

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 224 (2026)

Complainant: Mr. Utkarsh Mishra

Channel: NDTV, News18, Zee News and ABP

Date of Broadcasts: 02.05.2025 and 03.05.2025

Since the complainant did not receive a response from the broadcasters, ABP and NDTV and was not satisfied with the response received from Zee News and News18, the complainant, on 26.05.2025, escalated the complaint to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

Complaint dated 15.05.2025

The complaint seeks to bring attention to the violation of NBDSA guidelines by the respective channels. Despite multiple NBDSA orders, highlighting that the term jihad cannot be used loosely, the channels communalised the Bhopal TTT 'College students' rape/gang rape incident.

From 29th April onwards, the broadcaster, NDTV had reported the incident as a gang rape case from 2017, highlighting the courage of the victim in bringing this forward. However, after 2.05.2025 - the day when Hindu organisations held protest rallies in different parts of Bhopal city, claiming this incident to be a case of love jihad, the channels began reporting on this incident as "Love Jihad and Gang Rape Case". This was a direct violation of Fundamental Principle Number 4, the Guidelines to prevent communal colour in reporting and the Specific Guidelines for Anchors conducting Programmes, including Debates.

The complainant reproduced excerpts from the broadcasts including statements by the anchors that projected/ promoted the love jihad narrative as a matter of fact.

NDTV

1. Bhopal Love Jihad and Gangrape Case की पूरी कहानी का असली सच सामने आ गया! | Madhya Pradesh

0:25 - 0:51 :मध्य प्रदेश की राजधानी भोपाल में लव जिहाद और गैंगरेप का एक ऐसा मामला सामने आया जिसे सुनकर हर किसी की रूह कांप गई छह मुस्लिम युवकों का एक गैंग जिसका काम था हिंदू लड़कियों को अपने प्यार के जाल में फंसाना उनका ब्रेन वाश करना फिर रेप करना उसके बाद अपने साथियों से गैंगरेप करवाना फिर वीडियो रिकॉर्डिंग करना और उस वीडियो रिकॉर्डिंग को दिखाकर उन लड़कियों को ब्लैकमेल करना सोचिए कितना बड़ा कांड हो रहा था

8:25 -8:45 :तो यह थी कहानी भोपाल लव जिहाद और गैंगरेप कांड की आपकी नजर में इन आरोपियों को क्या सजा मिलनी चाहिए नीचे कमेंट्स में बताइए इस वीडियो में फिलहाल इतना ही मुझे असीम को दीजिए इजाजत लेकिन मैं एक अपील जाते-जाते आपसे जरूर करूंगा कि इस वीडियो को ज्यादा से ज्यादा शेयर करें ताकि बाकी लड़कियां सतर्क हो सकें

Amc

2. Bhopal Love Jihad and Gangrape Case की पूरी कहानी का असली सच सामने आ गया! | Madhya Pradesh

1:52 - 2:20 : आरोपी नंबर दो साहिल खान फरहान के गैंग की मुख्य कड़ी मूल रूप से पन्ना का रहने वाला था लेकिन अशोक गार्डन इलाके में रहकर डांस क्लास चलाता था जिसमें करीब 30 हिंदू लड़कियां आती थी यही साहिल का टारगेट थी झूठे प्रेम जाल में फंसाकर उनका रेप करना बाद में वही वीडियो दिखाकर उन्हें ब्लैकमेल करना इसका काम था कई लड़कियों को यह फंसाने की कोशिश करता था और सबसे बड़ी बात अपने डांस क्लास में यह सिर्फ और सिर्फ हिंदू लड़कियों को ही शामिल करता था

News18

1. Bhopal Love Jihad Case के आरोपी के शॉर्ट एनकाउंटर पर Vishvas Sarang का बड़ा बयान | CM Mohan Yadav

1:44 - 1:49: Reporter : भोपाल में शॉर्ट एनकाउंटर हुआ जिसमें लव जिहाद के एक आरोपी को पैर में गोली लगी

2:37 - 2:54 :Reporter: विश्वास सारंग जो सीधे तौर पर कहते हुए कि लव जिहाद के आरोपी को जिसने पुलिस के साथ भागने की कोशिश की थी

2. Love Jihad के आरोपी के साथ पुलिस का एनकाउंटर | Bhopal Crime | MP Police | CM Mohan Yadav | Hindi News

0:17 - 0:28 Anchor : तो लव जिहाद के इस मुख्य आरोपी के साथ ये पुलिस का इंकांटर देखने को मिला है

