

**News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority**

**Order No. 228 (2026)**  
**Complainant: Mr. Shivansh Verma**  
**Channel: India TV**  
**Programme: Aaj Ki Baat**  
**Date of Broadcast: 20.12.2025**

Since the complainant was not satisfied with the response of the broadcaster, on 11.01.2026, the complaint was escalated to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA.

**Complaint dated 22.12.2025**

In the impugned broadcast, a scientifically false claim that the Aravalli hills "cause" Delhi's pollution was aired. This was not just a journalistic error; rather, it was misinformation that could endanger the lives of 30 million citizens.

Violation of Law

Under Section 353 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the circulation of false reports that incite public alarm or mischief is a criminal offence. By falsely labelling a protected mountain range Delhi's primary shield against desertification as a "pollution trap", the broadcaster created a false justification for the ecological stripping of these hills.

Conflict of Interest & Misleading Narrative

The impugned broadcast coincides with the sensitive 10-meter rule and appears to build public consent for the mining lobby to demolish Aravalli. This directly violates Section 4 (Objectivity) by actively promoting a narrative that could lead to a national health catastrophe.

The Geography Fallacy

Science proves that the Aravallis block the Thar desert. The anchor's claim that they "trap" air is a deliberate reversal of the "Barometric Barrier" principle. If this misinformation leads to policy changes or reduced public resistance to mining, the broadcaster would be liable for the resulting irreversible respiratory crisis and total groundwater depletion in the NCR.

**Response dated 29.12.2025 from broadcaster**

1. The broadcaster acknowledged the receipt of the email in respect of the segment aired on Aaj Ki Baat on 20.12.2025. The broadcaster stated that while it respects the right of viewers to express their opinions and share feedback, it takes strong exception to the highly offensive, rude, and defamatory language used in the

complaint. The allegations of “misinformation” and “criminal offences” are not only factually incorrect but also legally untenable.

2. It is pertinent to clarify that the impugned news segment was grounded in a range of established scientific and geographical theories concerning the ecological crisis affecting the National Capital Region (NCR). As a seasoned journalist with decades of professional experience, the anchor articulated one such prevailing theory as part of a broader, research-based discussion.
3. Presenting and examining multiple theories lies at the very core of investigative journalism. Accordingly, portraying the articulation of a well-researched theory as “personal malice” reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of both the intent and the professional role of a news anchor.
4. The complainant’s attempt to link a scientific and geographical discussion to the “mining lobby” is a baseless and malicious attack on the reputation of the broadcaster and the anchor. The complainant has failed to provide any evidence to support his claim of a “conflict of interest.” Such reckless aspersions constitute civil and criminal defamation.
5. In the impugned broadcast, the reporting on the environmental crisis in Delhi-NCR was driven solely by public interest and rigorous research. Upon thorough review of the editorial research and the transcript of the broadcast, it categorically refutes the claim that the impugned report was scientifically false or motivated by external interests.
6. The report was not a product of conjecture but was based on extensive research and academic papers from reputed national and international institutions. The complainant has labelled established scientific inquiry as “fraudulent.” Therefore, it is suggested that the complainant should refer to the following peer-reviewed research and expert commentary upon which its report was founded:
  - The news segment relied on detailed papers from the University of Reading, which analyse the “ventilation challenges” and geographical “locking” of pollutants in the NCR.
  - Interview with Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati, Head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in India, a global authority on ecological security.
7. Similar findings have been published by various newspapers, websites, and News channels, noting how Delhi’s unique geography—situated between the



12. It is reiterated that the broadcast was an effort to inform the public about the multifaceted nature of an environmental catastrophe, and there was no intent to facilitate the alleged “ecological stripping” of the Aravallis.

**Complaint dated 11.01.2026 to NBDSA**

The broadcaster, in its response dated 29.12.2025, chose not to answer the scientific questions raised in the complaint.

