

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority

Order No. 229 (2026)

Complainant: Wego Search Technologies Private Ltd

Channel: India Today

Programme:

1. News article titled "Youtuber Jyoti Malhotra Pakistan Spy UAE Travel Firm Wego Link" published on 22.05.2025
2. News article titled "Haryana Youtuber Jyoti Malhotra Trips Sponsored UAE Pak - Link Firm Wego" published on 22.05.2025
3. Broadcast titled "Pak authorised UAE firm's sponsorship of Jyoti Malhotra's vlogs raises suspicions" aired on 22.05.2025

Since no response was received from the broadcaster, the matter was escalated to the second level of redressal, i.e., NBDSA, on 02.07.2025.

Cease and Desist Notice dated 10.06.2025 issued on behalf of Wego Search Technologies Pvt. Ltd.

Under instructions from and on behalf of our client, Wego Search Technologies Pvt. Ltd. ("our client" / "Wego") having its registered office at Suraksha Properties, IndiQube Crystal, Municipal No. 73, Church Street, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India - 560001, we hereby serve upon you, the noticees, the following legal notice:

1. That our client is a global online travel marketplace. Wego simplifies travel planning by aggregating and comparing deals on flights, hotels, trains, and other travel products from hundreds of websites. This allows users to easily search, compare, find, and book the best travel options across various regions, including South-East Asia and the Indian subcontinent.
2. That in line with standard travel industry practices and their lawful business objectives, our client 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 reports/articles published by you 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 articles, rather than reporting on the status/progress of investigation, you the noticees, have wilfully, without any factual basis-published and disseminated false, misleading, and unverified content across your platforms, wrongfully insinuating our client's complicity or association in the alleged illegal activities carried out by Ms. Malhotra. These defamatory publications lack any

credible evidence, factual basis, or lawful justification, thereby causing irreparable harm to our client's reputation, business standing, and goodwill.

4. This notice is necessitated by the publication and digital dissemination by you the noticees, of the following defamatory materials:
 - i. News article titled "Youtuber Jyoti Malhotra Pakistan Spy UAE Travel Firm Wego Link" dated 22 May 2025 and hosted at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/youtuber-jyoti-malhotra-pakistan-spy-uae-travel-firm-wego-link-2728752-2025-05-22>;
 - ii. Article published on 22 May 2025 _titled "Haryana Youtuber Jyoti Malhotra Trips Sponsored UAE Pak · Link Firm Wego" available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/st01y/haryana-yotituber-jyoti-malhotra-trips-sponsored-uae-pak-link-firm-webo-azerbaijan-travel-tourism-2728891-2025-05-22>
 - iii. Video published on your official YouTube channel and website titled "Pak authorised UAE firm's sponsorship of Jyoti Malhotra's vlogs raises suspicions" dated 22 May 2025 available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/video/pak-authorised-uae-firms-sponsorship-of-jyoti-malhotras-vlogs-raises-suspicions-2728740-2025-05-22>; and
5. These publications, jointly and severally, carry baseless, false, malicious, and gravely defamatory imputations against our client 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 our client across its operational territories in India and Southeast Asia. It is apparent that your 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 your reportage is patently false. This is manifestly demonstrated by your own admission in the defamatory articles, wherein you state: "*While there is no evidence linking Wego to funding Pakistan, its operation in the country raised flags in this case.*" The aforesaid imputation, despite acknowledging the absence of any evidence, has unjustly cast aspersions upon our client and has resulted in severe and unwarranted damage to their commercial and reputational standing.
6. Our client states that all these alleged contentions made by you against our client in the articles published by you are absolutely baseless, false, defamatory and frivolous in nature. That, the articles/ publications are available/accessible to public at large and such false statements made against our client have caused and are continuing to cause irreparable loss and damage to the reputation and goodwill of our client. Our

client states that the allegations made in respect of our client in the publications are ex-facie defamatory and derogatory in nature.