1:37 - 1:48 Reporter : मैं आपको बता दू कि यह भोपाल के कॉलेज में यह जिसका आरोप लगा जिसको लेकर भोपाल में जो कल पूड़े तरह से सकल हिंदू समाज ने प्रदाशन भी किया था और लव जिहाद की आरोप लेकर उसमें फरहाल आरूपी है

3. Bhopal Love Jihad Case : हिंदू लड़कियों से रेप करने वाले फरहान का हो गया शॉर्ट एनकाउंटर | N18

0:00 - 0:51 भोपाल लव जिहाद केस में बड़ा एक्शन हुआ पुलिस की हिरासत से भागने की कोशिश कर रहा फरहान पुलिस ने शॉर्ट एनकाउंटर इसका किया दाहिने पैर में गोली लगी और अब अस्पताल में इलाज के लिए भर्ती है दरअसल वो हिंदू लड़कियों से रेप करता था और ब्लैकमेल किया करता था यह गंभीर संगीन आरोप लगा भोपाल लव जिहाद केस में मुख्य आरोपी फरहान जिहाद की मंशा से हिंदू लड़कियों से रेप की वारदात को अंजाम देता था गैंग बनाकर हिंदू लड़कियों से रेप करने के लिए बाकायदा एक गिरोह भी था बताया जाता है कि फरहान की इसी हरकत को देखते हुए जब खुलासा हुआ तो उसे गिरफ्त में ले लिया गया और लव जिहाद कांड का यह मास्टरमाइंड भी है पहले वो कॉलेज की लड़कियों के साथ दोस्ती करता था बाहर मिलने बुलाता था अपने प्रेम के जाल में फंसाता था और फिर शादी का झांसा देकर हिंदू लड़कियों के साथ रेप की वारदात को अंजाम देता था पुलिस ने उसका शॉर्ट एनकाउंटर किया है

News18 Madhya Pradesh/ Chhattisgarh

1. Bhopal Rape Blackmailing Case के आरोपी फरहान का शॉर्ट एनकाउंटर! Love Jihad Case | CM Mohan Yadav

4:16 - 4:52 Anchor: राजफश के बाद भोपाल में शुक्रवार को बड़ा प्रदर्शन भी हुआ और लोगों ने विरोध जताया लोगों का गुस्सा सड़क चौराहों पर अब दिखाई दे रहा है तख्तियां लेकर के युवतियां महिलाएं अब सड़क पर नजर आ रही हैं शहर

की बेटियां छात्राएं सभी यहां पर प्रदर्शन कर रही हैं 25 अलग-अलग स्थानों पर एक साथ प्रदर्शन किया गया दरअसल सकल हिंदू समाज के आह्वान पर हर जगह अच्छी खासी भीड़ जुटी हुई थी प्रदर्शनकारी आरोपियों के लिए फांसी की सजा की मांग करते नारे लगाते नजर आई 10 नंबर मार्केट सहित कुछ स्थानों पर भी प्रदर्शन के दौरान उपस्थित लोगों को लव जिहाद के विरुद्ध संघर्ष की भी शपथ दिलाई गई है

Zee News

1. Bhopal Love Jihad Case Updates: एमपी में लव जिहाद के खिलाफ तगड़ा एक्शन! | MP News | Hindi News

0:00 - 0:12 Anchor : मध्य प्रदेश में लव जिहाद मामले का मुख्य आरोपी फरहान पुलिस की गोली लगने की वजह से घायल हुआ जिसे भोपाल में भी योगी मॉडल की छवि देखने को मिल रही है फरहान पर हिंदू लड़कियों से बलात्कार करने का बड़ा आरोप है

0:31 - 0:48 Voice Over : शहर शहर लव जिहाद अब योगी मॉडल से ही होगा समाधान भोपाल में आरोपी का एनकाउंटर लव जिहाद के आरोपी को पैर में मारी गोली अस्पताल में बेड पर लेटे इस आरोपी का नाम फरहान है और यह मध्य प्रदेश के भोपाल के बहुचर्चित लव जिहाद मामले का आरोपी है

1:24 - 1:34 Voice Over: गोली लगने के बाद लव जिहाद का आरोपी फरहान अब अस्पताल में अपना इलाज करवा रहा है लेकिन इस एनकाउंटर पर मध्य प्रदेश सरकार में मंत्री विश्वास सारंग का बयान सामने आया