1. The response provided by the broadcaster on 29.12.2025 is factually bankrupt. It relies on “Credential Hijacking” citing world-class institutions without providing a single verifiable source to justify a narrative that brands the Aravalli Range as a public hazard. This appeal seeks to prevent the weaponization of pseudo-science to facilitate ecological destruction.
2. In its response, the broadcaster has relied on the research from the University of Reading; however, it has failed to provide a DOI or a title. Further, these studies typically refer to urban canyons (buildings), not geological mountain ranges. Therefore, there was a failure to disclose reliable or cross-checked sources, violating Section 1 of the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards.
3. In respect of the broadcaster’s statement that “Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati (UNEP) validated the 'Pollution Trap' theory”, it is stated that the UNEP’s mandate is the Great Green Wall, i.e., restoring the Aravallis, therefore using his name to justify hill removal is a strategic misquotation. It amounts to a breach of objectivity and manipulation of expert testimony under the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards. Furthermore, the factual errors are not excused by the anchor’s reputation.
4. The broadcaster’s claim that the hills act as a “trap” for pollution is a fundamental inversion of atmospheric physics. According to the principles of Fluid Dynamics and Boundary Layer Meteorology:
  - Mechanical Turbulence: When air hits the uneven terrain of the Aravalli Range, it creates Surface Roughness. This forces the air to break into turbulent “eddies,” which move air vertically. This vertical mixing lifts ground-level pollutants (PM2.5 and PM10) into higher layers of the atmosphere where they are dispersed by faster-moving winds.
  - Laminar Flow: If the Aravallis were removed, as the broadcaster’s narrative suggests, the land would become flat. This creates “Laminar Flow,” where air moves in smooth, horizontal layers. In this scenario, pollution settles heavily at ground level because there are no topographical obstructions to force vertical dispersion.

- The Thermal Inversion Reality: The “trapping” of pollution in Delhi is caused by Atmospheric Thermal Inversion a meteorological condition where a layer of warm air sits above cold air. This is a seasonal sky-level event and is not caused by the 200–300 meters elevation of the Aravalli hills.
  - Laminar Flow Subversion: Natural topography creates Mechanical Turbulence (Surface Roughness), which lifts pollutants. Removing hills creates “Laminar Flow,” allowing desert dust to settle permanently.
  - Thermal Inversion Deception: Blaming permanent landforms for seasonal Atmospheric Inversion is a “False Causality” error.
  - Heat Sink Erasure: The Aravallis are a “Heat Sink.” Their removal intensifies the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect.
  - The “Bowl” Fallacy: Delhi is an open slope. The real “trap” is the Himalayas and cold air masses, not a 300m ridge.
  - Moisture Sequestration: Forested hills settle dust through natural moisture; the broadcaster promotes a drier, dustier NCR.
5. There was linguistic weaponisation, as a Natural Asset was rebranded as a “Natural Hazard.” Additionally, a unilateral narrative was presented with the total exclusion of environmentalists.
6. The broadcaster failed to perform its duty to act as a social trustee. There was an omission of the Green Wall, which amounted to a deliberate ignorance for the national reforestation mandate. In the broadcast, a fringe theory was presented as an absolute geographic truth. Further, erasing the Aravallis would be an invitation for the Thar Desert to reclaim Delhi.

**Further email dated 14.01.2026 from Complainant**

This is a formal follow-up to the appeal filed on 11.01.2026. In the interest of professional and objective adjudication, the complainant stated that he wishes to place the following clarifications on the record to ensure the focus remains on the core issues of journalistic ethics and scientific accuracy:

Upon reviewing the broadcaster’s response, the complainant stated that he wished to refine the language of his complaint. The ecological concerns remain grave, and his intent was to assist the Authority in focusing strictly on Section 4 (Objectivity) of the NBDSA Code of Ethics and the factual inaccuracy of the broadcast, rather than on personal or institutional characterisation.

The assertions regarding the "pollution trap" were based on the Hon'ble Supreme Court's recognition of the Aravallis as a "Protective Shield" against desertification and the meteorological principle of Mechanical Turbulence, which contradicts the Broadcaster's "Bowl Theory."

He requested that NBDSA judge the complaint based on the broadcaster's duty to provide Neutrality and Accuracy. The omission of scientific counter-views during the segment constitutes a breach of the broadcaster's duty to the public.