7. 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. Our client had engaged Ms. Malhotra, 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, you have deliberately, intentionally and without any legal or factual basis, made patently false insinuations against our client, linking it to the unlawful activities carried out 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.
8. It is of grave concern that the publications released by you fail to undertake even the most basic level of journalistic diligence fact verification or lawful editorial scrutiny before publishing statements that have severely damaged our client's reputation. Your publications knowingly portray Wego's engagement with the said influencer in a scandalous and calumnious manner, recklessly inferring criminal nexus where none exists, and propagate 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.
9. The editor as well as the authors of the articles failed to give our client an informed opportunity to respond to the details of the allegations made in the article. You, the noticees, have taken no steps whatsoever to verify the accuracy of the information that came into your possession, including but not limited to verifying it with our client. Had you done so it would have been possible to indicate that your information was false and unreliable and would have obviated the necessity of issuing the instant Notice.
10. That reputation and goodwill is an inseparable element of a company and plays an extremely critical role in its business. Further, as a news publishing agency, you are under the duty to conduct prior due diligence and confirm the truth of the statements made by you. By publishing the articles containing false statements and derogatory/defamatory remarks about our client, you, the Noticees have caused severe loss of reputation and goodwill to our client and have defamed our client. It is pertinent to note that the right to freedom of speech and expression cannot be used as an excuse for you to defame our client.

11. The false allegations and imputations made against our client are grave and serious in nature and despite the knowledge that such imputation will harm/damage its reputation you have chosen to go ahead with the publications. The conduct of your organisation in publishing falsified information which could readily have been debunked by reaching out to our client, has made your organization liable for damages.
12. Your 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.
13. The said defamatory statements have not only harmed Wego's reputation and standing but have caused substantial damage in the form of lost contracts, brand erosion, stakeholder disaffection, and irreversible market distrust. By portraying Wego in an overtly negative light and juxtaposing it with insinuations of partaking in espionage, your publications have 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, we hereby call upon you, jointly and severally, to
 - (a) Forthwith take down and permanently remove all offending articles, videos including those mentioned in para 4 above, posts and content referring to Wego or suggesting any link between Wego and the allegations against Ms. Jyoti Malhotra from all your digital platforms, including but not limited to your website, YouTube channel, and social media pages;
 - (b) Issue a clear and unqualified public retraction and written apology prominently published on your 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 our client and the allegations concerning the said influencer;
 - (d) Tender an unconditional apology to our client;

- (e) Provide to us in writing within seventy-two (72) hours of receipt of this notice a confirmation of your compliance with the foregoing demands.
14. Please be advised that failure to comply with the directions set forth in Para 13 (a) to (e) shall compel our client to initiate appropriate civil and criminal proceedings against you before competent judicial forum, without any further notice and solely at your cost, consequences, and peril.
15. We place you on strict notice that any delay, non-cooperation, or continued breach shall constitute aggravated misconduct, entitling our client to seek urgent injunctive and penal relief before the appropriate judicial forum. Should you fail to comply with the foregoing within the stipulated period, you shall be liable to compensate our client for all losses incurred, account for and remit all profits wrongfully derived, and pay applicable statutory damages. Our client expressly reserves the right to pursue full monetary relief, including compensatory damages, statutory damages, account of profits, costs, pendente lite and future interest on all sums found due to be.
16. This notice is issued without prejudice to any other rights, remedies, or reliefs available to Wego under law, equity, or contract, all of which are hereby specifically and unequivocally reserved. Please note that we have preferred to address this notice before initiating any legal proceedings in the hope that you adhere to the contents of this notice and that you cease and desist forthwith from any further commission and omission for which you have been duly cautioned above. If you do not provide a satisfactory response and full compliance within seventy-two (72) hours of receipt of this notice, we will proceed against you with no further notice. We trust you will treat this matter with utmost seriousness to avoid litigation and further liability.

