

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 213 (2026)

Complainant: Wego Search Technologies Private Ltd

Channel: ABP Live

Article titled “Arrested Spy Youtuber Jyoti Malhotra’s travel was sponsored by UAE firm Operating in PAK Report”

Date of Publication:22.05.2025

Since the complainant did not receive a response from the broadcaster on 02.07.2025, the complaint was escalated to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

Cease and Desist Notice dated 10.06.2025

1. Wego is a global online travel marketplace, which simplifies travel planning by aggregating and comparing deals on flights, hotels, trains, and other travel products from hundreds of websites.
2. In line with standard travel industry practices and their lawful business objectives, Wego regularly partners with digital content creators and influencers across various social media channels, including YouTube. These collaborations are designed to promote the mobile application and web engine travel offerings through digital marketing. Every engagement is strictly governed by a contract signed with the content creator or influencer, before any work begins.
3. We have come across news report/article published by the broadcaster pertaining to an influencer/ YouTube vlogger, Ms. Jyoti Malhotra, who is currently being investigated under the Official Secrets Act, 1923 and provisions of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita. In the said article, rather than reporting on the status/progress of investigation, the broadcaster, has wilfully, without any factual basis published and disseminated false, misleading, and unverified content across its platforms, wrongfully insinuating Wego’s complicity or association in the alleged illegal activities carried out by Ms. Malhotra. The defamatory publication lacks any credible evidence, factual basis, or lawful justification, thereby causing irreparable harm to Wego's reputation, business standing, and goodwill.
4. The publication, carries baseless, false, malicious and gravely defamatory imputations against Wego by imputing that Wego was connected with and facilitator of the alleged unlawful or espionage-linked activities of the said influencer. Such unfounded imputations which are per se defamatory have been casually made without any factual verification resulting in an unwarranted and irreparable injury to the brand equity, commercial standing, goodwill and overall

reputation of Wego across its operational territories in India and Southeast Asia. It is apparent that the article is not a journalistic piece but merely a click-bait aimed at increasing engagement, circulation and viewership by indulging in sensationalism and exaggeration to exploit curiosity and arousing a scandal, knowing fully well that the content of the reportage is patently false.

5. These alleged contentions in the article published are absolutely baseless, false, defamatory and frivolous in nature. That the article/ publication is available/accessible to the public at large, and such false statements have caused and are continuing to cause irreparable loss and damage to the reputation and goodwill of Wego. The allegations made in respect of it in the publication are ex-facie defamatory and derogatory in nature.
6. It is categorically stated that Wego has never sponsored, promoted, or in any manner facilitated any activity beyond the lawful, contractual, pre-defined scope of work agreed with Ms. Malhotra, whose engagement with Wego was on a limited, project-to-project basis in her professional capacity as a freelance YouTube content creator. Ms. Malhotra, was engaged solely for the purpose of promoting its mobile application through brief, scripted brand mentions integrated within content posted on her personal YouTube channel. Ms. Malhotra had been engaged by several other high-profile commercial and government entities however, the broadcaster has deliberately, intentionally and without any legal or factual basis, made patently false insinuations against Wego, linking it to the unlawful activities carried out by Ms. Malhotra, despite being aware that Wego was one of several brands involved in short-term, non-exclusive campaigns, and was at no point in time a long-term sponsor of Ms. Malhotra.
7. The publication failed to undertake even the most basic level of journalistic diligence, fact verification or lawful editorial scrutiny before publishing statements that have severely damaged Wego's reputation. It knowingly portrays Wego's engagement with the said influencer in a scandalous and calumnious manner, recklessly inferring a criminal nexus where none exists, and propagated a narrative of conspiracy, duplicity and culpability without basis or evidence, thereby inviting liability under civil and criminal defamation laws. These acts are in violation of Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (now corresponding to Sections 354 and 356 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023), which criminalise the making or publication of defamatory statements intended to harm the reputation of a person or entity.
8. The editor as well as the authors of the articles failed to give Wego an informed opportunity to respond to the details of the allegations made in the article. No

steps whatsoever were taken to verify the accuracy of the information, including but not limited to verifying it with Wego.

