assam police. a resident of the Dhubri village, Hussain was changing the wordings of the classic Bihu songs of Assam and was singing them in his own style. Do you know what the style and wordings of these songs were? Recently, Hussain sang a song which had the wording “this country does not belong to your father”. This provocative statement of his was inspired by the extremist protest that was being held against ex PM of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina.”

[Time stamp: 2:47- 3:34]

Furthermore, the anchor said “Altaf took this same slogan and made it a song in Assamese language. There are clear charges against Altaf, of distorting the Bihu language in his own style, which we can also call the extremist style, and of using Bihu classic song for this provocative statement.” The description of altering a Bihu song as an "extremist style" exaggerates the incident and casts a cultural reinterpretation as something dangerous, continuing the fear-based narrative. [Time stamp: 3:34- 4:01]

The anchor spreads misinformation by manipulating what the term *Miya* stands for, by stating that “Who do we actually call *Miya*? In Assam, *Miya* does not mean Muslims, rather these are illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, or the Bangladeshi Muslims who speak Bengali. These people are not the actual residents of Assam, but their population is increasing quickly. The situation is such that the actual Muslim resident of Assam is limited to only 37% while the rest are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, which we call *Miyas*.” [Time stamp: 4:02- 4:41]

Here, the anchor equates the term "Miya" with illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, which not only conflates citizenship issues with religion but also demonises the entire Muslim community of Assam. This furthers the divisive rhetoric by portraying Muslims as outsiders.

The anchor further said that “In addition to their increasing population, their power has become such that out of the 126 Vidhan Sabha seats in Assam, at least 30 seats are influenced by these people. Just think, those who have come from another country have the audacity to tell the actual residents of Assam that the state of Assam does not belong to them.” This particular of the anchor statement promotes the fear of political domination by Muslims, portraying them as "outsiders" who are gaining undue influence. It stokes communal tensions by suggesting that the Muslim population threatens the native Assamese culture and identity. [Time stamp: 4:44- 5:04]

Pursuant to this, the anchor unjustly links an isolated criminal case to the broader Muslim community, furthering the stereotype of Muslims as criminals by stating that “In the recent times, an incident of rape of a minor girl was reported from the Nagaon village of Assam. The three accused in the case were *Miya*. There were protests are this incident was reported. A few organisations gave an ultimatum to the *Miya* to leave from the northern part of Assam. Police

quickly took action and had arrested the accused. It was between these incidents that Altaf had released his song. Now think about it, look at the list of the crimes that have been alleged and how these people are trying to defend it.” [Time stamp: 5:24- 6:02]

Continuing with the unfair connect between the heinous crime against women and cultural distortion, the anchor states “To defend the acts of those who have been accused of raping a minor, songs with words saying that Assam does not belong to your father is being made. Firstly, there are making such songs, and then they are blaming the system of the state. On top of this, they are distorting the Bihu culture of Assam. Hindus have been celebrating this festival since thousands of years. You will find it in Bhagwat Gita, history books and in books written by many foreigners who have visited India.” [Time stamp: 6:02- 6:46]

In addition to this, the anchor provides that “However, in the state of Kerala, multiple attempts have been made to cut the connection of this festival from our religious history. Look at certain social media posts that have been put up in regards to Hindu festivals, and then you will understand that this is not only taking place in Assam, but in the whole of India.” [Time stamp: 6:46- 7:12]

The anchor attempts to generalise local incidents in Assam by suggesting a nationwide conspiracy against Hindu festivals. This is another effort to fuel communal tensions by portraying Muslims as part of a coordinated effort to undermine Hindu traditions across India.

The anchor shows the following social media post on the screen:



As these posts are shown on the screen, the anchor can be heard saying that “In reality, these so-called secular community within our country, they are on this mission to separate Hinds from their own festivals. These people not only declared Onam to be a Malayali festival, but also forcefully included caste into it to divide the Hindus.” [Time stamp: 7:20- 7:38]



Another social media post is shown by the anchor, while saying that “Thomas Issac, a big leader of the CPI(M) in Kerala, he spread misinformation about Onam by his social media post. He also made certain offensive statements against Vamana avatar. Everyone throughout the history have said that Onam is a Sanatani festival.”