Complaint dated 02.07.2025 to NBDSA

I am writing on behalf of Wego Search Technologies Pvt. Ltd., a global online travel marketplace, to escalate the breach of the Code of Ethics by the broadcaster. A complaint in the form of a cease and desist notice ("notice") was issued to the broadcaster on 10.06.2025, for making baseless, false and defamatory imputations in its articles and video published on 22.05.2025, asking them to forthwith take down all offending articles and videos. However, despite the expiry of 15 days from the date of communication of the notice, no response has been received from them to date. We are therefore compelled to bring this to your kind attention.

Reasons for escalating the complaint to NBDSA:

1. The Broadcaster/Publisher has not responded to the grievance raised by the Complainant.
2. The news articles published online remain available for free access on the Broadcaster/Publisher's website despite the complainant flagging the factual inaccuracy in the content

The complaint alleged infringement of Impartiality and objectivity in reporting under Section 2, Category 1 of the Code of Ethics.

Reply dated 15.07.2025 from the Broadcaster to the Cease and Desist Notice

Our Client, T.V. Today Network Limited (hereinafter referred to as “our Client” or “TV Today”), acknowledges receipt of your Legal Notice dated 10.06.2025, issued on behalf of your Client, Wego Search Technologies Pvt. Ltd. (“Wego”). We have thoroughly reviewed the contents of your Notice and, under instructions from our Client, provide this detailed response.

At the outset, we unequivocally deny all allegations of defamation, false reporting, malicious intent, or any purported irreparable harm to your Client's reputation, as asserted in your Notice.

Our Client operates with an unwavering commitment to accurate, fair, and responsible reporting on matters of public interest. T.V. Today Network and its journalists have long stood as a beacon of journalistic integrity in Indian media. With a steadfast commitment to delivering accurate, timely, and insightful news, the network has consistently upheld the highest standards of reporting, fostering informed public discourse and holding power to account.

The publications referenced in Paragraph 4 of your Notice relate to a serious matter involving an ongoing police investigation concerning Ms. Jyoti Malhotra under the Official Secrets Act, 1923, and provisions of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. As a responsible media entity, our Client has a fundamental duty to inform the public about such developments, ensuring that all reporting is accurate and placed in proper context.

The reporting in question was undertaken based on verified information and journalistic due diligence, reflecting evolving developments and inputs from credible sources, including law enforcement authorities. Our detailed response to the allegations raised in the Notice is as follows:

Our Client was credibly informed by the Hisar Police, the investigating authority in the matter concerning Ms. Jyoti Malhotra, that Wego and its transactions were subject to verification as part of the ongoing investigation. Our Client's reporting was directly informed by these official inputs. It is essential for the public to be aware when entities are under investigative scrutiny in matters with national security implications—this is a core function of the media, which our Client has responsibly fulfilled.

It is noteworthy that Paragraph 7 of your own Legal Notice expressly confirms your Client's engagement with Ms. Jyoti Malhotra. You state: *"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."* This statement substantiates the factual premise of our Client's reporting regarding Wego's

association with Ms. Malhotra. Our Client merely brought this acknowledged association to public attention in the context of the ongoing investigation a legitimate journalistic function.

The impugned news stories were carefully written to provide context and expressly avoided making definitive accusations or conclusions about your Client's conduct. This is evidenced by the inclusion of the line: *"While there is no evidence linking Wego to funding Pakistan, its operation in the country raised flags in this case."*

This demonstrates that our Client clearly stated that no evidence existed linking Wego to any funding, while accurately reporting that its operations in the region had "raised flags" in the context of the police investigation—a factual, neutral observation rather than an imputation of guilt.

This careful phrasing ensured that the reporting remained fair and did not prejudice the outcome of the investigation. This is responsible journalism—reporting facts surrounding an investigation without sensationalism or exaggeration, contrary to what is alleged in your Notice. Furthermore, any broader comments or narratives about business operations in countries neighbouring Pakistan—if they exist—were not part of the specific reporting in this matter.

