

May 14, 2025

To

Ms. Kshipra Jatana

Compliance Officer NBDSA

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Subject: Complaint Regarding misinformation in coverage of “Operation Sindoor” and defamatory misrepresentation of a deceased civilian as a terrorist

Respected Madam,

We, at Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), are writing to you with regards to filing a formal complaint against News18 MP Chhattisgarh for its broadcast on May 7, 2025, titled “*India's air strike Pakistan: Operation Sindoor में मारा गया आतंकी Mohammad Iqbal | India Pak War*”, which grossly misreported the death of Maulana Qari Mohammad Iqbal, a respected religious scholar and teacher from Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir, as the killing of a “most-wanted terrorist” and “top Lashkar-e-Taiba commander” during a purported Indian airstrike dubbed “Operation Sindoor”.

This broadcast constitutes a serious breach of the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards issued by the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA), particularly with regard to the principles of accuracy, impartiality, objectivity, neutrality, privacy, and responsible crime reporting.

I. Summary of the misinformation spread by the channel:

The segment aired by your channel falsely stated that the late Qari Mohammad Iqbal, an Indian citizen and an educator at Jamia Zia-ul-Uloom in Poonch, was a Pakistani terrorist neutralised in an Indian airstrike. This claim was repeated with dramatic visuals and emotive, triumphalist rhetoric, framed within the narrative of a cross-border military operation.

Link for the contentious programme- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swmMklh41No>



However, independent fact-checking and official confirmations have since made it unequivocally clear that:

- Qari Mohammad Iqbal was not affiliated with any terror organisation, let alone being a “top commander” of Lashkar-e-Taiba.
- He was a civilian who died during cross-border shelling in the border district of Poonch.
- His identity was falsely appropriated and defamed by several news outlets, including yours, using an image that originated from a condolence post made by his colleague and deputy administrator of Jamia Zia-ul-Uloom, Mr Sayeed Ahmed Habib.
- The district police confirmed that Qari Iqbal had no links to militancy and was a respected member of the local community.
- His family members, including his brother-in-law Ishaq Khayan and brother Qari Mohammad Farookh, publicly expressed anguish and trauma over the baseless accusation, calling the media coverage defamatory, hurtful, and an insult to their patriotism and grief.

Links of the Facebook post on deceased Qari Iqbal may be viewed as follows:

1. Qari Iqbal’s colleague social media post- *“He was loyal, He was devoted! And then, suddenly, a bolt of lightning struck, and a whole world seemed to collapse...Our dear Maulana Qari Muhammad Iqbal, respected teacher of the Hifz (Qur'an memorization) department at Jamia Zia-ul-Uloom, Poonch, became a victim of the recent border tensions. He was in his room when death arrived... May Allah Almighty grant our*

beloved companion a high place in the lofty chambers of Paradise. May He grant patience to the bereaved family and bless us all with a worthy replacement.”

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=609096812182403&id=100092462682460

2. Jamia Zia Ul Uloom Poonch J&K's statement- *“The way some media houses labeled a martyred, patriotic, and noble-hearted man as a terrorist is extremely condemnable, shameful, and deeply regrettable. These people must apologize on the same platform and in the same manner—or be prepared to face legal action.”*

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid026jmw8wdbgEUtXFytybTSx43Gz9ZgwhFDS53xtJuj6P8nTrD7aK3xyJogS5aZLZz3l&id=100057586804289&rdid=xility1l12qbwSs8#

3. Poonch police statement- https://x.com/Poonch_Police/status/1920403287204876544



4. Qari Iqbal Mohammad's family demanding action- *“We were already wounded, and now this tragedy has struck us. Godi media is spreading the falsehood that he was a Pakistani terrorist. We strongly condemn this and appeal to the District Collector (DC saab) to take appropriate action”*



https://x.com/alishan_jafri/status/1920422667619823929

II. Violations of NBDSA's Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards

The said broadcast violates multiple provisions of the NBDSA's Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, including but not limited to:

Section 1 – Fundamental Principles

This section outlines the foundational responsibility of the news media to maintain accuracy, impartiality, objectivity, and public accountability. In clear breach of these principles, your coverage:

- Misidentified a civilian Indian citizen as a terrorist without verification or confirmation from any credible source.
- Failed to conduct due diligence or cross-check the facts with official statements or local authorities.
- Deceived the public by presenting fabricated information as fact during a highly sensitive geopolitical moment, fuelling panic and confusion.

This reckless disregard for truth and verification is a grave abdication of journalistic duty, especially in a conflict scenario where information integrity is paramount.

Section 2 – Principles of Self-Regulation

This section calls upon news broadcasters to:

- Exercise responsible editorial discretion;
- Respect the privacy and dignity of individuals;
- Ensure that reporting on crime or terrorism is done with safeguards to prevent glorification or misrepresentation.

Your segment directly violated these principles by:

- Publishing and circulating the image and identity of a deceased civilian without consent or verification;
- Falsely associating him with terrorism, thereby causing irreversible damage to his dignity and the honour of his grieving family;
- Glorifying military action by linking a death of an innocent civilian to a so-called 'successful' counter-terror operation.

This is not just poor journalism — it is a failure of editorial responsibility with real-life consequences.