**[Time stamp: 7:40- 8:08]**

Post this, the anchor narrates his version of the story behind the celebration of the festival Onam, which involved the Lord Vishnu avatar of Vamana and the Mahabali. His story involved the legend of Mahabali and the three steps. He claimed that the narrative of the festive is being manipulated now. The anchor’s narrative simplifies the complex story of Onam and frames those who highlight Mahabali as opponents of Lord Vamana. This framing stokes unnecessary religious tensions, implying that certain interpretations of Onam are part of a larger conspiracy to divide Hindus. The anchor states that “Let me make one thing clear, by siding with Mahabali and speaking against Lord Vamana can be deemed nothing less than a conspiracy as God and demons are step brothers.”

**[Time stamp: 9:28- 9:42]**

Furthermore, the anchor provides that “King Mahabali is a Brahmin, but the Vampanthi people claim that Mahabali was a demon or a Dalit in order to further their agenda of creating differences within the Hindu community. This is a long plan. Before the year 2017, the celebration of Diwali was limited to gifts, shopping, eatables and crackers, while Lord Ram was forgotten. How would one had even celebrated Lord Ram as Ayodhya (considered as the birthplace of Lord Ram) was so quiet. All that changed under the governance of UP CM Yogi.”

**[Time stamp: 9:48- 10:30]**

The anchor’s statement attempts to stir up resentment by suggesting that earlier Diwali celebrations had somehow ‘forgotten’ Lord Ram, framing Yogi Adityanath's governance as a

corrective to an alleged cultural erosion. This pushes the narrative that there has been a concerted effort to erase Hindu religious figures and festivals, which fuels communal tension.

The anchor concludes the show by stating “This has been a long process, and it is still continuing today. In Assam, *Miyas* are now entering the Hindu songs of Bihu. In Kashmir, when the National Conference party came, they released a manifesto wherein they proposed changing the names of two Hindu temples to Muslims names. Think about it. From Kashmir to Kerala, From East to West, the Sanatan culture is fighting a big fight.” [Time stamp: 10:43-11:11]

The anchor draws an exaggerated connection between isolated incidents in Assam, Kashmir, and Kerala to craft a narrative of a widespread assault on Hindu culture. By framing cultural and political changes as part of a unified "fight" against Hindu traditions, the statement reinforces the notion of Hindus being under siege, further polarising communities.

### **What the show entailed:**

It is clear from the extracts we have mentioned above that the news program's anchor strategically had manipulated language and symbols to pit Hindus against Muslims by framing Muslims, particularly Bengali Muslims or "*Miyas*" in Assam, as a direct threat to Hindu culture. This form of reporting is not just biased but actively seeks to sow communal discord by positioning one community as inherently adversarial to another.

The anchor's use of emotionally charged phrases like “Jihadi syndicate,” “communal conspiracy,” and “attempt to change the meaning of Hindu festivals” implies that Muslims, through covert and extremist means, are working to undermine the very fabric of Hindu society. Such rhetoric doesn't just create a false narrative but weaponises religious identity, portraying Hindus as victims and Muslims as aggressors in a supposed cultural war.

Throughout the show, the anchor's assertion that Muslims are distorting sacred Hindu traditions like Bihu or that a Muslim singer's actions are part of a larger extremist plot is a blatant attempt to sensationalise isolated events, transforming them into communal flashpoints. This kind of framing suggests that the cultural practices of one community are under siege by another, thereby inciting feelings of insecurity and fear among Hindus. The subtle (and sometimes explicit) messaging that Muslims are “invading” Hindu spaces—whether through festivals or demographic changes—sends a dangerous signal that Hindus must “defend” their culture, further heightening religious tensions.

In addition to this, by linking criminal acts committed by individuals to an entire community, as seen in the mention of the rape case in Assam, the reporting insinuates collective guilt. The anchor takes a local crime and attempts to contextualise it within a larger communal framework, making it appear as though Muslim men, by virtue of their religious identity, are a threat to Hindu women and society at large. Such blanket accusations dehumanise an entire population, fuelling anti-Muslim sentiments and justifying discriminatory policies or violent reprisals.

This narrative, repeated across different contexts—whether through the incidents highlighted in Assam or Kerala—seeks to craft an overarching, pan-India narrative of Hindus being under attack by Muslims. The reference to Kerala, where secularism is portrayed as a threat to Hindu festivals like Onam, further attempts to blur the lines between secular critique or alternative interpretations of cultural traditions and an imagined "Muslim conspiracy." The program exploits cultural differences and nuances to reinforce a monolithic, exclusionary version of Hinduism that must be defended against an external, Muslim "other."