Our Client's publications are a legitimate exercise of the freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution, accompanied by a professional duty to report on matters of public concern. While this right is subject to reasonable restrictions, our Client has consistently adhered to ethical journalistic standards. Our Client did not publish any information it knew to be false or with malicious intent. Given the sensitive nature of the investigation, especially under the Official Secrets Act, certain documentation may not be informally disclosed, making official inputs essential—and our Client has relied only on such inputs and reported with due caution.

We also note your decision to escalate this matter to the News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA). We must express disappointment and state that such escalation is unwarranted and premature, especially as our response is now being provided. We reiterate that the allegations made in your cease-and-desist notice are baseless, lacking in substance, and devoid of merit. Our Client has upheld journalistic ethics and accuracy and acted with complete responsibility. We are fully prepared to defend our Client's position before the Authority, if required.

Accordingly, we categorically reject the demands made in Paragraph 13 of your Notice—seeking takedown of content, retraction, apology, and restraint from future reporting—as unwarranted, legally unsustainable, and wholly unacceptable.

Our Client reserves all rights and remedies available under law, including the right to vigorously defend its journalistic integrity and freedom of expression against any baseless

allegations or proceedings. We trust that your Client, upon fair reconsideration of the facts and legal position set forth herein, will withdraw its unsubstantiated allegations and demands.

Application dated 07.07.2025 seeking condonation of delay

Please note that although the broadcast was made for the first time on 22.05.2025, the applicant became aware of the publication around 26.05.2025.

Immediately upon learning about the highly defamatory broadcast, the 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 company's lawyers, and after much deliberation, the course of action was finalised by 1.06.2025. Thereafter, the lawyers spent time drafting the complaint and obtaining comments and clarifications from the 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. Eventually, the company finalised the complaint on 9.06.2025 and issued it through its lawyers on 10.06.2025.

It is stated that the company has 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.

Please note that under Regulation 9.1 Proviso 2, the Authority is empowered to condone any delay in making the complaint to the broadcaster. It is stated that the company 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 the draft and obtaining internal approvals from the senior management of the company.

In view of the above, it is humbly requested that this authority 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 28.07.2025 to the Application seeking condonation of delay

1. At the outset, it is submitted that any request for condonation of delay must be considered on the basis of the framework laid out in the second proviso to Regulation 9.1 of the NBDSA Regulations. Thus, the NBDSA may condone any delay only if the complainant is able to discharge the burden of proving that: (i) he has acted diligently in filing the complaint within the prescribed time period; (ii) the delay in filing the complaint was not a product of the complainant's making and/ or for other sufficient cause; and/ or (iii) he was prevented from filing the complaint for any other reasonable sufficient cause.

2. It is submitted that the applicant has failed to demonstrate any diligence in filing the complaint within a reasonable timeframe and has been negligent in pursuing the complaint. The applicant's reasons hold no ground for condonation of delay, as the reasons stated are insufficient, vague, and generic.
3. The applicant's reasons that routine internal deliberations, which every company/firm/individual undertakes, are inadequate. The applicant cites internal processes such as "reviewing the drafts"; "discussion with lawyer" as reasons for delay. To portray such standard internal deliberations as exceptional circumstances is entirely misplaced. It is well settled that the second proviso to Regulation 9.1 is intended to apply only in genuinely exceptional or unavoidable situations, and not for justifying procedural inertia. None of the reasons cited by the applicant in any way constitutes anything different that requires extension of time.
4. The applicant has stated that the awareness of publication came to their attention and knowledge on 26.05.2025 while the article was published on 22.05.2025. Even assuming this reason is true and taken at face value, the delay in lodging the complaint beyond the stipulated period is unpardonable and indicates a lack of urgency in initiating action, especially for a corporate entity with access to legal counsel and adequate resources.
5. It is to be noted that "*discussion with lawyers and obtaining necessary approvals from the senior management of the company*" is insufficient to meet the threshold of showing "*sufficient cause*", as provided for in the second proviso to Regulation 9.1. It must be borne in mind that "*sufficient cause*" cannot be liberally interpreted if negligence, inaction or lack of bona fides is attributed to the party. The applicant has been unable to establish how collating documents, seeking approvals, and the aid of legal counsel is anything that is beyond what is reasonably expected from a corporate entity.
6. Thus, since the applicant has failed to demonstrate the fulfilment of the pre-conditions ("diligent conduct, and "*sufficient cause*") required under the second proviso to Regulation 9.1 of NBDS Regulations, no relief of condonation of delay can be granted to the applicant. In light of the aforementioned reasons, it is pleaded that the complaint should be dismissed for being time-barred under Regulation 9.1 of the News Broadcasters & Digital Standards Regulations.

