

## **For the Thakur Foundation: A report on Tabassum Barnagarwala's work**

In December 2023, Tabassum Barnagarwala won the Red Ink award for health reporting for her story on a [cholera outbreak](#) in Amravati district in eastern Maharashtra which pointed to a larger water and sanitation problem in India: despite the Modi government building a record number of toilets and tap-water connections, many simply weren't working.

The Global Investigative Journalism Network listed Tabassum's report on India's [cough-syrup testing regime](#) among 2023's best investigative stories out of India.

In the six months between July 2023 and January 2024, Tabassum reported 17 stories on health.

Here is a summary of her work.

### **Drug regulation**

Tabassum broke the story about Sri Lanka stopping the import of an Indian-made [eye drop](#) that was found linked to 50 infections, resulting in loss of vision in at least two cases.

In an in-depth report, she contrasted the serious manner in which the WHO responded to concerns about an [eye ointment](#) made by Galentic Pharma and the way Indian authorities allowed the company to get away from a mere 25-day suspension in production.

In another in-depth report, she examined the regulatory failures that led to the approval of a [contested psychiatric drug](#) without clinical trials being held in India, and the continued sale of the drug despite it being banned 10 years ago.

## **Medical colleges**

Tabassum travelled to Nanded where 11 newborn babies died in a medical college and hospital in a single day. Her [report](#) revealed a picture of a hospital that was chronically short-staffed and overburdened – it did not have a neonatologist. It also highlighted the core problem at hand: the state was opening new medical colleges without providing adequate staff and infrastructure. A [follow-up report](#) examined the issue in greater detail.

## **Gaza**

Tabassum reported several stories on the medical and humanitarian crisis spawned by Israel's deadly strikes on Gaza. She wrote about the extreme pressures faced by doctors, [health staff](#), and [hospitals](#). One of her reports focused on the [mental health crisis](#) among Gaza's children. The reporting of these stories was done over WhatsApp voice notes – a process Tabassum described in this [moving piece](#).

## **Manipur**

Tabassum wrote about how the civil war in Manipur was leading to the disruption of health services. She investigated the factors that had led to a disruption in the supply of life-saving [HIV drugs](#) to antiretroviral centres in the hills of Manipur.

## **Tuberculosis**

In a special report, Tabassum wrote about a mysterious [drug resistance](#) to bedaquiline that doctors feared could undo gains made in the fight against tuberculosis.

## **Air pollution's health impact**

Along with Vaishnavi Rathore, Tabassum reported an in-depth story that looked at the factors causing a rise in toxic [air pollutants in Mumbai](#) and its impact on the health of city residents, especially the poor and the

working class.

### **Pharma wars**

After a well-known doctor was silenced on social media by a court order obtained by a pharmaceutical company, Tabassum revisited an older case where a doctor had [taken on a pharma firm and won](#).

### **Covid**

Tabassum examined available evidence on the link between [Sars-Cov-2 and heart disease](#) and spoke to doctors in India, who were dismissive of the link.

### **Organ donation**

As part of *Scroll's* yearender series, Tabassum wrote a short but insightful piece about her encounter with a man in Mumbai [in search of a kidney donor](#).

### **Health systems over 10 years**

As part of *Scroll's* 'A decade under Modi' series, Tabassum examined the [Modi government's record](#) on improving healthcare in India.