2:17 - 2:26 Voice Over : चर्चित लव जिहाद मामले में मुख्य आरोपी फरहान पर आरोप है कि वह कॉलेज में हिंदू लड़कियों को प्रेम जाल में फंसाकर दुष्कर्म और ब्लैकमेल करता था

2. Bhopal Love Jihad Case Updates: भोपाल लव जिहाद कांड में बड़ा एक्शन, धरा गया फरहान! | MP News | Hindi

0:00 - 0:30 Anchor: बड़ी खबर आ रही है भोपाल से जहां लव जिहाद के आरोपी का एनकाउंटर किया गया है आरोप फरहान के पैर में गोली लगी है आरोपी ने पिस्तल छीनने की कोशिश की थी रेप और लव जिहाद के आरोपी के घायल होने की तस्वीर सामने आई है पुलिस पर हमला किया था और जवाबी कारवाही में घायल हुआ है फरहान तस्वीर भी सामने आई है लव जिहाद का आरोपी है और एनकाउंटर में उसके पैर में गोली लगी है आरोपी को गिरफ्तार कर लिया गया है फिलहाल अस्पताल में उसका इलाज चल रहा है आरोपी फरहान ने पुलिस के ऊपर पिस्तल छीनकर गोली चलाने की कोशिश की थी

0:56 - 1:17: 0:56 तो आरोपी फरहान के खिलाफ सड़कों पर लोग उतरे ने प्रदर्शन किया था और अब इस मामले में पुलिस ने कारवाई की है आरोपी फरहान के पैर में गोली लगी है लव जिहाद और रेप का आरोपी है फरहान जो घायल हुआ है पुलिस एनकाउंटर के बाद पुलिस ने बताया कि उसने पिस्तल छीन करके गोली चलाने की कोशिश की थी और लव जिहाद के खिलाफ लोगों में काफी नाराजगी है

1:32 - 1:47 और इन सबके बीच स्थानीय लोगों की नाराजगी किस तरह से सामने आई थी सड़कों पर महिलाओं की ने मार्च निकाला और लव जिहाद रोकने की मांग की और आरोप लगाया कि जिस तरह से संस्थागत तरीके से टारगेट किया जा रहा है हिंदू लड़कियों को इस पर लगाम लगाई जानी चाहिए

ABP

1. Bhopal Protest: 'Love Jihad' पर भोपाल में आक्रोश, सड़कों पर उतरे हिंदू संगठन, लगाए गंभीर आरोप

0:00 - 0:29 Reporter :मध्य प्रदेश की राजधानी भोपाल और प्रदेश और देश भर से जिस तरीके से लव जिहाद के मामले निकल कर के सामने आ रहे हैं आज राजधानी भोपाल में तमाम सकल हिंदू समाज के लोग इकट्ठा होकर के लव जिहाद के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन कर रहे हैं इसका उद्देश्य यह है कि हिंदू बेटियों को भी जागरूक किया जाए और ऐसेप्रदर्शन आज भोपाल में 20 से ज्यादा जगहों पर हो रहे हैं हम जानने की कोशिश करेंगे क्या इसके पीछे का उद्देश्य है

1:53 - 2:03: Reporter: बहुत सारी महिलाएं भी इधर हैं मैडम आप आज यहां पर पहुंची हैं क्या कहना चाहेंगी जिस तरीके से ये मामले बढ़ते जा रहे हैं लव जिहाद के?

He stated that the statements above clearly failed to highlight the origin of the jihad conspiracy to its political roots and instead promoted it as a matter of fact, thus promoting stereotype against a specific community. Further, the restricted Police Statements mostly said that an investigation is underway on the basis of the complainants' FIRs. The complainant cited excerpt from one such broadcast aired on NDTV , wherein it was stated that “5:42 - 6:31 Reporter: जब पांचवी पीड़िता सामने आई थी उसके बाद यह पूरा मामला और बेहतर खुलकर सामने आया था पीड़िता के पास से भी कई ऐसी चीजें मिली थी जो जिसके चलते पुलिस अब उससे भी मदद लेकर आगे बढ़ रही है हालांकि जैसे कि मैंने बताया कि पहली बार में जितने सबूत पुलिस को मिल गए थे उसके बाद सबूत मिलना धीरे-धीरे कम हो गए जिसके चलते पुलिस अब कोई भी ऑफिशियल बाइट देने से भी बच रही है ताकि जितने भी आरोपी हैं उन्हें कोई भी सबूत ना मिले या पुलिस के अगले एक्शन की भी उन लोगों को जानकारी ना मिले ताकि जो आरोपी है उसे जल्द से जल्द पकड़ा जा सके यही कारण था कि नबील की गिरफ्तारी के पहले भी पुलिस किसी भी तरह के ऑफिशियल बाइट से बच रही थी अभी भी अबार की गिरफ्तारी को लेकर पुलिस कोई भी बाइट या कोई भी जानकारी देने से बच रही है उनका यह कहना है कि वे गिरफ्तारी कर लेंगे और उसके बाद इस पूरे मामले की जानकारी खुलकर और अब इस पूरे मामले में क्या कुछ खुलासे होंगे इस पर भी नजर बनी रहेगी

