

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 223 (2026)

Complainant: Mr. M. Chakravarty

Programme:

- 1. Most-wanted terrorist Qari Mohammad Iqbal reduced to dust. Agencies were searching for him in the valley; he was killed in India's airstrike" and "Operation Sindoor Terrorist Qari Muhammad Iqbal Dead" aired on ABP News and ABP Majha on 7.05.2025**
- 2. "Terrorist Qari Mohammad Iqbal killed" aired on Zee News on 07.05.2025**

Since the complainant did not receive a response from the broadcasters, on 10.06.2025, the complaint was escalated to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

Complaint dated 16.05.2025

1. ABP News:

The impugned broadcast was a report on the killing of Qari Mohammad Iqbal, bearing the headline: "मिट्टी में मिल गया मोस्ट वांटेड आतंकी इकबाल, घाटी में ढूंढ रही थी एजेंसियां; भारत के एयर स्ट्राइक में हुआ ठेर", which has since been removed.

2. ABP Majha:

The impugned news report was aired with the title "Operation Sindoor Terrorist Qari Muhammad Iqbal Dead: दहशतवादी कारी इकबालचा कोटली हल्ल्यात खात्मा", which remains available.

3. Zee News:

In the impugned broadcast, the broadcaster reported on the killing of Qari Mohammad Iqbal by airing a blurred image of his corpse with the ticker, "*Terrorist Qari Mohammad Iqbal killed*".

The complainant stated that the impugned news reports are factually incorrect and amount to the dissemination of fake news, which is also corroborated by the Press Release issued by the District Police Poonch. Further, this news was also fact-checked by a news report titled "*His name was Qari Mohammad Iqbal. He was not a terrorist.*" The broadcasters had, by airing the impugned news reports, infringed the principles of Impartiality and objectivity in reporting and the principle of Corrigendum under the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards.

Ases

Reply dated 27.06.2025 from Zee Media Corporation Limited

The impugned broadcast was aired on its channel Zee News (“impugned channel”), on 07.05.2025 at 4:00 PM, wherein it had covered the escalating tensions between India and Pakistan, with respect to developments in “Operation Sindoor,” the result of a calibrated military action undertaken by Indian forces. The objective of its reportage was to responsibly inform Indian citizens of the developing war-like situation in the northern region, to encourage vigilance and preparedness, and to reaffirm that the defence forces were actively working to safeguard national peace and security.

In reply to the allegations contained in the complaint, it submitted as under:

1. At the outset, it clarified that due to an inadvertent oversight, the death of Mr. Qari Mohammad Iqbal was initially reported as “Terrorist Qari Mohammad Iqbal killed.” This statement is made with utmost responsibility and sincere regret, acknowledging that this was an unintentional error. Upon becoming aware of the matter, it promptly took appropriate corrective measures, including the removal of the reference from all its platforms and the issuance of an explanatory ticker to address the oversight and provide accurate information that Mr. Iqbal’s death resulted from cross-border shelling by Pakistan, constituting a cowardly act.
2. It had consistently informed its audience about the tragic loss of life in border areas due to such cross-border incidents and had reported those events accurately. Furthermore, the coverage of the evolving conflict during “Operation Sindoor” was based on real-time information, publicly available sources, and a reasoned analysis of the unfolding military developments, reflecting standard journalistic practice during periods of armed conflict or national security operations. At no time was there any intention to disseminate misinformation, mislead the public, or incite unrest. Its reporting was aimed at informing viewers, reflecting public sentiment, and contextualising strategic developments from an Indian perspective.
3. It is pertinent to note that war time journalism inherently involves real-time updates and preliminary data, and while some reports may later be clarified or corrected, this is a recognised and necessary facet of journalistic engagement during armed conflict. Thereby, it submitted that its actions were motivated solely by the public interest, not sensationalism or misinformation.
4. That in view of the aforesaid, it accepts the factual inaccuracy in the impugned programme and confirms that the same has been taken down across different platforms. Further, a ticker acknowledging the specific error of the “impugned programme” had been promptly run on its news channel, in accordance with the Corrigendum. These steps are reflective of its commitment to accountability,

and its continuous effort to self-correct while retaining public trust. It is further in compliance with the requirements of transparency and timely correction under the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards

5. That it fully acknowledges NBDSA's mandate that channels must not only avoid disseminating false or defamatory content but must also correct inaccuracies transparently and explicitly, in the same format and prominence as the original broadcast. The corrective action, including the corrective ticker, deletion of the programme, and editorial clarification, had been taken in good faith to comply with these obligations as a responsible media house.

That in view of the above, it stated that it had abided by the principles of news reporting, broadcasting and journalistic norms, and had accepted its error in good faith. All necessary corrective steps had been taken at the earliest instance.

Email dated 27.06.2025 from Complainant in respect of Zee News

1. The explanatory ticker mentioned by the broadcaster, Zee News pertained to one Syed A Habib, a person who shared the condolence post of the person in discussion. He was not the deceased. This, was misinformation or oversight on the part of the broadcaster.
2. An explanatory ticker cannot be considered to be in the "*same format and prominence as the original broadcast*". The original broadcast included an image that covered the entire window size and an audio narration along with it.
3. Further, the ticker, though not regarding the person in context, mentioned "in relation to" a terrorist. There was no terrorist in relation to the news item in discussion.

Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 14.10.2025

NBDSA considered the complaints, response from the broadcaster, Zee News and decided to call the parties for a hearing.