9. The broadcaster's conduct constitutes actionable tortious wrongs, including libel and injurious falsehood, which are recognised under Indian jurisprudence to provide civil remedies for wilful or negligent publication of falsehoods that cause damage to another's reputation or business interests. Courts in India have consistently held that mass media platforms must adhere to heightened standards of care, particularly when reporting on persons or entities who are not public officials and have no connection to matters of state or public order. In light of these obligations, the lack of any effort to verify the contractual nature of Wego's relationship with Ms. Malhotra, or to seek clarifications from Wego prior to publication, constitutes reckless and malicious reporting.
10. By portraying Wego in an overtly negative light and juxtaposing it with insinuations of partaking in espionage, the publication has inflicted significant reputational harm across digital ecosystems and commercial channels. Moreover, the continued existence of these articles and videos in public domains serves as a continuing injury and justifies immediate legal action. Accordingly, the complainant called upon the broadcaster, jointly and severally, to:
 - a. Forthwith take down and permanently remove the offending article mentioned above, posts and content referring to Wego or suggesting any link between Wego and the allegations against Ms. Jyoti Malhotra from all its digital platforms, including but not limited to its website, YouTube channel, and social media pages;
 - b. Issue a clear and unqualified public retraction and written apology prominently published on its platforms clarifying that Wego has no involvement in the matters under investigation and that any reference made was erroneous and unverified;
 - c. Cease immediately and desist forthwith from publishing, transmitting, broadcasting or circulating, directly or indirectly, any further statements or representations, written or oral, implying or asserting any connection between Wego and the allegations concerning the said influencer;
 - d. Tender an unconditional apology to Wego;
 - e. Provide in writing within seventy-two (72) hours of receipt of this notice a confirmation of compliance with the foregoing demands.

Application dated 07.07.2025 seeking condonation of delay

That although the broadcast was made for the first time on 22.05.2025, the complainant company became aware of the publication around 26.05.2025. Immediately upon learning about the highly defamatory broadcast, the complainant company situated in Bengaluru approached its lawyers in New Delhi to seek legal opinion on the remedies available to it and the course to be adopted under the prevailing legal framework. Multiple calls were scheduled with the complainant company's lawyers, and after much deliberation, the course of action was finalised by 01.06.2025.

Thereafter, time was spent by the lawyers in drafting the complaint, obtaining comments and clarifications from the complainant company. Time was spent by the company in reviewing the drafts shared by the lawyers, extracting the relevant links to the broadcasts from various online portals, discussions with lawyers and obtaining necessary approvals from senior management of the company. Eventually, the complaint was finalised on 09.06.2025 and issued by the company's lawyers on 10.06.2025.

The complainant company had taken all necessary steps within its means to ensure that the complaints are made promptly within a reasonable time. Any delay caused is neither deliberate nor intentional.

Under Regulation 9.1 Proviso 2, the Authority is empowered to condone the delay, if any, caused in making the complaint to the broadcaster. It is stated that the complainant was prevented from filing the complaint within the stipulated time due to genuine reasons such as collating relevant material for proceeding against broadcasters, seeking legal advice, legal drafting, reviewing draft and obtaining internal approvals from the senior management of the company.

In view of the above, it humbly requested that NBDSA may take a lenient view in the interest of justice and kindly condone the delay of four days in making the complaint to the broadcaster.

Response dated 26.08.2025 to the Application seeking condonation of delay

That the request for condonation of delay is misplaced, and the delay ought not to be condoned by the Authority for the reasons detailed below.

1. At the outset, it is pertinent to note that Regulation 9.1 of the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations (NBDSR), prescribes a mandatory timeline within which a complaint must be filed before the Authority. The Regulation provides that in the event the Complainant does not receive a response from the Broadcaster, the complaint must be filed before the Authority within 15 (fifteen)

days from the expiry of the time prescribed for the Broadcaster to respond. While the said Regulation contains a proviso empowering the Authority to condone delay in exceptional cases, such discretion is not unfettered and can only be exercised upon a finding that the Complainant has acted diligently, and the delay has been caused for reasons not attributable to the Complainant's own conduct and/or for other sufficient cause. Therefore, the burden to establish the conditions lies entirely on the Complainant and must be demonstrated through credible and cogent evidence.

