

Demonstration against newspaper closure



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Raktim Baruah 30 March 2014 9892 views

Journalist and non-journalist media employees engaged with newspapers and news channels in Guwahati have demonstrated their angers today in front of Guwahati Press Club against the management of Sangbad Lahari, a Bengali daily newspaper simultaneously published from Guwahati & Shillong for its sudden closure notice rendering 100 employees jobless. The participants covered their mouths with black clasps demanding an immediate withdrawal of the closure notice issued by Shillong Times Pvt Ltd, Meghalaya three days back. The agitators also urged Tarun Gogoi, chief minister of Assam and Dr Mukul Sangma, chief minister of Meghalaya to pursue with the concerned management to continue its publication.

Sangbad Lahari was first launched in Guwahati in 2009 and later its Meghalaya edition was started in July 2011. The then State Governor RS Mooshahary released the first copy of Sangbad Lahari from Shillong. Mentionable is that Sangbad Lahari was Meghalaya's first Bengali newspaper. Manas Chaudhuri, the then managing director of Shillong Times group asserted that Sangbad Lahari was not a money-making venture but a social service for the esteem Bengali readers.

The closure notice from Shillong Times private limited (Ref no ST/63/14, date: 26 March 2014) was issued by general manager Mrs S. Chaudhuri which described that the management had decided 'to close down the publication of Sangbad Lahari w.e.f. 1st April 2014' due to reasons beyond its control.

The management has however offered a month's salary to its employees as a token of support to them, which has been rejected by All Assam Media Employees' Federation (AAMEF). The AAMEF president Hiten Mahnata argues that the Shillong Times management should release at least five months' salaries to the employees of Sangbad Lahari with other legal benefits before closing down the newspaper.

The year 2013 witnessed the closing down of three daily newspapers and one satellite news channel. While the employees of Sakaal Bela, a Bengali newspaper, Seven Sisters' Post, an English daily and Dainik Pratibimba, an Assamese daily did not receive any compensation from the managements, the television employees of Prime News had compelled its management with a series of protests to release three months' cumulative salaries at the time of closure.

Today's protest meeting was addressed by AAMEF president Hiten Mahanta, senior journalists Amal Gupta, Nava Thakuria with others. AAMEF also decided to lodge a complaint regarding the closure of Sangbad Lahari in the office of labour commissioner in the city. The media employees' federation reiterated its demand for a social media audit of the concerned newspaper house, as its management has shown the acute financial crisis as the reason behind the closure notice for Sangbad Lahari, such that its valued readers can have a fair idea about the present crisis of the media enterprise.

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