

EDITORIAL

Crucial warning amid rising drug abuse in J&K

Tobacco use often acts as a gateway to other forms of substance abuse. Many young people begin experimenting with cigarettes or other tobacco products under peer pressure, curiosity, or stress. What starts as a seemingly harmless habit can gradually lead to stronger and more dangerous addictions. In recent years, reports of rising drug abuse in parts of J&K have raised alarm among families, educators, and policymakers, making the message of No Smoking Day more relevant than ever. As the world observes No Smoking Day, the significance of this occasion becomes even more profound for Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory, where the growing menace of substance abuse has emerged as a serious social and public health concern. While the day traditionally focuses on raising awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco, in the context of J&K it also highlights the urgent need to address the broader challenge of addiction that is increasingly affecting the youth. The observance of this day should therefore serve as an opportunity to strengthen awareness campaigns across the Union Territory. Schools, colleges, community organizations, and health institutions must work together to educate young people about the dangers of tobacco and drug addiction. Preventive education is crucial, as informed youth are more likely to make responsible choices and resist harmful influences. At the same time, authorities must intensify their efforts to curb the availability and circulation of drugs and tobacco products, particularly among minors. Strong enforcement of laws, regular monitoring of tobacco sales near educational institutions, and strict action against drug trafficking networks are essential steps in addressing the problem. Equally important is the need for rehabilitation and support for those who have already fallen into the trap of addiction. Counselling centres, de-addiction facilities, and community-based support systems must be strengthened so that individuals struggling with substance abuse can find a path toward recovery and reintegration into society. Families and communities also have a critical role to play. Open dialogue, emotional support, and guidance can help young people cope with stress and challenges without turning to harmful substances. A supportive social environment can act as a powerful shield against addiction. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, therefore, No Smoking Day should be seen not merely as an anti-tobacco campaign but as a broader call to safeguard the health and future of the region's youth. By promoting awareness, strengthening law enforcement, expanding rehabilitation services, and encouraging community participation, society can collectively confront the twin challenges of tobacco use and drug abuse. Ultimately, protecting the younger generation from addiction is not just a public health priority—it is essential for ensuring a healthier, stronger, and more hopeful future for Jammu and Kashmir.

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Communication ethics in an age of conflict

BY
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In today's media environment, wars rarely remain confined to battlefields. They unfold just as vividly on television screens, digital platforms, and social media timelines. Every strike, every explosion, every movement of troops travels across the world within seconds. Technology has made it possible for audiences thousands of miles away to witness conflict almost as it happens. Yet this unprecedented access has created a strange paradox: the more we see of war, the less we often understand it.

What we are witnessing is the emergence of a new communication order around conflict. Information moves at extraordinary speed, but reflection rarely keeps pace with it. Images circulate faster than context. Algorithms amplify the most dramatic footage, and broadcasters compete for attention in an increasingly crowded media landscape. In such a setting, communication itself becomes part of the battlefield. While military operations determine the physical outcomes of war, the information environment shapes how societies interpret those events, how they emotionally respond to them, and sometimes even how they participate in them.

War reporting has not always looked like this. For most of the twentieth century, there was a distance between the battlefield and the newsroom. Journalists filed reports after verifying what had happened, often hours or even days later. That delay, though frustrating at times, created space for editorial judgment and context. Stories were writ-

ten with the benefit of reflection rather than immediate reaction. Today, that distance has almost disappeared. Twenty-four-hour news cycles and real-time satellite feeds have transformed war into something that resembles a continuous broadcast event. The shift is subtle but important: we are no longer only reporting war, we are broadcasting it.

Television studios increasingly resemble control rooms for a global spectacle. Large digital screens display animated maps, missile trajectories, and radar simulations. Footage of explosions is replayed repeatedly from multiple angles. Anchors narrate unfolding events with urgency and drama. Graphics and sound design sometimes mirror the visual language of cinema or sports broadcasting. In this environment, visual intensity often replaces informational depth. The purpose quietly shifts from explaining events to capturing attention. Ratings, viewership metrics, and digital engagement begin to shape editorial decisions. War becomes a form of content.

This raises an uncomfortable but necessary question: when conflict is presented as spectacle, does the audience gradually become a spectator rather than an informed citizen? Images, of course, have always played an important role in communication. Powerful visuals can humanise distant suffering and generate empathy across borders. They can make the consequences of war visible in ways that statistics never could. But images also have the power to distort reality when they are presented without context.