Response dated 02.06.2025 from News 18

This is in reference to complaint dated 15.05.2025, concerning the news segment aired on News18 India and News18 MP /Chhattisgarh pertaining to the encounter by MP Police of a man (“Incident”).

At the outset, the broadcaster denied all allegations made in the complaint and submitted that the content in question was broadcast in full compliance with applicable laws, journalistic ethics, and the guidelines and advisories issued by NBDSA.

News18 India

The impugned news items reported that Farhan, the main accused in the alleged organised sexual assault and blackmail case from TIT College, Bhopal, was shot in the leg by MP Police as he attempted to escape from police custody.

Some of the victims had also reportedly alleged that they were pressured by the accused to convert. Consequently, local protestors/social organisations and political leaders had started using the term 'Love Jihad', demanding strict action in the case. This included an MLA of Bhopal, ABVP, various other people and even a minister of the MP Government.

However, it is pertinent to state that in the reports carried by the channel, at no point did the anchor or the channel affirmatively state or conclude that the incident was a case of 'Love Jihad'. It has been stated categorically and repeatedly that the man who has been shot in the leg by MP police has been 'accused' of love jihad'.

News18 MP/Chhattisgarh

In contrast to the allegation made in the complaint about promoting the term 'love jihad' as a 'matter of fact', the impugned report provided a detailed account of public demonstrations held by social groups that took place in Bhopal following the incident, alleging the issue to be a case of Love Jihad. The news report referred to public participation, placards, slogans, and the reported oath-taking events. The sole intent was to inform viewers about the events unfolding in various parts of the city in relation to the incident. The allegations of 'love jihad' were made by social-political groups like the 'Sakal Hindu Samaj', which was also named in the report on News 18 India. The channel had also used the term 'tathakathit, i.e. so-called (05:28)' in connection to the term 'love jihad', which again distinctively indicates that the channel made no conclusion of this being a case of 'love jihad' by itself.

The impugned broadcast did not give any communal colour or promote any particular belief or opinion, and any assertion of such an intent is preposterous. On the contrary, it was aimed at informing the public about the incident, including the allegations /statements that are being made post the incident. The news items were presented as a news report in which the incident, statements, protests and allegations made were presented, without any endorsement or insinuation from its end. The channel had maintained strict editorial neutrality throughout its coverage.

The channel/anchor's narration was restricted to relaying factual events. In view of the above, the complaint is misconceived and devoid of merit.

Response dated 20.06.2025 from Zee News

In the complaint various false, misleading, and frivolous allegations have been raised regarding the content of its news programme published on 03.05.2025. It has been alleged that its coverage of the incident involving the alleged organised sexual assault of students from TIT College, Bhopal, in relation to the recent development involving protests and subsequent event wherein one of the main accused, while being taken for evidence collection, allegedly attempted to abscond but was lawfully

apprehended and the associated use of the term “Love Jihad” in this context constituted a violation of the NBDSA guidelines. It is further alleged that its reportage aimed to promote beliefs, opinions, and desires directed against a particular community, thereby imparting a communal colour to the reporting.

At the outset, the broadcaster denied each and every allegation, averment, and insinuation made in the complaint, as being entirely false, frivolous, unfounded, and misleading. In response to the specific allegations raised in the complaint, it submitted as follows:

The complainant appears unduly agitated by the use of the term “Love Jihad” and fails to appreciate the context and the compelling necessity to report the said term as it has emerged organically from public discourse and political debate. The news coverage pertained to a ghastly criminal episode involving a gang that systematically lured, raped, and blackmailed young college-going women. The main accused in this case, Farhan, was lawfully apprehended and sustained injuries while attempting to abscond. The brutal nature of these crimes had justifiably shaken the conscience of society at large and triggered widespread protests. It is this very context that underpins the reportage, including the use of the phrase “Love Jihad.”

