

JFA expresses grave concern at news channel closure



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Journalists' Forum Assam (JFA) has expressed grave concern at the shut down of Prime News by its management leaving more than 170 employees including journalists jobless. Extending supports to various protest demonstrations organized by the Electronic Media Forum Assam (EMFA) against the closure notice of the 24x7 satellite news channel, the JFA has urged the State chief minister Tarun Gogoi to intervene on the matter for the benefit of the affected employees of Prime News.

The employees of the Guwahati based private news channel, lately run by the Suresh Prithani owned Brahmaputra Infrastructure private limited, had informed that the news channel was shut down on October 1 citing the reason of huge financial crisis. The management apprised the employees that it had to pay nearly rupees two crore to the cable operators of Assam as a distribution fees, which it did not materialize. It was resulted in the black-out of Prime News for nearly three weeks in the last month.

As the Prime News was also not available in any Direct To Home (DTH) service too, the news channel was virtually not visible for all these days resulting a very poor TRP reading. Taking advantage of the situation, the proprietor of the channel had suddenly decided to close down it, said a statement issued today by the JFA president Rupam Barua and secretary Nava Thakuria.

The Assam based scribe body argues that the money received by the cable operators annually from the Guwahati based privately-owned television channels for facilitating the distribution among the subscribers should be made taxable. Moreover the cable operators should be asked to provide due receipts to the subscribers against their monthly charge of rupees 200 to 300 for the service. Assam with a population of over 30 million supports 26 morning dailies and seven privately owned satellite news channels with few entertainment & cable channels. These channels beam news and other programs in various languages, primarily in Assamese with English, Hindi, Bengali and various regional languages to virtually cater the need of nearly 60 million populace of the alienated northeastern region of India.

In a recent letter to Manish Tewari, Union Information and Broadcasting minister, the employees of Prime News alleged that their management abruptly informed them about the closure. However, the management has not given any formal closure notice till now. It is heard that the management has taken a new partner to run the channel who wanted all the employees to be sacked, added in the letter. Maintaining its earlier request to the Union government to design a comprehensive DTH arrangement where all the recognized channels be made available, the JFA insisted that the newly designed system should help the subscribers to get the 'freedom to select a channel' of their choice with or without regular payments.

The EMFA had lately organized a human chain covering the faces of agitators with black strips in front of Guwahati Press Club on October 4 to raise voices against the closure of Prime News. Hundreds of participants also shouted slogans demanding to improve the working condition of media persons in Assam with due salary and other facilities.

The JFA statement concluded with the appeal to the conscious citizens and the civil society groups of Assam to stand beside the employees of Prime News at this moment of crisis and uncertainties.

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Assam Times Staff. editor@assamtimes.org

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