In contemporary conflict coverage, viewers often encounter an endless loop of explosions, missile launches, and night-vision footage. Cameras gravitate toward

the most dramatic scenes, fireballs lighting up the sky, buildings collapsing under airstrikes, or tracer rounds cutting through darkness. What receives far less attention are the quieter and slower dimensions of war: displaced families, fragile diplomatic negotiations, economic disruptions, or the long and complicated process of rebuilding societies after violence.

The result is a kind of visual hierarchy of war. The most spectacular moment dominates the narrative, while the structural realities that explain conflict remain largely invisible. Audiences are exposed to bursts of violence but rarely to the deeper political, historical, and economic contexts that led to the conflict in the first place.

Over time, this can produce something even more troubling: normalisation. When viewers encounter dramatic imagery of violence day after day, war can begin to resemble a form of high-stakes entertainment rather than what it truly is, a catastrophic breakdown of political order.

A newer challenge is now intensifying this dynamic: the growing use of artificial intelligence in visualising conflict. Some broadcasters have begun using AI-generated imagery or digital simulations to reconstruct how an attack might have unfolded, how missiles may have travelled, or how military planners might have executed a particular operation. These visualisations are often presented as explanatory tools, but they occupy a complicated space between journalism and dramatisation. Even when clearly labelled as simulations, the realism of AI-generated imagery can blur the boundary between fact and speculation. For many viewers, the difference between a verified image and a reconstructed scene may not always be obvious.

More importantly, such simulations often prioritise visual drama over analytical clarity. Stylised animations of military operations risk turning strategic violence into something resembling a cinematic sequence. What is presented as explanation can easily slip into oversimplification, or worse, a kind of theatrical staging of conflict. In an era already struggling with misinformation and manipulated media, the casual use of such imagery deserves far more scrutiny than it currently receives.

At its core, the issue is not technological but ethical. Media institutions across the world have developed elaborate codes of conduct for elections, political reporting, and even public health crises. Yet when it comes to the communication of war, reflection often gives way to speed.

Several uncomfortable questions, therefore, remain insufficiently discussed. Should broadcasters repeatedly display the mechanics of weapons used in attacks? Does visualising military capabilities inadvertently glorify violence or reveal sensitive information? How much speculative reconstruction should be permitted in news coverage? And perhaps most importantly, at what point does reporting cross the line into dramatisation?

These are not minor editorial dilemmas. They point to a deeper problem within the global communication environment: communication itself rarely undergoes introspection during conflict. The urgency of reporting tends to overshadow the responsibility of representation.

Perhaps it is time to think about a clearer ethical boundary. In sports, certain violations are so serious that they trigger an immediate red card. It is a simple but powerful signal that a line has been crossed. Everyone understands the rule, and every-

one understands the consequence.

Conflict communication might benefit from something similar, a conceptual "red card" for media ethics. Such a framework would not exist to censor reporting but to establish limits that protect the integrity of journalism. Certain practices could clearly fall into this category: presenting speculative military scenarios as factual visuals, repeatedly looping violent imagery purely for dramatic effect, revealing tactical details that may escalate tensions, using AI-generated visuals without clear disclosure, or framing conflict in ways that trivialise human suffering. The goal would not be to silence journalism but to recalibrate it. Because the media ecosystem today is global, such questions cannot be addressed by individual broadcasters alone. A broader conversation is needed among international journalism bodies, academic institutions, and organisations concerned with information ethics. Together, they could help articulate a set of shared principles for responsible conflict communication.

Such principles might begin with a simple but important idea: context should always come before spectacle. Historical background, diplomatic developments, and humanitarian consequences should accompany battlefield imagery. Audiences deserve to understand not just what is happening, but why it is happening.

Transparency should also guide the use of digital reconstructions and AI simulations. If such visuals are used, they must be clearly labelled and treated as illustrations rather than evidence. At the same time, the human cost of war must be represented with the same prominence as military developments. Civilian suffering, displacement, and long-term societal

damage are not side stories; they are central to the reality of conflict. Editors should also be mindful of how visual repetition shapes perception. Endless loops of violent imagery may attract attention, but they can also desensitise audiences and distort understanding. And in the relentless race to break news first, verification must never become secondary to speed.

Ultimately, the question is not whether wars will continue to be reported in real time. That is inevitable. The more important question is how societies choose to communicate war.

Media institutions hold immense power in shaping public perception. Their narratives influence how people interpret global events, how governments respond to crises, and how societies emotionally process conflict. Communication can inflame tensions and amplify fear, but it can also foster understanding and restraint.