In this case, the term “Love Jihad” has been repeatedly invoked, not only by protestors on the streets holding banners but also by elected representatives, including Cabinet Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assemblies of Madhya Pradesh and other states. To suggest that the media house should refrain from reporting on this widely used terminology would deny the public access to the reality of ongoing political and social discourse.

The media’s role as the fourth pillar of democracy, enshrined under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India, is to report matters of public interest in an accurate, balanced, and timely manner. Any attempt to curtail reportage on the grounds of political sensitivity must be viewed with suspicion and disfavor.

The Hon’ble NBDSA in Order No. 178 (2024), dated 28.02.2024, had cautioned that the term “Love Jihad” should be used with due circumspection. It had fully complied with this directive by using the term strictly in the context of incidents and protests where it was organically deployed by the affected public and government functionaries. The complainant ignores the crucial distinction between reckless, defamatory usage and factual reportage of the term as it appears in the public domain.

Public interest demands candid discussion of the modus operandi, intent, and social impact of criminal enterprises, including those that exploit personal relationships to

commit sexual violence. The complainant's effort to stifle reportage of the term "Love Jihad" which has become a widely accepted shorthand to denote a pattern of criminal conduct targeting women through matrimonial or romantic deception amounts to an attempt to obfuscate the heinous nature of these acts. This would tantamount to enabling the continued victimization of innocent women and suppressing the social outrage necessary for effective enforcement of law and policy reforms.

The complainant's demand for an absolute prohibition on the use of the term "Love Jihad," without regard to context or factual background, is impermissible in law. Such a demand ignores the settled principles that freedom of expression and reportage cannot be curtailed merely because a term is uncomfortable or politically sensitive. The law demands a nuanced approach that balances rights and responsibilities; it does not countenance arbitrary censorship.

The complainant's grievance arises not from any substantive wrong in the reportage but from a superficial reaction to the word "Jihad," which is a loaded term and often evokes emotional responses. However, it is imperative that the media is not gagged or browbeaten by such misplaced sensitivities. The courts have consistently held that mere discomfort or offence cannot override constitutional freedoms. The reportage was anchored in the reality of public protest and official statements, thereby ensuring that the viewers were fully apprised of the social milieu and the exigency of the issue.

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, therefore the complaint ought to be dismissed at the outset.

Complaint dated 26.06.2025 to NBDSA

The complainant stated that he was escalating the complaint, as he had not received response from the broadcasters and the response received from News18 and Zee News were not satisfactory. The broadcasters in their replies had sought to cover up the fact that the issue was only considered to be worthy of reporting once it was raised as an issue of love jihad, and not before when it was primarily framed as a gang rape case.

Application dated 10.07.2025 seeking condonation of delay

The complainant stated that the 12-day delay was due to his having extremely limited internet access for approximately two weeks following the expiration of the limitation period within which the broadcasters were required to respond. These circumstances were beyond his control and prevented him from escalating the complaint within the stipulated time frame.

Furthermore, the broadcasts in question promote yet another unverified, Jihad-related conspiracy theory, an issue that has been repeatedly addressed and reprimanded by both NBDSA and the Hon'ble Supreme Court.

In light of the above and given that the delay was caused by unavoidable circumstances, the complainant requested that the delay in escalating the complaint be kindly condoned.

Response dated 22.07.2025 ABP to the Application seeking condonation of delay

1. The complainant, admittedly, had filed the complaint dated 26.06.2025 before the NBDSA with a delay of 12 days beyond the limitation period prescribed under Regulation 9.1 of the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations ("Regulations"). It is evident that under the Regulations, the Authority is permitted to condone the delay only if it is satisfied that the complainant acted diligently or that the delay was caused by reasons not attributable to the complainant, or there exists a sufficient cause. Therefore, the burden of establishing the conditions lies entirely with the complainant and must be demonstrated through credible and cogent evidence.
2. The complainant claims that the 12-day delay was caused by "*extreme limited access to the internet*" for approximately two weeks following the expiry of the limitation period. Such an assertion is vague and wholly unsubstantiated. The complainant has failed to provide any evidence, such as travel records, medical documentation or official communication, substantiating the impediment or any contemporaneous communication or attempt to escalate the matter once access was restored. Such an explanation provided by the complainant remains a mere unverified assertion and falls significantly short of establishing sufficient cause or that the complainant acted with requisite diligence.
3. Even assuming some temporary difficulty in accessing the internet, no steps appear to have been taken by the complainant to communicate with the Authority by alternative means or to express an intent to escalate once the limitation period expired. Such inaction evidences a lack of diligence, and the delay appears to be the result of omission on the part of the complainant rather than any circumstances beyond his control.
4. In view of the foregoing, the broadcaster requested that the Authority dismiss the complainant's application for condonation of delay as being without merit and not supported by sufficient cause and further hold that the complaint is not maintainable, being barred by limitation under Regulation 9.1 of the Regulations.

Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 14.10.2025

NBDSA decided to condone the delay in filing the complaint and proceeded to consider the complaint on the merits. After considering the complaint, the response received from broadcasters, News18 and Zee News, and viewing the footage of the broadcasts, 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

Broadcasters

NDTV

1. Mr. Nikhil Guliani, Legal

ABP

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

Zee News

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

News18

1. Mr. Brajesh Kumar Singh, Group Editor - Integration & Convergence, Editorial & Production
2. Mr. Apurv Narula, Principal Counsel Legal

Submissions of the Complainant

The complainant submitted that the accused in this case were arrested on April 27, and the impugned broadcasts were aired between April 27 and May 2. This incident was initially reported objectively by NDTV as primarily a case of gang rape, blackmail, and, in some cases, religious conversion. In this regard, the complainant cited one of the broadcasts aired on NDTV, which included a statement from the DCP. However, after the Sakal Hindu Samaj rally on 2.05.2025, the complainant stated that all channels started reporting this incident as a case of love jihad.

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After the rally, there was a clear editorial shift in the reporting of the incident. The broadcasters, including NDTV, started claiming that only Hindu girls were being targeted, a claim that was not made prior to the rally.

In none of the broadcasts impugned in the complaint were any questions or concerns raised about women's safety. Instead, the broadcasts only provided a platform to those who were claiming love jihad. The Sakal Hindu Samaj had previously been reprimanded by the Hon'ble Supreme Court for its 2023 rally, during which they had explicitly called for a complete economic boycott of Muslims, presenting it as a solution for "love jihad" and "land jihad".

The complainant submitted that his grievance regarding the impugned broadcasts was of a similar nature. In the impugned broadcasts, there was extensive coverage of the protest organised by the Sakal Hindu Samaj and the protesters; no perspective was presented from women's rights activists. He submitted that the justification advanced by the broadcasters for using the term "love jihad" while reporting the incident was that it had been used at the Sakal Hindu Samaj rally. Further, the tickers repeatedly paired & quoted love jihad with the accused, regardless of the spoken content, and provided no indication that these were third-party characterisations.

Submissions on behalf of the broadcasters

NDTV

The broadcaster submitted that the usage of the term "jihad" was, per se, not illegal. In the broadcast, the representatives' statements were aired. No endorsement or approval was expressed by the broadcaster in the impugned broadcast, which was based on the allegations made in the FIR.

News18India

The broadcaster submitted that the complainant, in his submissions, had referred to the DCP's statement; in this regard, it stated that, during an ongoing investigation, no police officer would reach a definite conclusion. As far as the victims in this case are concerned, it stated that while their identities cannot be revealed, however, it was found during the investigation that all victims belonged to the Hindu community. During the broadcasts, developments were reported as they unfolded. Further, other perspectives were also presented during the reporting of the incident in other broadcasts. Its reporting was based on statements made by political leaders, including Mr. Vishwas Sarang, a Minister in the Madhya Pradesh government. Further, it referred to one of FIR in the incident, where one of the victims in the complaint said that Farhan had told her that, "*if you tell this to anyone I will tell everything to your family*", "*that if you marry me, you will have to become a Muslim, wear a veil and adopt my religion*" and "*that he was forcing her*". From the contents of the FIR, it was clear that this was an incident of forceful conversion.

Zee News

On behalf of the broadcaster, it was submitted that, insofar as the victims were concerned, as per the instructions received, all the victims were Hindu girls; however, considering the nature of the crime alleged, it is possible that their identities were not disclosed even in the FIR.

