

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 222 (2026)

Complainant: Mr. Utkarsh Mishra

Channel: NDTV

Programme: तंदूरी रोटियों पर थूकने वाले आरोपी ने किया चौंकाने वाला खुलासा”

Date of Broadcast: 06.12.2024

Since no response was received 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.

Complaint dated 20.12.2024

In the impugned broadcast, an anti-social activity of one roti maker, spitting in rotis, was reported as ‘Thook Jihad’ to give it a communal angle. In the broadcast, an incomplete video was shown, wherein the accused claims that he was instructed to spit in the rotis by his mentor. In the full viral video, the accused claimed that this act was done by himself, and his mentor had not instructed him to do so, the relevant excerpt is reproduced below:

1:29 Inquirer: उसने कहा कि हर रोटी थूक के दिया कर?

1:30 Accused Boy: जी, नहीं कहा

1:34 : Inquirer: तो तू अपनी मर्जी से थूक रहा है?

1:35-1:36 : Accused Boy: जी

The interview of the accused, conducted by a private citizen, was labelled a police inquiry in the broadcast.

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. This trend of normalising discourse around antisocial incidents as incidents of jihad advances the agenda of specific interest groups, including extremist pro-Hindutva organisations and conspiracy theories endorsed by certain political leaders; and thus also amounts to a violation of Fundamental principle No. 4, which states “*News shall not be selected or designed to promote any particular belief, opinion or desires of any interest group.*”

Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 14.10.2025

After considering the complaint and viewing the footage of the broadcast, NBDSA decided to call the parties for a hearing.



On being served with the notices, the following persons were present at the hearing on 12.03.2026:

Complainant

1. Mr. Utkarsh Mishra

Broadcaster

1. Mr. Nikhil Guiliani

Submissions of the Complainant

The complainant submitted that the impugned broadcast related to an incident in Meerut, in which a video shows a child spitting on the rotis he was preparing. The complainant stated that although he was not disputing the factual scenario, his grievance with the impugned broadcast was with the use of the term “thook jhad”. His grievance also lay in the insinuation of a larger conspiracy at the end of the broadcast, as the reporter can be seen stating that in several cities, such “घिनौनी हरकत” are coming to light and questioning the intention behind such incidents. This generalisation of the incident violates the Code of Conduct.

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.

Submissions of the Broadcaster

The broadcaster submitted that it had, without prejudice, removed the impugned broadcast from its platform and that it was no longer available.

The impugned broadcast reported on a viral video from Meerut showing an individual spitting on *rotis* while preparing them. The primary editorial objective was to highlight matters of legitimate public concern, including public health, food hygiene, and anti-social behavior. The coverage relied exclusively on material already circulating in the public domain and was reported as a matter of criminal investigation and police action. When such incidents occur, it becomes the media's legitimate right to inform the public.

As far as the complainant's grievance regarding the use of the term “jihad” and its attribution to a particular community is concerned, the allegations were unfounded, as the broadcaster had not referred to any particular community in the impugned broadcast. The phrase was used solely to reflect terminology currently circulating in social media discourse and public debate. Broadcaster did not coin, endorse, or validate this term. The broadcast presented it as a reflection of the prevailing public

conversation. The report remained focused on the specific actions of the individual caught on camera and did not attribute the conduct to any specific community, religion, or group.

Further, it submitted that the term “jihad” is not illegal; it is an Arabic term that literally translates to struggle or striving, as per Arabic dictionaries. The word is not illegal even in Muslim countries, and even in India, the term is not banned and is used in education, media, religion, and other purposes as well. The term “jihad” is also used by Courts and in legislation. It reiterated that the incident shown in the impugned broadcast has not been attributed by it to any particular community, whether Hindu or Muslim; it has merely been described as thook jihad.

As a responsible media house and based on its own assessment rather than the complaint, it found that the impugned broadcast might hurt the sentiments of a particular community; accordingly, it had removed the broadcast voluntarily, without prejudice. Furthermore, this incident was covered by other media houses as well.

The version of the video referenced by the Complainant in his submission is not available online. The broadcaster had no access to the version cited by the Complainant and cannot be held responsible for alleged discrepancies between that footage and the material aired, which was based on verified, publicly accessible sources at the time of broadcast.

The broadcast was in compliance with the NBDSA Principles. It was neutral and factual, ensuring the news was not designed to promote the beliefs or agendas of any interest group. The report did not promote hate speech or communal disharmony. It focused on the individual’s admission of guilt and the subsequent police inquiry. The coverage served the public interest by highlighting a breach of food safety standards and the need for legal accountability in public catering. It reiterated that the broadcast was factually accurate, impartial, and in the public interest.

Decision

At the outset, NBDSA decided to condone a four-day delay in escalating the complaint to the second level of redressal.

NBDSA considered the complaint, the footage of the broadcast, as well as the submissions made by the parties during the hearing.

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NBDSA observed that the incident/video from Meerut of a person spitting in food reported in the impugned broadcast was undoubtedly shocking and condemnable, and no objection could be raised to the broadcaster's coverage of the incident. The problem lay with the contextualization and characterization of this isolated incident.

The sweeping generalization of this incident as 'thook jihad' and the suggestion that this was not an isolated incident, but was a widespread occurrence, without substantiating the same, amounted to a violation of the Code of Conduct, particularly guidelines against Racial and Religious Stereotyping. It was the broadcaster's assertion that it did not refer to any specific community in its coverage of the incident. However, even in the absence of explicit attribution, the use of the term "jihad" in the report referred to a particular community.

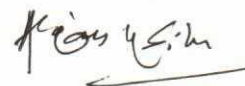
NBDSA noted that the broadcaster had voluntarily removed the impugned broadcast, albeit without prejudice. In view of the action taken by the broadcaster, NBDSA decided to close the complaint by cautioning the broadcaster to be careful in the future and to avoid such sweeping generalizations, consistent with the principles of the Code of Conduct.

NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the aforementioned 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 : 19-05-2026