



ILLUSTRATION: NOOR US SAFA ANIK

After page 4

It has been seven months since he was forced to resign, but the 34-year-old video editor is yet to find a job.

Meanwhile, TV#2 completely shut down its news section on March 28, 2019, because they too could not pay their employees. "A total of 130 employees lost their jobs. Of them, 96 were Dhaka-based," said a senior news editor who has since been unemployed. The news channel first broadcasted six years ago.

"Of us, about 20 managed to find jobs. They were mostly youngsters. The older employees have not managed to get jobs because there just aren't as many senior-level jobs available," claimed the former employee of the news channel.

The TV channel first announced that they were going to close the news section during a house-wide general meeting that they had at the end of the day on January 12, 2019, informs another senior news editor. "We sat down with the administration after the evening news.

They told us that they need to close down the news section. We protested and pleaded with them to keep it running for a year," he described.

"But come the beginning of March, an official from the administration came into the newsroom and hung up a notice stating that we will stop transmission from March 28," he added. The notice, a copy of which was provided to this correspondent, was signed by the managing director and its concluding line was, "Under this situation, all employees of the news section are being given a termination notice, effective from now until 90 days from today."

The employees had not been paid that year, the interviewees claim. "We came to office and sat around without work for three months from March 29 because we were hoping for our salaries," said one of interviewees. The administration cleared the dues of the year only after the 90 day notice period was over. "However, I did not receive the severance that is my legal

right. I got neither my gratuity nor my festival bonus, all of which was codified into my contract. Furthermore, I was not allowed to cash in my leaves," she informed.

"The administration has been sloppy about paying our wages on time from the beginning. I joined in October of 2013, but I did not get any salary until three months from then. For the last two years, we have been getting half our salaries on the due date, with the rest being credited incrementally. It has been impossible to keep track of the transactions and determine whether my entire salary had been getting deposited in my bank account," claimed the interviewee. She surmised that the organisation owes her around six lakh taka.

TV#3 is one of the oldest and most robust television stations in the country and yet has been failing to pay its workers, leading to a mass lay-off of 16 people from its newsroom last February. The list included some of its most senior journalists. Speaking to this correspondent, the laid-off chief news editor, who had been with the channel for the last 15 years, said that the move was completely unprecedented.

"On February 14, I had completed my shift and gotten out of work when I was called in again by the newsroom coordinator, who told me that HR had left a letter on my desk," he added, "The letter thanked me for my service, and stated that because of the state of business, they can no longer afford me." This was a complete shock to the journalist, whose career spans 25 years.

"When I was given the notice, the administration owed me seven or eight months of salary. Over the year, they have cleared some of it but are yet to hand over three months' worth of money," he stated. The amount owed comes up to Tk 4.5 lakh. "There was no severance package, no gratuity, all of which they are obliged to give me."

The former newsroom chief claimed that his former employees are still owed anywhere between three to six months of salary. The same was echoed by another senior journalist, who, while not sacked, left the media house to escape the atmosphere of fear. A former chief reporter, he stated that the organisation had divided the personnel into three salary tiers—the highest paid were six months behind, while the middle tier were three months behind. The ones who got paid regularly were non-journalist staff like drivers.

Downsizing to cut costs

Even in houses where salaries were regular, lay-offs took place as management are taking a survival-first policy.

Like others, when TV#4 decided to cut its costs, it targeted not just its senior staff but its multiple award-winning investigations team. "We used to air a documentary investigation show that was wildly popular among the masses. We were supposed to air the third season of the show from March, but were suddenly told that the date is postponed," stated a senior journalist who headed the team.

"We waited for three months. The whole team were sitting ducks." On July 4, he approached the administration to pressurise them to make a decision about the show. That is when they told him that they are no longer willing to continue with him.

Continued to page 6