Such tactics are not merely sensationalist but dangerously divisive, as they encourage Hindus to view Muslims with suspicion and hostility. In doing so, the media becomes complicit in fostering communal violence, as this type of reporting fans the flames of distrust, turning neighbours into enemies. For a diverse, pluralistic society like India, the effects are devastating—polarising communities, damaging interfaith relationships, and threatening the country's democratic and secular ethos.

Biased reporting, as demonstrated in the statements made by the anchor during this program, is deeply damaging to the fabric of a democratic country like India. In a nation as diverse as India, where multiple religious, cultural, and ethnic groups coexist, such reporting exacerbates existing tensions and fosters an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility. By presenting skewed narratives and using inflammatory language, the anchor not only distorts facts but also reinforces dangerous stereotypes. This undermines the very foundation of democracy, which is built on dialogue, understanding, and coexistence.

The Muslim population, already vulnerable to marginalisation, bears the brunt of such harmful narratives. The consistent portrayal of Muslims, particularly Bengali Muslims, as 'outsiders' or 'infiltrators,' contributes to their dehumanisation and fuels communal polarisation. Associating an entire community with crimes committed by individuals and framing them as a threat to India's culture is not only factually incorrect but also dangerous. This further alienates the Muslim population and can lead to social, economic, and political disenfranchisement, feeding into a cycle of exclusion and animosity. This does not only violate the media 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.

Moreover, biased reporting polarises public opinion and detracts from the real issues that should be addressed. When media outlets push a communal agenda, they detract from responsible journalism that holds power accountable and serves as a check on government policies. Instead, they become instruments of division, manipulating emotions and spreading fear. For a democracy like India, where media is often called the "fourth pillar," such reporting weakens democratic institutions, erodes trust in media, and threatens the idea of an inclusive, pluralistic society.

Anchors in news media have a critical duty to report with sensitivity, fairness, and neutrality, especially in a diverse and pluralistic society like India. As the face of public discourse, they have the power to shape perceptions, influence opinions, and guide national conversations. This immense responsibility requires anchors to prioritise accuracy, balance, and integrity over sensationalism and TRP-driven content. When anchors indulge in inflammatory rhetoric,

name-calling, and provocative statements, they compromise their role as impartial communicators of truth, undermining both journalistic ethics and the societal fabric.

Sensitive reporting is crucial in a country where religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity is vast and where historical tensions can easily be reignited. Anchors must be aware that their words carry weight, and careless or biased remarks can deepen divisions, incite violence, and reinforce dangerous stereotypes. In the case of communal issues, the duty of the media is to de-escalate tensions, not inflame them. Anchors should aim to provide context, facts, and diverse perspectives to ensure that viewers are informed rather than incited. In this sense, responsible journalism is about informing the public without provoking unnecessary alarm or hostility between communities.

Neutrality is essential to maintaining credibility and trust. An anchor's role is not to take sides or amplify one community's grievances over another's but to present the news in a balanced manner, giving voice to multiple viewpoints and promoting understanding. Anchors who allow their own biases to colour their reporting, or who deliberately push a communal agenda for higher ratings, violate the principles of fairness that are central to journalism. Their job is not to act as provocateurs but as facilitators of informed debate, where all sides of an issue can be heard. Indulging in name-calling, such as labelling an entire group of people as "*Miyas*" or "Jihadi syndicates," is reckless and unprofessional. Such language not only stigmatises an entire community but also legitimises hatred and discrimination.

Apart from this, the NBDSA's guidelines state that, "News broadcasters must not broadcast any form of 'hate speech' or other obnoxious content that may lead to incitement of violence or promote public unrest or disorder as election campaigning based on communal or caste factors is prohibited under Election Rules. News broadcasters should strictly avoid reports which tend to promote feelings of enmity or hatred among people, on the ground of religion, race, caste, community, region or language." The channel has acted in complete violation of this directive as well as Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards issued by the NBDSA and certain specific guidelines relating to conducting debates on TV news channels. It further amounts to certain offences related to hate speech, misinformation and promoting enmity under the Indian Penal Code.

As such, in view of the elaborate and detailed complaint made herein above, we expect your channel to take responsibility of the grievances raised herein and act upon the same responsibly. With your vast viewership, this prejudicial view has already reached large sections of the people through the TV channel and also through your social media platforms including YouTube, Twitter and Facebook.

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.

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. The inflated myth of a rapidly growing Muslim population, especially in Assam, is frequently used to stoke anti-minority sentiments across the country. The Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP) will then take the opportunity to deconstruct these myths and inflated figures during the course of their arguments. 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