The first step towards Assamese students’ activism can be attributed to a memorandum submitted by some students led by Anandaram Dekhial Phookan to A. J. Moffat Mills on his visit to Assam in 1853. The memorandum was basically a report on the administration of the province. Though it failed to elicit any response, yet its significance lies in the fact that it marked the beginning of Assamese students’ activism.

The second concerted effort on the part of the Assamese students of Calcutta was the submission of a petition to the newly-appointed Viceroy of India Lord Northbrook on May 21, 1871, on behalf of the ‘Asomiya Chatrar Sahitya Sabha’ (Literary Club of Assamese Students). It inter alia stated: When occupied with multifarious affairs of the more important provinces, we pray that your Lordship will occasionally cast your eyes on the conditions of the frontier province of Assam to which we belong and which bids fare with all her natural resources obtain a high position in competition with her sister provinces. And the most effectual means, we submit of developing those resources would undoubtedly be to connect the province with Bengal by a railway line—a proposal already brought to your Lordship’s consideration in English.¹

Students like Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Hem Chandra Goswami were instrumental in establishing several literary and cultural organizations. Coupled with these organizations’ literary activities and political consciousness, a new trend in journalism was also noted.

All these generated an atmosphere of rare ethos and elan for Assamese literature which led to the formation of the historic ‘Asomiya Bhasar Unnati Sadbhavi Sabha’ (ABUSS) at 67, Mirzapur Street over cups of tea on August 25, 1888 at the initiative of the indivisible trinity of Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Hem Chandra Goswami and Chandra Kumar Agarwala.
It also published its mouthpiece *Jonaki* on January 13, 1889, which stated that the organization would be apolitical in character. The founder editor of *Jonaki* was Chandra Kumar Agarwala.

The aims and objectives of the ABUSS were:

i) To collect the *pathis* (manuscripts) scattered all over Assam, preserve them from inevitable destruction and to publish them.

ii) To introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in schools of Assam.

iii) To agitate for introduction of correct Assamese grammar for imparting correct Assamese language in educational institutions of Assam.

iv) To compile critical studies and commentaries of writings of celebrated writers like Sridhar Kandali, Sri Srimanta Sankardev, and others.

v) To translate Sanskrit books and books in other languages into Assamese.

vi) To compile socio-political and religious histories of Assam.

vii) To arouse literary consciousness in the minds of the general Assamese people.

viii) To publish journals and newspapers in Assamese. Later, the ABUSS was rechristened as “Assamese Students Literature Club.”

The founders of the Sabha became the harbingers of a new form of literary regeneration. Later, the Assamese Students’ Literary Club (ASL Club) came to be founded in Calcutta and Gauhati respectively in 1903. At Uzan Bazar in Gauhati, ‘Ekata Sabha’ was formed by the students in 1905. Inspired by the successful conferences of the Uttar Bangiya Sahitya Sammilan in 1912 and the Bangiya Sahitya Sammilan, hosted by the Maharaja of Burdwan on April 3, 1915, Assamese students, many of whom were members of the ASL Clubs of Calcutta and Gauhati, and the Ekata Sabha took the lead in forming the ‘Asom Chattra Sammilan’.

Subsequently, it led to a meeting on December 25, 1916 under the presidentship of Lakshminath Bezbarua where the Asom Chattra Sanmilan was given its true shape. The aim of the Sanmilan was succinctly put by Chandra Nath Sarma, one of the founding members. He said, “Besides developing literary skills,
brotherhood and patriotism, the students must also revive the ancient heritage of Assam."

The Sanmilan was earlier named as Asomiya Chattra Sahitya Sammilan, but the name was changed to expand the scope of the organization as desired by Banikanta Kakoti and Lakshminath Bezbaruah. They were not in favour of limiting the Sanmilan to merely literary activities.

However, politics was kept out of the realm of the Sanmilan. Article 2 of the constitution of the Sanmilan clearly stated that the organization would have nothing to do with any political propaganda or political movement.

Whereas the secretaries of the reception committees were students, the presidents of the Sanmilan were literary, cultural and educated giants of the day.

The speeches of the Secretaries of the Reception Committees of the Sanmilan starting from 1916 reveal the students' ideology generated during that period. In his speech at the inaugural session, Chandranath Sarmah expressed that besides studies, students would have to collect ancient books and manuscripts.

In 1917 at the Jorhat conference, the Secretary of the Reception Committee K. K. Handique said in clear terms that the Sanmilan was not separated from the national life of Assam. He also said that spread of national literature should be the immediate attention of the Sanmilan while its future activities could be much wider. In the 1918 session at Dibrugarh, publication of good books was stressed by the Sanmilan. It also led to a resolution calling for expansion and extension of education to create a reading habit that would lead to the development of the Assamese literature.

