

News Broadcasting Standards Authority

Order No 14 (2012)

Re:Complaint dated 8.5.12 received from Mr. Sharad Shah from Mumbai regarding participation of Mr. Maroof Raza, Strategic Defence Analyst in debates on the Tatra deal in various episodes broadcast on *Times Now* channel in programme titled “News Hour”.

ORDER

1. A complaint dated 8.5.12 was filed by Mr. Sharad Shah from Mumbai making grievance that in the programme titled “News Hour” broadcast on Times Now news channel during the first week of April’12, which comprised debates on the Tatra trucks deals, the channel erred in failing to disclose that Mr. Maroof Raza, who was invited in such programmes/episodes as a strategic defence analyst and expert, was also engaged in a business under the name and style of M/s Maroof Raza & Associates, of which entity Mr Raza is the principal and through which entity Mr Raza acts as a consultant for foreign arms manufacturers, suppliers and dealers. The complainant’s contention was that it was the duty of the channel to make such disclosure since in the absence thereof viewers were not in a position to correctly evaluate the views expressed by Mr Raza taking into account his business interest as well. The complainant said that in cases such as this, where there was a clear possibility of conflict between the business interests of the expert and the subject matter on which such expert was expressing his views and commenting, it was obligatory on the part of the channel to disclose the exact pre-occupation/ business interest of the expert, since only upon such disclosure would viewers be able to correctly evaluate and assess his views expressed on the subject matter as an expert. Since the complainant was not satisfied with the response received from Times Now, the matter was considered by the NBSA, in the light of versions of the parties, including the hearing given to the parties.
2. The hearing was held on 20.8.12 at which Times Now was represented by Ms. Jyothi Suresh Kumar, DGM Legal & Company Secretary & Ms. Navika Kumar, Editor, Politics & Economy ;Mr. Maroof Raza, Consultant, Times Now, was also present in person. The complainant Mr. Sharad Shah had sought to be excused from personal presence in view of his age and the fact that he resides in Mumbai.
3. Upon a careful consideration of the subject matter of the complaint and after hearing Times Now as well as Mr. Maroof Raza in their defence, the NBSA is of the opinion that in the interest of transparency and objectivity, which is a fundamental tenet of all public affairs, including news broadcasting standards, it is important for a news channel to disclose the exact credentials of panelists who appear as experts on their programmes to the extent such credentials are relevant to the subject matter of the programme. The NBSA is of the view that only when such disclosure is made would the viewer be in a position to correctly evaluate and assess the views expressed by expert panelists.
4. In the present case, considering the fact that Mr. Maroof Raza was expressing his opinion as an expert on military affairs in relation to the Tatra truck deal conducted by the Indian Army and on related issues, it was necessary for Times Now to have disclosed that Mr. Maroof Raza was also engaged in the business of consulting for and representing manufacturers, suppliers and dealers of military hardware and equipment under the name and style of M/s Maroof Raza & Associates, since by virtue of such business, Mr Raza’s views on the Tatra trucks deal could have been coloured by his business interests or those of his clients or potential clients.

5. In this view of the matter the NBSA holds that in the facts of the present case Times Now has failed to make necessary disclosure in relation to the business interests of its expert panelist Mr Maroof Raza, which disclosure was required being a necessary concomitant of the objectivity and fairness norm contained in the NBA Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards and specific Guidelines.
6. Accordingly, the NBSA directs Times Now to ensure that in future adequate disclosure is made in relation to the business interests, credentials and circumstances of those who appear as experts and specialists on their channels – to the extent that such business interests, credentials and circumstances are relevant to the subject matter of the debate - to enable viewers to correctly evaluate and assess the opinions and views expressed by such experts and specialists on their shows.
7. The NBSA further directs the NBA:
 - a) To send a copy of this order to the complainant and to the news channel concerned.
 - b) To circulate this order to all Members & Editors of NBA.
 - c) NBA to also host a summary of this order on its website and to include such summary in its next Annual Report.

Sd/-
Justice J S Verma (Retd.)
Chairperson

Place : New Delhi
Dated : 25/10/2012