

Delhi operations of Sakaal Times closed, employees angry

The Delhi operations of the Sakaal Times, an English daily brought out by Maharashtra's leading Sakal media group, were closed down Sunday allegedly without informing the employees in advance. The group's management has denied the charge.

Many staffers who came in to work Sunday morning found the office closed with a terse notice pasted on the main door stating: 'The editorial work carried out at Delhi is no longer required to be continued.'

'As a result, the operations are stopped forthwith and the staff is being released. They need not attend office from today.'

Sakaal Times is published from Pune while the group also runs a popular Marathi daily, Sakal.

Confirming the closure, editorial director of Sakal Papers Anand Agashe told IANS in Pune: 'The operations of the Sakaal Times' Delhi bureau have been suspended for now.'

He said: 'The overall market crash has entailed drastic cut-downs.' Agashe said he could not comment on the decision to close the Delhi operations since 'the decision was administrative'.

There were around 70 employees in Delhi, including editorial staff, who camped at the gate for several hours, angry over the management's decision to close down the Delhi operations a mere six months since Sakaal Times was launched May 7.

Sakal Papers' Director, Human Resources and Operations, Pradip Khire denied the charge of the staff that they had not been informed about the impending closure.

'It was communicated to them that their services are no more required and their dues are being settled,' Khire told IANS in Pune.

He said: 'Some pages of Sakaal Times were being produced in Delhi and those operations have been shifted to Pune. Since we are also reducing the number of pages, we won't require the staff that we had engaged in Delhi.'

The employees in Delhi, meanwhile, instantly constituted an action committee to protest the lock-out.

K.K. Laskar, the photo editor who has now become the convenor of the action committee of Sakal Times staff, told IANS: 'The closure is illegal and unethical. We will take legal action. This is a test case for all workers in the print industry to fight.'

A senior editorial staff said: 'None of us knew the edition will be closed down like this. We were neither informed nor given the option to relocate to the head office in Pune.'

An initial few were laid off some time ago and 12 people were told their services were no longer required. 'The rest of the editorial team, including photographers, editors, reporters and designers, was all in the dark,' he said.

A reporter with the paper said: 'I was in the office till Saturday midnight. Till then, there was no intimation by the management. Everything was functioning normally and when I reached office today afternoon, it was all locked.'

'We may not get even this month's salary,' she said.

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