The growing tide of nationalism was soon getting conspicuous in the Sanmilan. The secretary of the Reception Committee of the Tezpur Conference in 1919, Om Prakash Kumar Das, called for remembering Assam's glorious past through a commemoration of her 'great sons', by the revival of her heritage in weaving and handicrafts, and finally through self-reliance.

In the sessions beginning from 1921 to 1928, the feeling of nationalism gained momentum. In 1923, there was a clear enunciation of the ideas of Assamese identity.
In the 1926 session of the Sanmilan at Dibrugarh, the underpinning of anti-imperialist ideas were reflected in the speech of the secretary Alok Chandra Rajkhowa who accused foreign pressure of ruining Assam's handicrafts. The 1928 session at Tezpur marked a paradigm shift in the ideas of the Sanmilan. Rule I of the constitution which had barred political discussion in the organization was deleted. Slowly but surely, the Sanmilan, highly enthused by the political ideology of the Indian National Congress, got involved in the mainstream politics of the country. In 1939, the constitution of the Sanmilan was amended again to facilitate the merger of the Sanmilan to the All India Students' Federation. The Sanmilan was able to stir the ideals of nationalism in general and Assamese nationalism in particular with a clarion call for the revival of Assamese identity and language and for protection and development of Assamese literature. However, the biggest contribution of the Sanmilan lies in the fact that it established an inseparable bond for generations between the students community and the people of the State at large. The social reforms programme of the Sanmilan which included work for improving the condition of the tea-garden labourers, introduction of social reforms like widow remarriage, abolition of the caste system and the system of early marriage, and programme of rural hygiene in the form of campaigns launched to educate the masses, benefited all sections of the population and through these reforms, the Sanmilan was to receive the unflinching support of people at large in the coming decades.4

This legacy of the Sanmilan was rightly carried forward by the AASU starting from the 1960s and it is not for nothing that the Sanmilan was rightly termed as the deserving predecessor of the AASU.

Even after its merger with the All India Students' Federation (AISF) at the Jorhat session of April 23-24, 1939, the old tradition continued in the AISF. The year 1939 may be considered as a dividing line in the history of the students movement of Assam when the students of the tribal areas in Assam shed their age-long isolation and joined hands with the students of the rest of the province. Its first manifestation resulted in Shillong hosting the inaugural session of the All Assam Students' Federation in July, 1940. But the Leftist tilt of the students of Assam in the early 1940s resulted in the force being controlled by party politics and was characterized by a split and dissension. The original tradition of the Asom Chhatra Sanmilan was
then laid in smithereens and badly battered. Construction gave away to destruction, peace to violence, political consciousness to party consciousness, and communal ideas began seeping into students' organization. Hence, the 1940s in India in general and Assam in particular saw the students force beginning to play second fiddle to party politics.

Formation of the AASU

Soon after independence, the language issue came into prominence in Assam which led the students into the politics of the language problem. Student organizations from time to time appealed to Bengali students to accept Assamese as the State language. However, these appeals had no impact on them and they continued to oppose Assamese language. The language issue was the precursor of the problem of the socio-political identity of Assam and its people which had dogged State politics in myriad form till date.

Students' activism took a new form with the refinery issue. On August 1, 1956, representatives of different institutions of Gauhati met and decided to carry on a vigorous campaign for the location of an oil refinery in Assam instead of in Calcutta.

On August 2, 1956, a meeting of about 800 students criticized the Centre's policy towards industrial development of Assam. The meeting adopted a resolution urging the State Government to ask the Centre to locate the proposed refinery in Assam as an industrial enterprise in the private sector, and decided to observe August 11, 1956, as "All Assam Students' Protest Day". On the day, students abstained from classes and took out a procession shouting slogans demanding the location of the oil refinery in Assam. On August 28, 1956, a general strike was successfully observed at different places of the State. On July 13, 1957, a deputation on behalf of the Gauhati Students’ Oil Refinery Action Committee met the Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi to discuss the issue, and even demanded his resignation if their demand was not met. Massive spate of activities including hartals, protest march, etc., forced the Government of Assam to requisition the service of a French oil expert as a consultant regarding the technical and economic feasibility of an oil refinery. The French expert’s report was positive from all angles. He was in favour of establishing an oil refinery in Gauhati. Finally, the Centre decided to set up a
refinery, that too a small one, in Gauhati, which failed to satisfy the aspiration of the students community. On August 31, 1958, the All Assam Students' Association (AASA) with the avowed objective of a union without any political bias was formed. The AASA was to work for cultural development and moral uplift of the student community. 6

On March 22, 1960, a deputation on behalf of the newly-formed AASA and student representatives met the Chief Minister and presented a memorandum to him demanding declaration of Assamese as the State language. This memorandum thus ignited one of the biggest controversies in Assam politics—the language controversy.

On March 26, 1960, people of Barpeta, including the students, organized a public meeting and demanded Assamese as the State language of Assam in the State Assembly within 1960. On April 2, 1960, the Gauhati Students' Federation, in a public meeting decided to form a Students' Action Committee consisting of representatives of various students' organizations of Assam to decide the future line of action in the event of Assamese not being declared as the State language.

