

**News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority**

**Order No. 211(2026)**  
**Complainant: Mr. Utkarsh Mishra**  
**Channel: Zee News**  
**Programme: "संभल हिंसा के बाद QR कोड जिहाद!"**  
**Date of Broadcast:09.12.2024**

Since the complainant did not receive a response from the broadcaster within the time stipulated under the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations, on 23.01.2025, the complaint was escalated to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

**Complaint dated 24.12.2024**

In the impugned broadcast, an instance of misinformation committed by a local journalist, Asim Raza Zaidi (@Molsabbashelp), and an appeal for donations to help Sambhal victims were reported as an instance of QR code Jihad by the broadcaster.

The usage of the word jihad to describe this antisocial incident was a clear violation of the Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crimes and the Guidelines to Prevent Hate Speech, as it sought to reinforce existing stereotypes against Muslims.

This trend of normalizing discourse around antisocial incidents as incidents of jihad advances the agenda of specific interest groups, including extremist pro-Hindutva organizations and conspiracy theories endorsed by political leaders, and thus also amounts to a violation of Fundamental Principle No. 4 "News shall not be selected or designed to promote any particular belief, opinion or desires of any interest group."

**Reply dated 07.02.2025 from the broadcaster**

The broadcaster acknowledged receipt of the complaint dated 24.12.2024, in which various false, misleading, and frivolous allegations were made regarding the content of its news programme published on 09.12.2024. It was alleged that the report covering the incident, in which an individual was soliciting donations via a QR code from the Muslim community in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, violated the provisions outlined in the "Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crimes" and the "Guidelines to Prevent Hate Speech."

At the outset, the broadcaster denied each and every allegation, averment, and insinuation made in the complaint, as they were entirely false, frivolous, unfounded, and misleading.

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The news report published by it was based entirely on verified facts and credible sources. The subject of its coverage was an individual, Asim Raza Zaidi, who was attempting to exploit the tense situation following the violence in Sambhal District by soliciting money from the Muslim community. This individual falsely claimed to be a journalist and used a QR code to collect funds, stating that the money would go to the families of those who had died in the violence, referring to them as "Shaheed." This individual's actions were not only deceptive but also posed a risk of further emotional and financial exploitation of the affected community. The impugned report was intended to inform the public of this situation and prevent further exploitation.

It is pertinent to note that it had taken appropriate steps to investigate the person's identity, which revealed that he was not a legitimate journalist but was, in fact, trying to capitalize on the crisis for personal gain. Sambhal district had already been affected by violence, and the broadcaster firmly believed that any attempt to exploit such a situation emotionally or financially should be addressed promptly. As a responsible media organization, it was its duty to highlight this issue so that the public at large would not fall victim to a person attempting to take advantage of the vulnerable. The report focused on preventing further harm by informing the public about the individual's actions and enabling the authorities to act appropriately. The administration was actively working to restore peace in the area, and it was crucial that such exploitation be brought to light to prevent the situation from worsening. Its reporting was not intended to stoke communal tensions but rather to draw attention to a specific incident that could have led to greater unrest if left unchecked.

The allegation that the usage of the term "Jihad" in describing this antisocial incident violates the "*Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crime, Riots, Rumours and Such Related Incidents*" or the "*Guidelines for the Prevention of Hate Speech*" is completely false and denied. It is important to note that several public figures, including politicians, used the term "Jihad" and "QR Code Jihad" in their public reactions to the incident. Because these reactions were part of the broader public discourse at the time, they were accurately reflected in the report. It had not used the term "Jihad" with any intent to communalize the issue or to violate any ethical guidelines. Rather, it was a term already in the public domain, and its coverage aimed to present the situation in a truthful and contextually accurate manner.

It categorically denied any violation of "*Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crime, Riots, Rumours and Such Related Incidents*" or the "*Guidelines for the preventions of Hate Speech*". The purpose of the coverage was solely to report the facts and raise public awareness about the actions of this individual, who was exploiting a sensitive and volatile situation. The report contained no inflammatory or biased language and was neither intended to communalize the issue nor to promote any divisive narratives. Its editorial team had strictly adhered to all relevant ethical

guidelines, including the principles and the Code of Ethics. It had acted within the framework of responsible journalism, ensuring that the public was informed and that the authorities could take the necessary action against this individual.