2. The Complainant has admitted in their communication that they became aware of the impugned broadcast on or around May 26, 2025. Despite such early knowledge, the complaint was admittedly issued only on June 10, 2025. This is beyond the stipulated 15 day limitation period under Regulation 9.1 of NBDSR. The Complainant has attempted to justify the delay by citing internal processes such as seeking legal advice, scheduling calls with counsel, reviewing draft complaints, and obtaining approvals from senior management. However, it is respectfully submitted that these are standard and foreseeable administrative steps within the Complainant's internal decision-making/control and cannot constitute sufficient cause for delay.
3. The proviso to Regulation 9.1 clearly intends to provide relief in cases where the complainant is faced with circumstances beyond control, such as technical impossibility, unavoidable impediments, or other extraordinary conditions that prevent timely filing. The present case does not disclose any such exceptional or unavoidable circumstance. On the contrary, the reasons advanced reflect a lack of promptness and diligence and cannot be said to have prevented the Complainant from filing its grievance within the period prescribed by the NBDSR.
4. It is also important to highlight that the regulatory framework under the NBDSR is designed to ensure expeditious resolution of grievances. Strict adherence to timelines is fundamental to maintaining the integrity, credibility, and effectiveness of the self-regulatory mechanism. Permitting condonation of delay on account of ordinary internal consultations and routine legal procedures would dilute with regulatory standards, open the floodgates for delayed complaints, and set a precedent inconsistent with the letter and spirit of Regulation 9.1.
5. The power to condone delay, though discretionary, must be exercised judiciously with caution and not as a matter of routine. In the present instance, there is no material on record to suggest that the delay was beyond the control of the Complainant or that any genuine impediment existed. The explanation offered

by the Complainant only reflects internal delays entirely within their control, and therefore, cannot form the basis for the exercise of discretion in their favour.

6. In view of the above, it submitted that the Complainant's request for condonation of delay is without merit, does not satisfy the threshold laid down under the second proviso to Regulation 9.1, and ought to be rejected. In view of the above, the broadcaster respectfully urged the Hon'ble Authority to uphold the sanctity of the regulatory timelines and dismiss the complaint as time-barred.

Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 14.10.2025

NBDSA considered the complaint, application for condonation of delay filed by the complainant and response of the broadcaster on the application seeking condonation, and 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

Wego Search Technologies Pvt. Ltd represented by

1. Mr. Bernard Corraya, General Manager
2. Ms. Kumar Rishabh Parth, Advocate

Broadcaster

1. Mr. Shayak Majumder, Associate Editor- Team Lead
2. Ms. Ashika Daga, Advocate
3. Ms. Sampurna Mukherjee, Advocate

Submissions of the complainant

A. Condonation of Delay

The complainant submitted that the broadcast was made for the first time on 22.05.2025 and the complainant became aware of the publication around 26.05.2025. Immediately after learning about the highly defamatory broadcast, the complainant company situated in Bengaluru approached its lawyers in New Delhi to seek legal remedies. Several calls were held, and after deliberation, the course of action was finalized by 01.06.2025.

Thereafter, the lawyers spent time drafting the complaint and obtaining comments and clarifications from the complainant company. The company spent time reviewing the drafts shared by the lawyers, extracting relevant links to the broadcasts from various online portals, discussing with the lawyers, and obtaining necessary approvals from senior management of the company. Eventually, the complaint was finalized on 09.06.2025 and issued by the company's lawyers on 10.06.2025. The

complainant company took all necessary steps within its means to ensure that the complaint was made promptly within a reasonable time. Any delay caused was neither deliberate nor intentional. The delay in filing the complaint is fully explained and bona fide in nature. In view of the above, the complaint requested that NBDSA may kindly condone the delay of four days in making the complaint to the broadcaster.

B. Merits

The complainant submitted that in the article titled *“Arrested ‘Spy’ YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra’s Travel Was Sponsored By UAE Firm Operating In Pak: Report”*, which was published on 22.05.2025, the broadcaster had portrayed the complainant company in a scandalous manner and recklessly suggested a criminal nexus where none exists. The article stated, *“Investigators are analyzing her sponsorships particularly from UAE-based travel firm Wego, which also operates in Pakistan”*, this assertion was patently baseless and designed to mislead. In the absence of any evidence whatsoever of any sponsorship by the complainant, a salacious conjecture had been made regarding some alleged connection between entities in the UAE and Pakistan and the involvement of the Indian entity, in order to sensationalise the issue. By doing so, the broadcaster sought to propagate an unfounded insinuation of conspiracy and wrongdoing without any credible evidence in violation of the fundamental principles of fairness, integrity, and truthfulness mandated by the Code.

In the impugned article, the broadcaster stated that *“According to the report, multiple videos of Jyoti have been sponsored by the firm Wego, which also has a license to operate in Pakistan”* while deliberately highlighting only the complainant’s name despite acknowledging that several other sponsors existed. The broadcaster repeatedly inserted the complainant’s name in frivolous contexts, such as *“Wego operates in Pakistan with a valid travel agency license. It also has offices in Singapore and Dubai,”* thereby creating a misleading impression that the complainant was involved in unlawful or espionage-related activities and suggesting, without basis, that the complainant was responsible for or connected to such alleged misconduct. These statements were made without any factual verification or diligence. In fact, the broadcaster had relied merely on the article/videos published by another broadcaster, which was acknowledged in the article itself.

