INFORMATIVE ABSTRACT

The development of the press in the recent years was marked by the growth of small and medium sized newspapers. With increasing in literacy and the capacity of purchasing power of the people living in rural and urban areas, there is a significant increase in the circulation of regional language newspapers. And expansion of the language press has brought about a marked change the way public issues are discussed and conducted. Over the past decade or so the language press has gained enviable power over local politics so much so that regional power centers are often seen wooing it in an effort to gain its support at the local level. Local daily is also a low cost medium of advertising, publicity, gathering information and updating knowledge. It provides an easy access to local information of immediate importance to the people of locality.

The objectives of the present study are to examine (i) the role played by the local dailies in disseminating information; (ii) the satisfaction of the readers of local dailies from the information available in local dailies; and (iii) the library services in connection with ‘collection-dissemination-preservation’ and other functions related to the dailies. The geographical area and the time-period of the study are restricted to the state of Manipur for a period of 3 years (1999-2001). Studies on the information contents of the local dailies of any particular state are rarely found in LIS literature. However, some of the works related to the dailies, as identified in the survey of literature, have given great importance to the role played by the dailies in the society.

The work has been carried out using different methods and techniques (like, scanning of the dailies, using of questionnaires, conducting of surveys/interviews/
discussions etc.) for collection of data. Media personalities and renowned scholars of the state are also interacted for collection of first hand knowledge. To scan and record the information contents of the local dailies, some important and well-circulated dailies (both vernacular and English) are selected for the period 1999-2001 (three years). The dailies include *Poknapham, Huiyen Lanpao, Prajatantra* (vernacular); *Imphal Free Press, Manipur Mail, Sangai Express* and *Freedom* (English). The columns selected for scanning are ‘top headline of first page, editorial, article, letter to editor, advertisement and sports column.’ For convenience, the issues published in the local dailies are grouped under thirteen subjects. The data collected are analysed using different statistical methods (like Chi-square test, Tables, Diagram, Weighted Index method etc.) to find accurate result.

The study finds that about 31 dailies (in vernacular, English and in some tribal dialects) are being regularly published in the state. It has been found that the ratio between one daily and number of people comes 1:77053 while the number of literate people stands in 1:46118. Most of the dailies (with maximum ‘two to four’ pages) are found to have started publishing after 1970 onwards. As revealed, the dailies *Poknapham* (vernacular), *Huiyen Lanpao* (vernacular) and *Sangai Express* (both English and Vernacular) have shared the largest circulation (15,000 and above) during the period of study. As claimed by the editors, the editorial policy are mainly directed to make people aware about the surroundings and to form public opinion. They, as reported, are used to face a lot of problems (like financial limitation, pressures from various circles and other issues) in publishing dailies.

The study also reveals that the local dailies have played important role in disseminating information on various issues required by the people. It has been
observed that issues related to contemporary social events, state administration/ state politics and law and order are given more attention in the dailies studied during the period 1999-2001. The Chi-square test also approves this trend. The ranking position of the issues, as identified and displayed in a number of statistical tables (using weightage index models in some cases), however, have been changed according to situation and requirement of the time.

While examining the newspaper reading habits of the people, it has been found that people residing both in valley (86%) and hill (63%) districts are regular readers of the local dailies. The sample responses, under study, include various sections of the people like student segments (32%), people resided in valley districts (62%), people in rural areas (66%), male folks (60%), younger age groups (48%), graduates (62%) and Meitei community (73%). The different groups of readers as identified are guided by different purposes for reading local dailies. Updating knowledge is, however, the principal target to almost all sections. As observed, the local dailies in the state are to some extent able to satisfy the information needs of the people. Realising the importance and role of local dailies, more than 80 per cent of valley people and 60 per cent of hill people are making it a habit to subscribe at least one of the same.

Majority of the city based (in and around) libraries in the state are not able to organise and maintain the local dailies (except 2-3 libraries) for use and preservation efficiently and effectively. It is also found that only few libraries (29%) in the state have been subscribed more than six local dailies (during the period of investigation). The contributions of the librarians are found to be negligible since they are not much alert about the services in connection with newspaper (i.e. newspaper clipping, newspaper indexing, microfilming, etc.).
However, they have argued that financial limitation, lack of co-operations from staff members, shortage of space, disinterested readers and lack of time have made them incapable in providing newspaper-services effectively to the users. The readers, too, have expressed that the libraries in the state are failed to maintain and organise the newspapers properly both for current and future use.

The key observations of the present study have called for improving (i) the quality, scope and size of the dailies; (ii) the existing newspaper-services; and (iii) the information-communication system through local dailies for better dissemination of information. Limited financial background, as revealed by the study, demands the joint-efforts of the publishers in publishing few but qualitative dailies and in setting up a systematic selling-network. Since the libraries of the state are failed to maintain the dailies and provide the services (related to the dailies) efficiently and effectively, a separate establishment is required to satisfy the information needs of the researchers, scholars and media-persons of the state. Accordingly, two proposals are made at the end: (i) establishment of a joint-forum of the publishers to improve the quality, scope and size of the dailies; and (ii) establishment of a separate Newspaper Library (two models are also designed) in the capital city of the state under the information technology programme of the State Government (IT Policy 2003) to provide better services.

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