Decision of NBDA at its meeting held on 14.10.2025

NBDSA considered the matter, the application seeking condonation of delay and response thereof the broadcaster and after considering the impugned content, decided to call the parties for a hearing.

On being served with Notices, the following were present during the hearing on 18.11.2025:

Wego Search Technologies Pvt Ltd. represented by:

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

Broadcaster

1. Ms. Vrinda Bhandari, Advocate
2. Ms. Sreya Chatterjee, Associate Editor
3. Ms. Dipali Rai, Legal Counsel

Submissions of the Parties:**A. Condonation of Delay****Submissions of Wego**

On behalf of Wego, it was submitted that the broadcast/publication was first made on 22.05.2025; it became aware of the publication around 26.05.2025. Immediately upon learning of the highly defamatory broadcast/publication, it approached its lawyers for legal advice on the remedies available to it; it finalised its course of action by 01.06.2025 and issued the legal notice. The Hon'ble Delhi High Court in *Government of NCT of Delhi v R.S Sharma Contractors Pvt. Ltd.*, had observed that it is "equally essential that justice is not sacrificed at the altar of hyper-technicalities. To deny condonation in circumstances where the delay is fully explained and bona fide would result in a disproportionate prejudice to the State, effectively barring it from exercising its statutory right to appellate scrutiny. It is well-settled that justice must be advanced on the merits of a case rather than defeated by technical or procedural lapses, particularly when such lapses are attributable to institutional processes beyond the control of the Appellant." In this case, the delay was attributable to organisational processes and logistical issues and was neither gross nor inordinate. In view of the above, it was requested that NBDSA may in the interest of justice and kindly condone the delay of four days.

Submissions of the broadcaster

The broadcaster submitted that Wego has filed the escalation request prematurely and on false grounds by stating that no reply was received. The broadcaster sent a detailed reply to the Legal Notice dated 10.06.2025 on 15.07.2025. Thereafter, Wego made no additional submissions. In any event, it submitted that any request for condonation of delay must be considered on the basis of the framework laid out in the second proviso to Regulation 9.1 of the NBDSA Regulations. Routine internal deliberations that every company/ firm/individual undertakes are inadequate as reasons for delay. These are standard procedures that every decently managed entity undertakes in the ordinary course of business. To portray such standard internal deliberations as exceptional circumstances is entirely misplaced. Wego has failed to demonstrate diligence in filing the complaint within a reasonable timeframe and has been negligent in pursuing it. The reasons do not warrant condonation of delay, as they are insufficient, vague, and generic and do not fulfil the preconditions ("diligent conduct" and "sufficient cause") required under the second proviso to Regulation 9.1. Therefore, no relief of condonation of delay can be granted, and the matter should be dismissed for being time-barred under Regulation 9.1 of the News Broadcasters & Digital Standards Regulations.

B. Impugned Content

Submissions of Wego

On behalf of Wego, it was submitted that the impugned news reports/articles pertained to an influencer/YouTube vlogger, Ms. Jyoti Malhotra, who is currently being investigated under the Official Secrets Act, 1923 and provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. In the said articles, rather than reporting on the status/progress of the investigation, the broadcaster has wilfully, without any factual basis, published and disseminated false, misleading, and unverified content across platforms, wrongfully insinuating Wego's complicity or association in the alleged illegal activities carried out by Ms Malhotra. These defamatory publications lacked credible evidence, factual basis, or lawful justification.