In view of the above, it stated that it had abided by the principles of news reporting, broadcasting and journalistic norms, and the complainant had failed to establish any deviations therefrom. Thus, the complaint ought to be dismissed at the outset.

### **Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 14.10.2025**

NBDSA considered the complaint, response from the broadcaster, and, after viewing the footage of the broadcast, decided to call the parties for a hearing.

On being served with the notices, the following persons were present at the hearing on 18.11.2025:

#### **Complainant**

Mr. Utkarsh Mishra

#### **Broadcaster**

Ms. Annie, Compliance Officer, NBDSA

#### **Submission of the Parties**

The complainant stated that the channel in the impugned broadcast reported an instance of misinformation committed by a local journalist, Asim Raza Zaidi, which it characterized as an instance of QR code Jihad.

The complainant's grievance concerned the use of the term "jihad." The label "jihad" is perceived to promote it as part of a broader, orchestrated conspiracy involving an entire community.

The usage of the word jihad to describe this antisocial incident is a clear violation of the Guidelines to Prevent Communal Colour in Reporting Crimes and the Guidelines to Prevent Hate Speech, as it seeks to reinforce existing stereotypes against Muslims.

Additionally, the visuals depicting Muslim men standing before a mosque with a QR code further exacerbate this generalization.

In response, the broadcaster submitted that the accused in this matter, Asim Raza Zaidi had created a video of a mosque, and that the visual shown in the broadcast was only a representation of the video. The news report published was based entirely on verified facts and credible sources. The subject of its coverage was an individual, Asim Raza Zaidi, who was attempting to exploit the tense situation following the

violence in Sambhal District by soliciting money from gullible persons and using this money for purposes that the police were still investigating.

**Decision**

NBDSA considered the complaint, response of the broadcaster, the submissions of the parties and reviewed the footage of the broadcast.

NBDSA noted that the impugned broadcast was a news report regarding an individual who tried to exploit the tense situation following the violence in Sambhal District by posing as a journalist and using a QR code to collect funds for the families of the deceased, by calling them "Shaheed".

NBDSA was of the view that the issue reported was of public importance and, as far as the broadcaster's reporting of the incident factually is concerned, the broadcaster was fully justified in showing the same. However, in the process, there was no reason to invoke the term "Jihad" in reference to the incident. While the broadcaster, in its response, has attempted to justify the usage of the term "QR Code Jihad" by claiming that the term was in the public domain, as several public figures, including politicians, had used the term "Jihad" and "QR Code Jihad" in their public reactions to the incident, however, no such attribution has been made in the broadcast. NBDSA is of the opinion that the term "Jihad" should not be applied casually, as it has certain connotations and ramifications, and therefore, there must be strong reasons for using such a term.

In view of the above, NBDSA held that the broadcaster had violated the Specific Guidelines covering Reportage and the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards.

NBDSA, thus, cautions the broadcaster in this behalf and directs the broadcaster to edit/remove the offending portion of the broadcast within 7 days of the Order.

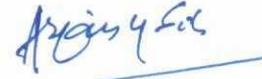
NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the above observations and inform the complainant and the broadcaster accordingly.

NBDSA directs NBDA to send:

- (a) A copy of this Order to the complainant and the broadcaster;
- (b) Circulate this Order to all Members, Editors & Legal Heads of NBDA;
- (c) Host this Order on its website and include it in its next Annual Report and
- (d) Release the Order to media.

It is clarified that any statement made by the parties in the proceedings before NBDSA while responding to the complaint and putting forth their view points, and any finding or observation by NBDSA in regard to the broadcasts, in its proceedings or in this Order, are only in the context of an examination as to whether there are

any violations of any broadcasting standards and guidelines. They are not intended to be 'admissions' by the broadcaster, nor intended to be 'findings' by NBDSA in regard to any civil/criminal liability.



**Justice A.K Sikri (Retd.)**  
Chairperson

**Place: New Delhi**

**Date : 17.02.2026**