No investigation has ever been initiated against the complainant nor has the complainant received any notice from any competent authority in relation to the Jyoti Malhotra matter. The imputations were therefore speculative, baseless, and per se defamatory, and the so-called reference to the complainant in the report was baseless, and added merely to sensationalize the story and supply it with a sense of foreboding and existence of a deep sinister conspiracy, solely for viewership.

The broadcaster failed to afford the complainant any meaningful, informed, or fair opportunity to respond to the allegations contained in the impugned articles and made no attempt to verify the accuracy of the information by seeking clarification directly from the complainant.

Submissions of the Broadcaster

A. Delay

The broadcaster submitted that the complainant became aware of the impugned publication on or around 26.05.2025 and despite such early knowledge, the complaint was issued only on 10.06.2025. This is beyond the stipulated 15-day limitation period under the aforesaid Regulation 9.1 of the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations, 2022. Hence, it submitted that the complaint is not maintainable and ought to be dismissed.

B. Merits

The broadcaster submitted that Ms. Malhotra's allegedly anti – national activities, inter alia, revolved around spying and espionage, which was the sole aspect and ground of coverage. No derogatory, detrimental or injurious comments have been made against Wego in the impugned News Article. The complainant has failed to indicate or establish how there has been any case of derogation or defamation or bias made out against Wego, failing which the complaint lacks any basis or credibility.

The impugned news article did not make any unsubstantiated claims or engage in speculative reporting concerning “Wego” and/or “Wego Search Technologies Ltd.” The mention of “Wego” and/or “Wego Search Technologies Ltd.” in the article was not intended to malign or defame the firm but was a factual reporting of information that emerged in connection with the activities of Ms. Malhotra. The impugned Article merely presented reported facts without drawing definitive conclusions or expressing any opinion regarding the firm's culpability.

The complainant has failed to demonstrate how the mention of “Wego” in the context of the impugned Article constitutes a bias against the firm and is a breach of any broadcasting guidelines or ethical standards, particularly when the information reported was derived from credible intelligence sources and already in the public domain.

It is submitted that the coverage was an honest endeavour to report the developments of Ms. Malhotra's activities, as had been similarly undertaken by other leading national and international dailies and channels. There was no personal opinion or prejudice or bias offered as a comment in the impugned Article.

The role of a news organization is to disseminate information that is of public interest, especially concerning individuals or entities involved in matters of national security or public concern. The activities of Ms. Malhotra, as described in various reports, and any associated entities, fall squarely within the ambit of public interest journalism.

Without prejudice, it submitted that the impugned Article had been taken down in good faith and was not accessible, as on date.

However, with utmost regard for the NBDSA, if NBDSA is of the view that the impugned Article or any part thereof encouraged or endorsed any inappropriate or misleading statement to any extent, the Broadcaster tenders an unconditional apology for the same and regrets any unintended impact the coverage may have had.

Subsequent email dated 18.11.2025 from the Broadcaster

It appears that the impugned broadcast was available at <https://news.abplive.com/news/india/arrested-spy-youtuber-lyoti-malhotra-s-travel-was-sponsored-by-uae-firm-operating-in-pak-report-1774160> (hereinafter referred to as "First Link"). As per its records, a similar broadcast was also available at <https://news.abplive.com/news/india/arrested-spy-youtuber-lyoti-malhotra-s-travel-wassponsored-by-uae-firm-operating-in-pak-report-177> (hereinafter referred to as "Second Link"). On or around July 4, 2025, the Second Link was taken down, considering the same to be the impugned broadcast. Accordingly, submissions were made in the hearing.

However, upon a query being raised during the hearing, it had checked its records and it appears that the First Link was still available. After the hearing and upon being pointed out, it has taken down the First Link as well. As such on date, both the links have been taken down.

Decision

NBDSA considered the application seeking condonation of delay filed by the complainant and the response thereof of the broadcaster.

In view of the fact that there was only a four-day delay in filing the complaint at the first level of redressal, NBDSA condoned the delay and decided to hear the complainant and the broadcaster.

NBDSA noted that during the hearing, the broadcaster submitted that the impugned article had been removed. However, the broadcaster, in a subsequent email, clarified that a similar article had been removed in error, believing it to be the impugned

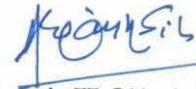
article. The broadcaster had further stated that the impugned article has since also been removed.

Since the broadcaster itself had removed the impugned article, NBDSA decided not to go into the issue. NBDSA decided to close the complaint and inform the complainant and 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