### **Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 11.02.2026**

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

On being served with the notices, the following persons were present at the hearing on 01.05.2026:

#### **Complainant**

1. Mr. Shivansh Verma

#### **Broadcaster**

1. Ms. Anita Sharma, Managing Editor, News Operations
2. Mr. Kunal Vats, Legal Counsel

#### **Submissions of the Complainant**

The complainant submitted that the question before the Authority is not as to which atmospheric theory is correct, but rather the question is whether the broadcaster can, during a declared public emergency, when the AQI exceeds 1000, present an absolute factual claim that the crisis is caused by geography and cannot be solved, particularly when such a claim is being made without any verifiable sources.

The claim made in the broadcast, that "*Geographical location is the main reason. Delhi is a big city and its shape is like a bowl, surrounded by the Aravalli hills on three sides. As a result, polluted air gets trapped and cannot disperse easily. Therefore, the problem of pollution in Delhi cannot be solved in one year or in any particular season*" was not factual and scientifically false. This amounted to a declarative assertion being made in a news programme, which cannot be afforded the same latitude as an opinion or commentary.

While the broadcaster had in its submissions stated that the broadcast was balanced, as multiple causes for pollution were cited in the impugned broadcast, the anchor's own words, wherein he claimed that "*Geographical location is the main reason*" directly contradict the broadcaster's submission.

The complainant stated that he had sought expert assessment from Dr Manoj Kumar, Air Quality Analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), a globally recognised clean air research organisation, who had responded directly to the specific claims at issue by stating that *"The description of Delhi as a 'sealed bowl' formed by the Aravalli hills is not scientifically correct. The Aravalli range does not form a continuous or sufficiently elevated barrier to trap air... Saying that pollution 'cannot be solved' due to geography gives a misleading picture and distracts from practical solutions."*

This expert assessment is also corroborated by five peer-reviewed, publicly accessible studies, including WII 2017 Report, which documented 12 gaps in the Aravalli ridge and concluded that a discontinuous range cannot form a "sealed bowl", Guttikunda et al. 2023, which was based on a 32-year Delhi dataset, stated that 30% of particulate matter, particularly PM2.5, can improve from emission controls alone. Guttikunda & Goel 2013 also stated that the mixing heights reach 2,500m in summer and 800m in winter, respectively, the Aravalli's at 200–300m cannot trap what extends far above them. Another report claimed that source emissions and not topography are responsible for the pollution in Delhi. These studies are supported by research during the COVID lockdown, which showed that PM10 fell 49%, PM2.5 fell 39%, and NO2 fell 39% when emissions were controlled; 904 premature deaths were prevented. If geography were the main reason for pollution, the issue would also have persisted during the lockdown and remained unchanged. Additionally, it may be relevant to note that while the topography remains the same year-round, pollution peaks in winter and declines during the monsoon. Furthermore, if the Aravalli were a sealed bowl, pollution levels would remain constant year-round. However, the variation in pollution levels disproves the broadcaster's claim.

In the impugned broadcast, the broadcaster presented a permanent geographical explanation for a demonstrably seasonal phenomenon. Los Angeles, which has similar geography and sits in a basin surrounded by mountains on three sides with frequent atmospheric inversions, was able to substantially reduce its particulate emissions. If the sealed bowl theory were correct, Los Angeles would never be able to reduce its pollution. Similar is the case of Beijing. While geography is the compelling factor, it is not a death sentence.

It reiterated that the broadcaster cited no verified sources, except for a reference to the University of Reading. Further, no title, no author, and no DOI were supplied. Additionally, researchers from the University of Reading itself published a study in March 2025 stating that temperature inversion, not topography are the primary trapping mechanism.

### **Submissions of the Broadcaster**

The broadcaster submitted that the impugned broadcast was aired on 22.12.2025. In the complaint, it was alleged that the broadcaster was supporting the mining lobby, which forms the primary basis of the complainant's grievance. It had addressed this grievance in its response, and subsequently, on 14.01.2026, the complainant withdrew his primary grievance and restricted the complaint to his secondary grievance regarding the theory that was disseminated in the impugned broadcast. The modified complaint appears to be an afterthought.