The broadcaster, in its article titled *"UAE firm operating in Pakistan sponsored 'spy' YouTuber's travel: Sources"* portrayed Wego in a scandalous manner and recklessly suggested a criminal nexus where none exists. The article states, *"Multiple videos of Jyoti, who has been arrested for allegedly spying for Pakistan, have been sponsored by the firm Wego, which also has a license to operate in Pakistan"*, this assertion is patently baseless and designed to mislead. In the absence of any evidence of sponsorship, the broadcaster made a salacious conjecture about an alleged connection between entities in the UAE and Pakistan and the involvement of the Indian entity, to sensationalise the issue. By doing so, the broadcaster sought to propagate an unfounded insinuation of conspiracy and wrongdoing without any credible evidence. This violates the fundamental principles of fairness, integrity, and truthfulness mandated under the Code.

In the article titled *"Pak-linked firm behind 'spy' YouTuber's trips partnered with Azerbaijan two days ago"*, the broadcaster manufactured a baseless and defamatory narrative by falsely claiming that Wego UAE sponsored Ms Malhotra's trips and by linking this to geopolitical references involving Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Crucially, the broadcaster omitted the material fact that Wego India is a completely separate legal entity from Wego UAE. The reliance on Ms. Malhotra's promotion of the *"Wego"* app in one of her YouTube videos was likewise misleading, as the app promoted belong to Wego India, not Wego UAE. By conflating distinct entities and constructing a narrative of guilt by association, the broadcaster engaged in reckless, sensational, and inaccurate reporting in flagrant violation of the Code's core principles.

Despite admitting that *"there is no evidence linking Wego to funding Pakistan, its operation in the country raised flags in the case"*, the broadcaster falsely imputed Wego's involvement in unlawful and espionage-related activities.

The broadcaster failed to conduct basic fact-checking or lawful editorial scrutiny and thereby caused serious reputational harm. The local police authorities are cited as the basis for the impugned articles/broadcast. However, the Office Memorandum of the Ministry of Home Affairs states that only the designated officer may disseminate information about any ongoing investigation. It was submitted that no investigation was initiated against Wego, nor did any competent authority issue a notice regarding Ms Jyoti

Malhotra's case.

The reporting lacked due diligence and was salacious and sensationalised. Wego is a well-established company that has operated in India for the past 15 years and is not a fly-by-night operator. It has worked with over 1500 influencers and has never faced such allegations.

The broadcaster failed to afford Wego any meaningful, informed, or fair opportunity to respond to the allegations in the impugned articles and made no attempt to verify the information by seeking clarification directly from it. This omission violates the principles of neutrality, equality, and balanced reporting, as it denied Wego the opportunity to present its version of events and allowed unverified allegations to be projected as established fact.

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 solely engaged to promote its mobile application through brief, scripted brand mentions integrated into content posted on her personal YouTube channel. However, a false impression was created, insinuating that Wego had sponsored Ms. Malhotra's trips to Pakistan.

Further, Ms. Malhotra had been engaged by several other high-profile commercial and government entities; however, the broadcaster deliberately, intentionally and without any legal or factual basis, made patently false insinuations against Wego by linking it to the unlawful activities carried out 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.

Further, the impugned defamatory statements have not only harmed Wego's reputation and standing but have caused substantial damage in the form of lost contracts, brand erosion, stakeholder disaffection, and irreversible market distrust. By portraying Wego in an overtly negative light and insinuating that it partakes in espionage, the publications have inflicted significant reputational harm across digital ecosystems and commercial channels.

The impugned publications remain accessible on the broadcaster's platform and continue to cause grave prejudice by disseminating defamatory, misleading, false, and baseless imputations against Wego.

Submissions of the Broadcaster

The broadcaster submitted that there is no evidence to support the contention that the Wego became aware of the article only on 26.05.2025. In any event, even accepting that date, the fact that the company became aware of the article four days after publication strongly indicated that the article neither garnered immediate attention nor was

defamatory or click-bait content. Furthermore, the delay explained was attributed to organisational processes.