Specific violations are as follows:

1. Impartiality, Objectivity, and Neutrality

- The coverage lacked any semblance of verification, airing baseless claims branding a deceased Indian civilian as a terrorist, without checking with the local administration, the family, or law enforcement.
- The anchor's tone and visual presentation showed no neutrality or balance and displayed clear bias, seeking to sensationalise rather than inform.

2. Accuracy and Responsibility in Reporting

- The channel failed to verify the identity of the deceased and the nature of the operation before broadcasting highly sensitive and inflammatory content.
- There was no disclaimer, correction, or even the most basic journalistic safeguard of verification before labelling a civilian a “terrorist”.

3. Privacy

- The use of Qari Mohammad Iqbal’s name, photograph, and misrepresentation of his death without the consent of the family or due diligence violated their right to privacy and dignity, even in death.

4. Reporting on Crime and Safeguards Against Glorification of Violence

- The broadcast glorified and celebrated the “killing” of a “terrorist”, who in fact was a victim of shelling.
- This not only distorts the facts but creates a climate of jingoism and desensitisation to civilian casualties, violating the spirit of responsible journalism.

III. Violation of government advisories

This coverage is also in direct violation of multiple advisories issued by government authorities including the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting:

- **Advisory on live/real-time coverage of defence operations (MIB Advisory dated April 25, 2025):** All media channels, digital platforms and individuals are advised to refrain from live coverage or real-time reporting of defence operations and movement of security forces. Disclosure of such sensitive or source-based information may jeopardise operational effectiveness.

News18 MP Chhattisgarh, in its rush to report “Operation Sindoor”, irresponsibly indulged in speculative and unverified real-time reporting, potentially compromising operational and national security while spreading falsehoods.

The MIB advisory dated April 25, 2025 has been downloaded and annexed to the complaint as Annexure A.

- **Advisory to counter disinformation during sensitive times:** Through social media platforms, MIB had urged the citizens to, in sensitive times like these, be wary of disinformation being spread on social media. Always verify any piece of news, image, or video before you forward.

The broadcast flies in the face of this advisory by picking up unverified visuals from social media and repackaging them as authenticated intelligence on terrorist elimination.

Link- http://x.com/MIB_India/status/1920890376367362362

IV. Consequences of your irresponsible coverage

Qari Mohammad Iqbal was not only an Indian citizen, but a respected religious teacher who served for 20 years at Jamia Zia-ul-Uloom High School in Poonch. He was not affiliated with any terrorist outfit, as clarified by the district police and verified by independent fact-checking outlet Alt News.

This wrongful labelling is even more distressing given that the deceased belonged to the Muslim minority community in India. In a fraught political and communal climate, such defamatory misinformation increases the vulnerability of minorities, feeding into damaging stereotypes and contributing to their stigmatisation and marginalisation. To wrongfully brand a teacher — a civilian — as a terrorist, and to do so without apology, reflects not only media irresponsibility but a deep-seated communal bias that must be condemned and corrected.

As enshrined in the NBDSA Code and upheld by journalistic ethics globally, the duty of a journalist is to serve the truth, not sensationalism. Your team had every opportunity to verify the identity and background of the deceased. Instead, you chose to broadcast misinformation — not just harming one family, but betraying the trust of your entire viewership.

In failing to uphold these basic journalistic duties, you have undermined the profession and contributed to a dangerous media environment where misinformation is rewarded, and accountability is absent.

The consequences of your coverage are not merely journalistic lapses—they are real, tangible, and devastating:

- You have defamed a deceased Indian citizen, inflicting irreparable trauma on his grieving family, who continue to seek justice and apology for the slander.
- You have contributed to national panic and misinformation in an already fragile and volatile geopolitical environment.

- You have eroded public trust in journalism and failed in your ethical responsibility as a broadcaster.

V. Our demands

In light of the above, we demand that News18 MP Chhattisgarh take immediate corrective and restorative action as follows:

1. **Corrigendum and on-air correction:** Acknowledge and correct the false claim aired on May 7, 2025, through an on-air correction with equal prominence and visibility as the original segment. This must be scheduled in a way that attracts sufficient viewer attention, and not hidden in less-viewed timeslots.
2. **Public apology to the family of Qari Mohammad Iqbal:** A formal, unconditional apology must be issued by the channel, both on-air and on digital platforms, addressed to the family and the community of Poonch for the pain and defamation caused by your misreporting.
3. **Immediate removal of the broadcast video and related content:** The video titled “*India's air strike Pakistan: Operation Sindoor में मारा गया आतंकी Mohammad Iqbal*” must be permanently taken down from all platforms, including YouTube, to prevent the continued spread of disinformation.

This complaint is being formally lodged in keeping with the NBDSA's complaint mechanism and shall also be forwarded to the NBDSA if no corrective action is taken within the prescribed time. The misrepresentation of Qari Mohammad Iqbal's death is not only a journalistic failure but a moral one. News18 MP Chhattisgarh must accept responsibility and take urgent action to redress the harm it has caused.

Yours sincerely,

Nandan Maluste, CJP President

Teesta Setalvad, CJP Secretary

Annexures:

Annexure A- MIB advisory dated April 25, 2025