

## 1. Case Study: Tara Air Crash Site

### Theme: Socio-economic

On Sunday, May 29, 2022, a domestic airplane belonging to Tara Air became contactless during its flight from Pokhara to Jomsom in west Nepal. Flight 197 was a Twin Otter aircraft with 22 people onboard including three crew members. It lost contact with the air traffic control after 12 minutes after the take-off for the 25-minute flight at 9:55 AM.

Due to poor weather, the search operations faced some difficulties, and some helicopters sent to locate the plane returned without success. There was news about the mobile phone of the captain still ringing and was in connection with the telephone towers, and locals of Lete village reporting hearing from bang sound. Although the locals said they had seen smokes in a hill, the search operation was called off on the day of accident due to bad weather and the wreckage of the aircraft along with bodies of all 22 people were only located on Monday, May 30 – more than 20 hours after it went missing at Thasang in Mustang district.

Immediately after the news of the missing airplane broke, all media covered it with priority. News TV channels were giving live updates and were competing for the viewership. Avenues TV – a well-known television news channel – on Sunday afternoon broadcast visuals that it claimed are from the crash site. At that point of time, although the aircraft was feared crashed, it was not confirmed, and the news presenter stated it a breaking news and said: “The aircraft of Tara Air en route to Jomson of Mustang from Pokhare had gone contactless and right now we have received recent visuals of the site of the plane crash. This visual has been received a few minutes earlier.”

Then it showed a photo on the screen of an aircraft accident.



The photo however was not the photo from Tara Air crash. It was a photo from a helicopter crash in India earlier in December 2021. The helicopter crash in India was widely reported because Chief of Defence Staff

General Bipin Rawat was killed in it. The photo used was that of the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency, which had been published in many Indian newspapers and online site.

### ABCDE Framework Analysis

Actor	Behaviour	Content	Degree	Effect
<p><i>Prime actors:</i> Avenues Khabar – a national news television channel.</p>	<p><i>Transparency:</i> The actor is transparent.</p> <p><i>Intent:</i> The behaviour suggests no aspersive motive.</p> <p><i>Dependency:</i> The news was broadcast on national tv channel.</p>	<p>A news based on the fake photo.</p> <p><i>Harm:</i> Added to the grief of the families of the crew and passengers of the plane waiting for news of the accident.</p> <p><i>Synthetic:</i> The news was based on an old photo presented as a new.</p> <p><i>Narrative(s):</i> The content is aligned with the disinformation narrative.</p>	<p><i>Target audience:</i> Nepali population</p> <p><i>Platforms:</i> Television channel.</p>	<p>Added to the grief of the families of the crew and passengers of the plane waiting for news of the accident.</p>

**Actor:** Avenues Khabar TV – a privately owned national news channel of Nepal. It was launched in 2007 and is one of the popular news channels in the country.

**Behaviour:** The actor was transparent in identifying itself in the content and was using lawful means of communication. The actor didn't seem to have an aspersive intent however seems to have deliberately used fake photo and content to gain upper hand in the cut-throat competition among news channels during an event of high attention from the public.

**Content:** The content was a photo along with a spoken words falsely claiming that the photo was an image of the plane accident site.

**Degree:** The content was targeted to Nepali citizens as the news was in Nepali and broadcast over a Nepali news channel.

**Effect:** The news spread misinformation at the time of grief due to disappeared airplane. The fake photo of the accident was broadcast at the time when the crash was not established and there were thin hopes, at least among families and friends of those onboard the aircraft, that there could be some chances of survival. The photo showing accident and plane debris aggravating grief among concerned people.

### Diagnosis

The case has been identified as an incident of disinformation. The national news television channel deliberately used a fake photo and content to gain upper hand in the competition among news channels during a breaking news situation after an aircraft on the domestic flight went contactless. The photo showing accident and plane debris, and the accompanying news aggravated grief among concerned people.

## **Conclusion**

An aircraft on a domestic flight went missing midway from Pokhara to Jomsom in west Nepal with 22 onboard. The aircraft was located more than 20 hours after it went missing due to bad weather and the duration of those 20 hours was a breaking news situation for Nepal's media. Although feared crashed, it was not established until the crash site was located. To gain an upper hand in the breaking news competition, Avenues Khabar TV broadcast a photo of an old accident in India claiming it was the newest footage of the crash. The disinformation quickly became information for the public and aggravated grief among families and friends of those onboard.