The emerging communication order around war therefore, demands more than technological sophistication. It requires moral imagination. The ability to broadcast instantly must be matched by the wisdom to decide what should be broadcast, and how it should be presented.

In a world where war can be watched live from living rooms across continents, communication carries an enormous responsibility. Journalism must resist the temptation to turn conflict into spectacle. Its task is not to amplify the noise of war, but to illuminate its meaning.

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India's 'Goldilocks' growth and the silent struggle of its working class

BY
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India's GDP growth may look impressive, but rising inequality, wage gaps and weak job quality reveal a deeper crisis for the working class.

India calls its GDP growth the "Goldilocks moment", a label meant to signal economic growth and global power. With growth of 8.2% in Q2 (July-September, 2025), inflation at 1.33% and an unemployment rate of 4.7%, India presents itself as a fast-growing nation that has achieved fourth position in global economic rankings, surpassing Japan. However, both real and nominal GDP growth show only a small gap, raising questions about the nature of these growth measures. The comparison is misleading when it relies solely on total GDP because per capita income does not accurately reflect the living standards of res-

idents. According to the IMF's estimates, Japan's GDP per capita is approximately \$34,700, compared with \$2,800 for India. This shows that although the economy's overall performance is stronger, lower segments of society continue to live in sub-standard conditions.

Income Gaps
To understand the situation, we need to examine the distribution of income as it reveals who captures the gains and who continues to suffer during the so-called Goldilocks moment. The World Inequality Report 2026 states that India's top 10% of the population controls 58% of the national income, while the bottom 50% receives only 15%. Even when the economy grows fast, most people do not feel better off because the largest share of the income goes to the big companies and wealthy households. The top 1% alone owns 39.5% of the country's wealth.

This is not merely a moral concern. It leads to three clear outcomes: people spend less due to tight finances, little or no savings, and rising dif-

ficulty in affording everyday essentials. These pressures affect working-class families through housing, healthcare, and education costs. The system produces a persistent "inequality of access", which proves more challenging to resolve than income inequality because people require access to convert economic growth into sustainable financial stability.

Women Workers
From a gender perspective, official labour market indicators suggest that women face significant obstacles in finding work. Rural female labour force participation increased from 35.2% in June 2025 to 39.7% in November 2025. The urban female labour force participation rate remained stable at 25.5% during this period. The unemployment rate decreased from 5.2% in October 2025 to 4.7% in November 2025 (PLFS, 2025), but these figures reveal little about job stability, adequate compensation or formal employment status.

Earnings data from the salaried sector also show that gender wage disparities persist. The

average monthly earnings for regular salaried employees during April to June 2024 reached Rs 18,200 for rural men but only Rs 12,396 for rural women, and Rs 26,105 for urban men but Rs 19,879 for urban women (PLFS, 2025). With wealth concentrated among the top earners, weak social protection and gender wage gaps, the country's economic boom risks leaving large sections of the working class behind.

Despite improvements in human capital, such as the literacy rate rising from 74% in 2011 to 80.9% in 2023-24, inclusion remains uneven. Vocational training programmes do not match the scale of the workforce, exposing a significant skills gap. According to recent PLFS data, only 4.1% of people aged 15-59 had received formal vocational or technical training in 2023-24. Moreover, most learning occurs through informal sources (30.6%), which lack certification and therefore do not lead to better pay or greater bargaining power.

Tackling Challenge
Addressing this challenge requires macro-

economic policies targeted at the lower segment of society. First, the government should treat wage floors as enforceable institutions by strengthening the national floor wage framework and building inspection and grievance systems capable of reaching informal workplaces.

Second, the base year of the inflation index should be revised every five years so that inflation estimates remain credible and real wages can be adjusted accordingly. This would help ensure that the rising prices do not erode the consumption capacity of poorer households. Third, workers need stronger protection through better portable social security, simpler registration, and stricter accountability to prevent delayed payments and contract abuse.

Fourth, strengthening Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) systems could provide support to the vulnerable section of society. Lower-income households face greater income volatility, and DBT can supplement earnings, stabilise consumption and protect household welfare,

thereby encouraging labour force participation. Finally, India's expanding digital economy has the capacity to deliver income support quickly and transparently. What is missing is the use of these tools to strengthen workers' bargaining power and improve real earnings for those who currently bear the costs of growth. Better work incentives and income support or pro-work support by the government, such as wage insurance, can act as a safety net for the vulnerable section and translate into improved livelihoods. India's growth narrative may appear fascinating, but the real question is whether it reflects the full reality. This story remains incomplete until real wages rise, job quality improves, and inequality narrows.

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