

**News Broadcasting Standards Authority
Order No. 60 (2019)**

Order of NBSA on complaint dated 3.10.2018 from EMMC: Viral Sachh programme - Pupils of a school being beaten up mercilessly aired on ABP News on 3.5.2018 (20:00:00)

The above complaint was received from the Deputy Director, Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC), Ministry of Information & Broadcasting vide letter dated 3.10.2018. The complaint relates to a special programme broadcast by ABP news channel under the title “Viral Sachh” in the context of young pupils of a school who were mercilessly beaten up.

EMMC Report:

EMMC report stated that the channel had aired a special programme under the title “Viral Sachh” showing young pupils of a school being mercilessly beaten up. In the programme packaged five videos that had become viral on social media, which allegedly related to a school (RMVM School). In these videos, the staff members of the school were shown inflicting physical torture on the kids. The channel made a thorough investigation of these videos and also spoke to the school administration. Following this, it was told that all these videos being linked with the school, was incorrect. During the broadcast, the videos that were aired showed some people undressing kids and beating them up with belts, thrashing girls by holding their hair, children being tossed up in the air and getting beaten up with sticks and also kicked. In addition, the fifth video aired by the channel showed two boys of the school beating each other. Though the channel purports to oppose such brutal acts against children, it inappropriately showed such brutality continuously for five minutes. The visuals were extremely disturbing and upsetting. Though the channel had blurred the first video in which children were being hit with a belt, the actions in the video are clearly discernible. The broadcast of the visuals, according to the EMMC, could incite child abuse and is condemnable.

Response from ABP News:

Broadcaster stated that the news report in question was aired with the intention of clarifying that the videos of violence inflicted against children that were going viral on the internet and being sought to be connected with the RMVM school, were in fact not connected with that school. There was an appeal in the story to viewers at large that they should not believe the rumours and should not participate in the spreading of such videos. The intention of the story was also to bring to sharp focus and criticize atrocities committed on children. According to the broadcaster, all the relevant images were blurred and the identity of none of the children was disclosed in the news report. The news report did not violate Programme Codes 6(1)(a) and 6(1)(l) of the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 as the news report did not offend good taste and decency, nor denigrated children in any way, nor encouraged atrocities against children, but on the

contrary, the channel had taken a strong stand against such denigration and atrocities, which will be evident from the script, tone and tenor of the story.

Issue of notice of hearing to the broadcaster

NBSA at its meeting held on 17.1.2019 considered the report of the EMMC, response from the broadcaster and also viewed the CD. During the broadcast of the programme, the videos that were aired show some people undressing kids and beating them up with belts, thrashing girls by holding their hair, children being tossed up in the air and getting beaten up with sticks and also kicked and two boys of the school themselves badly beating each other. Though the channel stated that it was opposed to such brutal acts against the children, NBSA noted that the channel was inappropriately showing such brutality continuously for five minutes of un-blurred visuals. NBSA was of the prima facie view that the broadcaster had violated the Principles of Self-Regulation No 4 which states that “*news channels will ensure that no woman or juvenile, who is a victim of sexual violence, aggression, trauma, or has been a witness to the same is shown on television without due effort taken to conceal the identity*” and *Specific Guidelines covering Reportage 3.5 which states that “Identities of victims should not be disclosed in cases of sexual crimes and violence on women and children” and Guideline 3.7 which states that “Violence must not be depicted solely for its own sake, or for its gratuitous exploitation or to pander to sadistic or other perverted tastes. Scenes with excessive violence or suffering such as close-up shots of persons being subject to brutality, torture or being killed and visual depiction of such matter should be avoided” and Guideline 3.8 which states that “broadcasters should not glamorize or in any way promote individuals, groups or organizations that employ or advocate the use of violence or engage in criminal / nefarious activity. Hooliganism, vandalism and all forms of delinquency should not be shown in favorable light”*. Therefore, NBSA decided to call the broadcaster for a hearing.

On being served with notice, the following persons were present at the hearing held on 25.2.2019:

On behalf of ABP News Network Pvt. Ltd. [Channel: ABP News]

Mr. Shambo Nandy, Advocate

Mr. Kishan Singh Rawat, Head Admin & Regulatory Affairs

The broadcaster submitted that the intent of the programme was to bring to light the false/fake videos circulating in social media which the public should not believe; that while doing so, it highlighted five such videos which were circulating in the social media regarding violence/ brutality being meted out to young children. The broadcaster accepted the fact that showing such gruesome videos for long durations without blurring was not appropriate and submitted that it will abide by any future Regulation or Guideline made by NBA/NBSA restricting the duration of broadcast of such videos by news channels. It also submitted that it would sensitize its editorial team to ensure adherence to the Guidelines of NBSA and would take due care in the future broadcasts.

Consideration and decision of NBSA:

NBSA found that only towards the end of the programme it was mentioned that the school referred to in the video was not RMVM school in Bengaluru and that what was being circulated were fake videos relating to brutality being meted out to children in an orphanage in Egypt. NBSA was of the view that it is not proper for news channels to show brutality for a long period thereby sensationalizing the issue and create panic among viewers, while purporting to make a programme out of false/fake videos circulating in the social media. NBSA was of the view that television news has greater reach, and more immediate impact than social media, which makes it all the more necessary that news channels exercise restraint to ensure that any report or visuals broadcast do not induce, glorify, incite, or positively depict violence/brutality or perpetrators thereof. NBSA was of the view that special care should be taken while reporting of violence and news channels should report well researched, factually correct and verified news to educate and inform the viewers so as to enable them to understand the issue and reach their own informed conclusions; and that channels should desist from glamorizing acts of violence and brutality, which will mislead and desensitize the viewers. NBSA was of the view that news channels should ensure that such reporting did not cross boundaries of good taste and sensibility; that they should take adequate precautions while showing any visuals of pain, suffering and brutality. NBSA concluded that in this case, the footage of brutality, shown repeatedly and continuously without blurring at several places, was not justified.

_NBSA therefore warns the broadcaster / channel (ABP News) to exercise greater care, caution and discretion in future while formulating news stories relating to depiction of violence or intimidation against children and that any future violations would be viewed seriously.

NBSA directs the video of the said broadcast, if still available on the website of the channel, or YouTube, or any other links, should be removed immediately and confirmed to NBSA in writing within 7 days.

NBSA also directs the NBA to send: (i) a copy of this Order to the EMMC and the broadcaster; (ii) circulate this Order to all Members, Editors & Legal Heads of NBA; (iii) host this Order on its website and to include it in its next Annual Report; and (iv) release the Order to media.

Sd/-

Justice R.V. Raveendran (Retd.)
Chairperson

Place: New Delhi

Date: April 2, 2019