Further, in the impugned broadcast, it reported a theory advanced by experts, and had disclosed its sources in the reply and written submissions. It reiterated that the report was not a conjecture but based on research, including academic research from reputed national and international institutions like the University of Reading.

The news segment relied inter alia on detailed papers from the University of Reading, that analyse the “ventilation challenges” and geographical “locking” of pollutants in the NCR and on the interview with Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati, Head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in India, a global authority on ecological security. It appears that through the complaint, the complainant is seeking a declaration that the research relied upon by the broadcaster is incorrect, and that the research relied upon by the complainant is correct, which may not be within the remit of the Authority.

At the beginning of the broadcast, it had stated that the causes of pollution in Delhi, inter alia, include vehicle emissions, coal burning, and dust in the air. It is only after citing other reasons in the broadcast that the broadcaster then reported on the other factors, which the complainant is aggrieved with. Therefore, from a perusal of the broadcast, it is evident that it did not attribute Delhi's pollution to a single factor; rather, it attributed multiple factors to the pollution in the Delhi NCR, including vehicular emissions.

Further, in the broadcast, it was clarified that the problem of pollution cannot be solved overnight; rather, it requires collective effort to clear the pollution in the region. Additionally, the broadcaster alone had not presented this theory; it was also reported by other newspapers and digital news platforms.

In rejoinder, the complainant submitted that his grievance was confined only to the violation of the Code of Ethics & Broadcasting Standards in the impugned broadcasts. Further, the study by the University of Reading concerned buildings and urban canyons, not mountains. In any event, the University of Reading contradicts its own claims. The complainant stated that, in December 2023, the broadcaster had attributed Delhi's air pollution solely to policy failures, citing government inaction,

governance failures, and mismanagement, and had demanded solutions and rightfully sought accountability. However, in the impugned broadcast, there was a clear shift. Furthermore, on 23.12.2025, the day after the impugned broadcast, the Union Environmental Minister Bhupender Yadav, himself attributed pollution in Delhi to emissions and not to geography.

### **Decision**

NBDSA considered the complaint, the response of the broadcaster, reviewed the footage of the impugned broadcast and the submissions advanced by the parties during the hearing.

NBDSA noted that the impugned broadcast was a news report on pollution in the Delhi-NCR region. The complainant's grievance with the impugned broadcast concerns the claim made regarding geography, particularly the Aravalli hills, which were allegedly attributed in the broadcast as the main cause of Delhi's Pollution. As per the complainant, this claim was not only factually inaccurate but amounted to misinformation.

Before going into the merits of the complaint, NBDSA noted that, as an independent self-regulatory body, its remit under the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Regulations is confined only to adjudicating the broadcaster's compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Having observed the above, NBDSA noted that there may be many causes that contribute to the pollution in Delhi-NCR. Upon perusal of the footage of the impugned broadcast, NBDSA found that the broadcaster had explicitly mentioned multiple causes of pollution in Delhi-NCR, including vehicular emissions, construction, and residue from the burning of crops. While mentioning these various causes, the broadcaster also addressed how Delhi's unique topography, situated between the Himalayas and the Aravalli's, creates a sealed-bowl effect during winters, which is also a factor behind pollution in Delhi.

NBDSA was of the view that there may be debate as to whether the geography of Delhi, is a significant cause or not of pollution. However, it noted that the broadcaster had submitted that there is material which indicates that this is one of the reasons for pollution. Therefore, merely because the complainant feels that this is not the cause for pollution in Delhi, is no ground to state that broadcast is spreading misinformation.

NBDSA is not supposed to adjudicate on whether the topography of Delhi, surrounded by the Himalayas and Aravalli, causes pollution, once it is found that there is material indicating it to be a possible cause and one of the causes of pollution


in Delhi. Since in the impugned broadcast, apart from the above reasons, other reasons for pollution have also been reported, NBDA found no violation of Code of Conduct.

NBDSA accordingly 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: 28-05-2026**