The broadcaster submitted that not only was the impugned complaint belated, but it had been addressed as a notice of cease and desist while alleging that the impugned content amounted to disseminating defamatory content against Wego, without citing any violation of the NBDA Code of Ethics, or pointing out the relevant portions which are defamatory, false or misleading. Hence, the complaint is unmaintainable on both accounts.

As a media house, it is within our fundamental right of freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) to report any information/development in an ongoing investigation based on the statements of the official sources.

Not only has Wego belatedly claimed a violation of Section 2(1) of the Code of Ethics, which provides for impartiality and objectivity in reporting, but it has also failed to point out even a single instance of untrue or inaccurate reporting in any of the impugned content. Both the articles and the video are reports based on statements from police sources that all companies that sponsored Jyoti's travel blogging content on social media are being analysed during the investigation. The reports were based solely on sources stating that the Wego is of particular interest to investigative agencies because it also has a license to operate in Pakistan and had recently partnered with the Azerbaijan Tourism Board.

While in one of the articles it stated that Wego had sponsored her trips, the other article and video clearly stated that Wego had sponsored her content. The articles clearly stated that *"while there was no evidence linking Wego to espionage or funding from Pakistan, its operations in the country have raised concerns in the context of the case"*

The reporting was directly informed by these official inputs. The public must be aware when entities are under investigative scrutiny in matters with national security implications this is a core function of the media, which has been responsibly fulfilled. The reporting was based on verified information and journalistic due diligence, reflecting evolving developments and input from credible sources, including law enforcement authorities. The public must be aware when entities are under investigative scrutiny in matters with national security implications this is a core function of the media, which has been responsibly fulfilled.

It is also pertinent to mention that the termination agreement filed by the complainant was dated 23.05.2025, even though she was arrested on 16.05.2025. Therefore, the termination occurred only subsequent to the publication of the article/video on 22.05.2025.

Decision

NBDSA considered the cease-and-desist notice, the response of the broadcaster and reviewed the articles and video impugned in the notice.

From the chronology of events noted above, it can be seen at the outset that Wego initiated the action by sending a cease-and-desist notice to the broadcaster. No doubt, in this notice, Wego made allegations concerning the correctness of the article/feed. However, as can be seen from para 13 of the said notice, Wego wanted the broadcaster to take certain actions/steps as per the said notice, with a warning that otherwise it would initiate legal action against the broadcaster. Thus, it was not a complaint within the ecosystem provided for introducing the complaint by NBDSA. It was a notice for initiating legal action. It is in continuation of such a notice that Wego has approached NBDSA for the so-called redressal of its grievance. In this backdrop, NBDSA is of the view that it would not be appropriate to deal with the complaint. It is more so when NBDSA finds that in the cease-and-desist notice, Wego has alleged that the publications are scandalous and defamatory in nature, inviting liability under civil and criminal defamation laws, and has even threatened to take criminal action. Wego has specifically referred to Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (now corresponding 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 (refer para 8 of the cease-and-desist notice). The gravamen of the charge, therefore, revolves around the so-called defamatory contents of the article/feed, which assumes altogether a different dimension and, in these circumstances, the court of law would be the more appropriate forum to decide the rival contentions which need to be decided after recording of the evidence of both sides. It may not be proper for NBDSA to pass any observations which may have a tendency to prejudice the case of Wego or the broadcaster.

NBDSA decides to close the matter making it clear that it is always open to Wego to take any other action which is permissible in law.

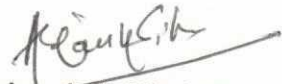
Wego has also filed an application for condonation of delay stating that there was four days' delay in approaching the broadcaster. However, as the NBDSA has found that it was not a complaint of the nature which is generally filed with the broadcaster but a cease-and-desist notice, it is not necessary to deal with this application, also having regard to the nature of the Order, which NBDSA has passed.

NBDSA decided to inform Wego 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: 11.09.2026