On being served with the notices, the following persons were present at the hearing on 23.02.2026:

Complainant

1. Mr. M Chakravarty

Broadcasters

ABP News and ABP Majha

1. Ms. Ashika Daga, Advocate

Ane

2. Ms. Sampurna Mukherjee, Advocate
3. Mr. Tejas Pradeep Vaidya, Legal

Zee News

1. Ms. Ritwika Nanda, Advocate
2. Mr. Sarvesh Kumar Singh, Deputy Manager Legal, ZMCL

Submissions of the Parties

The complainant submitted that Qari Mohammad Iqbal was not a terrorist as alleged by the broadcasters. This was also confirmed by the District Police. While the broadcasters had removed the link of the impugned broadcasts/publication from the platform, the Code of Ethics also enjoins them to ensure that errors are corrected promptly and clearly. Therefore, mere removal of the impugned broadcast/publication is not sufficient. The news reports were in direct violation of the Code of Ethics, namely principles of Impartiality and objectivity in reporting, and the requirement therein that the channels be transparent about errors. Further, it seemed that the impugned broadcast aired on ABP Majha was still available.

On behalf of ABP, it was submitted that the country was in a precarious state and that, given the delicate nature of the terrorism involved, the broadcaster tried to inform the public by covering the developments as and when they arose. The impugned content was not a video but a publication on the ABP website, published on 07.05.2025. The information was based on credible sources. Further, several other news channels apart from ABP had while reporting on Operation Sindoor, reported this inaccurate information. This, in fact, had prompted the District Police in Poonch, to issue a clarification. Notwithstanding, the same upon becoming aware that the information was factually inaccurate, all related links had been taken down. That if NBDSA is of the view that the impugned broadcast or any part thereof encouraged or endorsed any misleading or inappropriate statement, it tenders an unconditional apology for the same and regrets any unintended impact the coverage may have had.

The broadcaster, Zee News, also submitted that it had removed the impugned broadcast and subsequently aired a corrective ticker. Additionally, it informed the Authority that an FIR had been lodged against Zee News, in respect of the impugned broadcast.

Affidavit dated 12.03.2026 filed by the Broadcaster, ABP

The broadcaster submitted that the impugned broadcast, namely ABP Live at 3:27 PM, pertained to news coverage relating to anti-terrorism operations undertaken by the Government of India, including Operation Sindoor. At the relevant time, the developments were unfolding in real time and were the subject matter of widespread

coverage by multiple media organisations owing to their significant public importance. It had reported on the developments based on information then available from credible sources and in the public domain, while continuously monitoring the situation for further clarification and verification. Thereafter, upon receiving further clarity, the broadcaster had voluntarily and promptly removed the impugned video on 7.05.2025, itself at 5:31 PM, i.e., even prior to the clarification subsequently issued by the Poonch District Police on 8.05.2025, which, owing to wide reportage by most media channels, clarified that Mr. Qari Muhammad Iqbal was not involved in the alleged terrorist activities. ABP, acting bona fide and on its own initiative, promptly removed all connected news links and related reportage from its platforms and servers, to the fullest extent possible and within its technical control.

The impugned YouTube video link was inadvertently missed during the earlier removal process. Upon detection during subsequent review, the said link was immediately and voluntarily taken down on 18.02.2026 as further compliance.

Decision

NBDSA considered the complaint, response of the broadcaster, Zee News and the submissions advanced during the hearing by the complainant and the broadcasters.

Prior to delving into the complaint, it is essential to note that, during the hearing of the complaint, it was brought to NBDSA's attention that an FIR had been filed in respect of the impugned broadcast aired on Zee News. In view of the same, keeping in mind Proviso to Regulation 7.2, which precludes NBDSA from holding an inquiry into any matter in respect of which any proceeding relating to the same issue in the same broadcast/publication is pending in a Court of law or other Tribunal or statutory authority, NBDSA decided not to proceed further with the complaint against Zee News.

NBDSA noted that the complainant's grievance with the impugned content concerned the inaccurate labelling of the deceased Qari Mohammad Iqbal as a terrorist and the subsequent failure of the broadcaster to issue a clarification in this regard.

NBDSA also noted that the broadcaster, ABP, in its response to the complaint, had stated that the broadcast was part of its coverage of Operation Sindoor, in which it reported developments as they unfolded in real time. The development was reported based on information available at the time from credible sources and in the public domain, while the situation was continuously being monitored for further clarification and verification. Thereafter, upon receiving further clarification, it

voluntarily and promptly removed the impugned broadcast on 07.05.2025, even before the clarification was issued by the Police Officials in Poonch.

NBDSA was of the view that branding any individual as a “terrorist” was a serious factual inaccuracy. Although the impugned content was removed, it would have been appropriate for the broadcaster to issue a clarification in compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Further, since several broadcasters had committed this mistake, prompting the Poonch Police to issue a clarification, NBDSA deemed it appropriate to advise the broadcasters that the purpose of the Corrigendum principle is to serve the public interest by ensuring accuracy. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge and correct any significant mistakes made during broadcasts to keep the public informed.

Keeping in view the manner in which events happened and were covered by the broadcasters, NBDSA also decide to make the following observations:

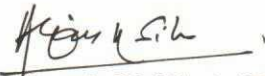
1. Such type of news, though in the public interest, also affects the image of the persons in respect of whom such news is broadcast and therefore, the scrutiny by the broadcaster about the credibility of such news has to be deeper. Though it is claimed that information came from ‘credible sources’, at the same time, the so-called information turned out to be incorrect and false. Therefore, the broadcasters should be careful in treating a particular source as “credible”, inasmuch as if the source was credible, how the information was found to be wrong. Thus, broadcasters are required to be more careful before disseminating such news.
2. When it is found that the news broadcast was wrong and incorrect, there should be immediate action on the part of the broadcasters to issue clarification in accordance with the principle of Corrigendum. The clarification should be proximate in time to when the initial news was broadcast and should be of sufficient length to ensure that the effect of the initial false news is nullified.

NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the aforementioned observations and inform the complainant and the broadcasters 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 : 28-05-2026