In the complaint, two telecasts aired on Zee News, lasting 2 minutes 16 seconds and 2 minutes 28 seconds, have been impugned. These broadcasts primarily focused on Mr. Farhan, who, upon his arrest, attempted to flee police custody under the pretext of going to the washroom and was shot by the police and consequently injured. Regarding "love jihad," it submitted that the term was mentioned during a broadcast at the 1:30 timestamp, in the context of footage showing a protest, where demonstrators were holding banners with the slogan "Stop Love Jihad."

In rejoinder, the complainant submitted that during the impugned broadcasts on Zee News, the following tickers were aired: "love jihad raaz kholega raaz," and "ghayal Farhan, love jihad ka khulega raaz,". While footage of the Sakal Hindu Samaj rally was shown, no other perspective was presented. In one of the telecasts, an interview with a politician was aired, who said that such people do not have the right to live. This statement was accompanied by the ticker "love jihad, Yogi model se prahar", which appeared to encourage encounters and platformed views that are extremist in nature.

ABP

On behalf of the broadcaster, it was submitted that the impugned coverage was part of routine news reportage concerning a serious criminal case and the ensuing public protests held in various parts of Bhopal. The coverage was based on developments emerging from FIRs, police investigations, and on-ground demonstrations organised by certain l groups. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, it had taken a cautious approach in its reporting.

In its coverage of the incident, it aired interviews with members of the Sakal Hindu Samaj. The allegations that its broadcast was biased, used the term "love jihad," or promoted the term were totally baseless. The references to the expression "love jihad" in the coverage were in the context of reporting slogans, allegations, and demands raised by protestors and public representatives during demonstrations. The channel did not present the said expression as a concluded finding or judicial determination, but merely reported the terminology being used in public discourse surrounding the incident.

Further, the reporter had clearly specified that it was an allegation made by people who were part of the protest. The coverage did not attribute motive, conspiracy or

criminal intent to any community. The narration was only descriptive of the events as they unfolded and did not promote or endorse any particular belief, opinion or desire of any interest group whatsoever. The police statements covered by the channel clearly indicated that an investigation was underway and that facts were being verified. This demonstrated due caution and adherence to responsible reporting standards in sensitive criminal matters.

In rejoinder, the complainant stated that the reporter's commentary was not confined to the case, but it was being insinuated that there was a conspiracy of "love jihad". In all the impugned broadcasts, there was no mention of statistics related to crimes against women. Additionally, no other perspectives were projected. The tone of the broadcasts suggested that the most alarming aspect of the situation was not the harm done to the women but rather the jihadi mindset. Further, the charges in the FIR also pertained only to "religious conversion".

Decision

NBDSA considered the complaint, the response from News18 and Zee News, and the footage of the broadcasts, as well as the submissions made by the parties during the hearing.

NBDSA noted that the impugned broadcasts emanated from an incident involving the alleged sexual assault of students from the Bhopal TTT College. It is the allegation of the complainant that the broadcasters were initially reporting the incident in an objective manner, as an incident involving gang rape. However, after the rally held by a right-wing group, the impugned broadcasts characterised the incident as "love jihad".

NBDSA observed that a review of the contents of the FIR supplied by the broadcasters revealed that the projection of the incident as "love jihad" was not factual. In fact, such characterisation appeared to have been influenced by the rallies in Bhopal. NBDSA was of the view that had the broadcasters explicitly attributed the framing of this incident as love jihad in its reporting to the statements made by the certain politicians or political group, no objection could have been raised. However, in the impugned broadcasts, this allegation was presented in a matter-of-fact manner, and no attribution was made to any entity or group, thereby giving a communal colour to the incident. Not only does it violate the principles of accuracy, but it also violates the principles of Racial and Religious Harmony, under which broadcasters are cautioned against religious stereotyping.

It is relevant to reiterate that had the broadcasters reported that the accused were alleged to have committed love jihad by certain politician or political group, no violation could be made out. However, by failing to attribute the allegation, the

broadcasters have amplified an allegation as a fact, which should have been strictly avoided.

In view of the above, NBDSA decided to admonish the broadcasters and advised them to be careful to avoid such violations in future broadcasts.

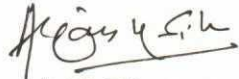
NBDSA further directed the broadcasters to remove the footage of the impugned broadcasts, if still available from the website of the channels (s), YouTube, and remove all hyperlinks, including access, which should be confirmed to NBDSA in writing within 7 days of the Order.

NBDSA decided to close the complaint with the above 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