

INDIAN JOURNALISTS UNION (IJU)

(Regd No.4001)

Website: www.indianjournalistsunion.org

President:

Amar Devulapalli

Hyderabad

Mobile: 098480 48536

Email: amardevulapalli@yahoo.com

Secretary-General:

Sabina Inderjit

New Delhi

Mobile: 098100 05349

Email: sabina@infa.in

IJU Condemns Meghalaya Police High Handedness

New Delhi/Hyderabad, August 16: The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has condemned the high handedness of the Meghalaya police to browbeat the news portal Northeast Now to remove a news item and disclose its sources. Worse, the police has asserted that media houses had no journalistic privilege or any codification which prevents them for disclosing their sources.


The issue has led to apprehension among the State's media fraternity wherein they fear police reprisal and misuse of power. The row started with Northeast Now carrying a news item suggesting Former Chief Minister and Congress leader Mukul Sangma may join the BJP, in its ongoing membership drive. The portal was sent a notice under Section 91CrPc by Special SP MGT Sangma directing it to 'remove the item', as it was "misinformation" and asked it "provide the authenticity of the sources of information."

The portal published the said notice under headline "Meghalaya Police sends gag order to Northeast Now, demands source of information from Journalists". Thereafter, the Assistant IG (A) J.K Ingarai, issued a press release to all Editors of the media in the State justifying its notice claiming the item contains "rumours which may incite hatred or ill-will between different communities" apart from "the intent to defame Mukul Sangma." He also asserted there is "no journalistic privilege or any codification that prevents media houses from disclosing their source of information as and when required".

In a statement, the IJU President and Member, Press Council of India D Amar and Secretary General and IFJ Vice President Sabina Inderjit said the notice was misuse of power as the news item was far from "inciting hatred or ill will" and that no criminal case had been registered. More importantly, they said, the police could not compel the portal to disclose its sources, as the media's right to protect its sources is internationally recognised and the Press Council of India's Norms of Journalistic Ethics too reiterates such a right.

Making a note that the portal had later duly added Mukul Sangma's tweet saying the item was "misinformation," the IJU, along with Northeast India Federation of Journalists, said the matter should have ended there. To persist and ask for the media outlet to disclose its source was unfair and arbitrary, said the IJU and demanded the police withdraw its order against Northeast Now.

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(Y Narender Reddy)
Secretary

President Office: No.5-9-60/B, Desoddharaka Bhavan, Fateh Maidan, Hyderabad-500 001, Telangana, India
Phone: +91-040-23232659 Fax: +91-040-23232660, Email: amardevulapalli@yahoo.com

Secretary-General Office: 5 Central Lane, Bengali Market, New Delhi-110001, Email: sabina@infa.in