The demand to make Assamese as the State language was not without protests. On May 21, 1960, a procession of non-Assamese students was taken out from the Khasi National Durbar Hall in Shillong protesting against the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee's resolution supporting Assamese as the State language. The State was clearly polarized by demands for and against Assamese as the State language. Tension was palpably visible. In the wake of sporadic disturbances from May 1960, the then IGP issued circulars to all police officers to keep watch over the actions of students and agitators.

On July 4, 1960, police fired at student boarders of Cotton College killing Ranjit Barpujari and injuring many others. A case was filed against the SP, Kamrup district. This incident marked the climax of the language movement. There were protests all across the State against the killing of Ranjit Barpujari. Protests started mounting in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts against the demand for Assamese as State language. The 'Bhasa Andolan' there resulted in the death of 11
students in a police firing at Hailakandi in June, 1961. MLAs from Cachar district resigned from their seats in protest.

A worried Congress high command asked Lal Bahadur Shastri to undertake a tour of Assam to find out an acceptable solution to the language problem. His report known as the Shastri formula, inter alia, suggested the following measures:

a) Communication between the State headquarters and Cachar and the autonomous hill districts to continue in English until replaced by Hindi.

b) At the state-level, English would continue to be used along with Assamese.

c) Linguistic minorities in the State would be accorded safeguard as provided in the Government of India’s memorandum of September 19, 1956.

Meanwhile, several students’ organizations were formed owing allegiance to various political parties. This necessitated the formation of a students’ body independent of allegiance to any political party. Many students felt that the affiliation of the existing students’ body to one or the other political party was acting as an impediment to working towards the greater interest of the State. They felt that a students’ body without party loyalty would be the best bet in securing the economic, social and educational growth of the State. On August 31, 1958, the students’ union secretaries and students of different colleges of Gauhati held a meeting at Barooah College with Harekrishna Duara in the chair. The result of the meeting was the formation of a students’ union free from any political bias for the solution of various problems of the students. Speakers in the meeting stressed that the body would also work for the cultural development and moral uplift of the student community. An ad-hoc committee was formed to convene a students’ meeting on September 21, 1958. Students from school, college and the university unions attended the meeting held at Gauhati and presided over by Amrit Singh. The constitution of the Students’ Association was discussed and a resolution was passed in the meeting. An executive body with the union secretaries of all the local schools and colleges including those of the university unions was formed. The meeting also formed a board of conveners with Harekrishna Duara, Bhuban Barua, Abani Khaybul, Chandrika Saha and Prafulla Saikia to organize the All Assam Students’ Association (AASA). Thus was formed the All Guwahati Students’ Union in 1958 and was succeeded by the formation of the AASA in 1959.
The AASA led the students of Assam in the language movement of 1960 and succeeded in granting Assamese the legal status of a State language amid massive opposition from vested quarters.

The Federal Plan coupled with the Chinese aggression forced the AASA as well as the students' activism into a shell. The AASA went into oblivion till 1966 but came back much stronger in the 1966 food crisis in the State under the leadership of Dilip Bhattacharjya (Jorhat), Lakshmi Kanta Saikia (Mangaldoi) and others, after a conference of the AASA in 1965 at Jorhat. Meanwhile, in Gauhati, the All Gauhati Inter-College Students' Union conceived the idea for the formation of the All Assam Students' Union on July 1, 1966.

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**An appeal for the formation of All Assam Students' Union**

Student friends,

I take this privilege of making an appeal to you on behalf of the All Gauhati Inter College Students' Union. You are aware of the fact that this union on whose behalf I am approaching you is the premier student organization in this city of Gauhati. As a student of one of the fourteen member colleges of this union, you are also a member to this organization. Since its inception, this union has offered its valuable services towards the people of Assam during different periods of crisis.

Now, there is the crisis confronting our country. Today people are in a state of frustration—frustration due to the economic setback and frustration due to the evils prevailing unchecked in the society. We the students together constitute a major and enlightened section of the society. The student community is a great reservoir of energy. Today I feel it to be our moral duty to put our energy to work and help our countrymen in avoiding this state of frustration.

During our spare time we can put all our physical and mental efforts in the service to the nation. For this, we will have a constructive outlook of our own. Our view will be that—"We are students. We know how to adhere ourselves to our premier objective which is study. But at the same time we know how to..."
for the country and how to put our spare time and energy in services to the
nation. We will raise our voice against any injustice and any evil, which we come
across in the society in our day-to-day life—This is what the All Gauhati Inter
College Students' Union is aspiring for. This union wants to see that each
individual student of Assam will come forward and stand united under a single
roof—which is an All Assam Students' Organization. The All Gauhati Inter
College Students' Union proposes to unite the different students' Unions of
Assam together and form a big single organization under the banner of "The All
Assam Students' Union." This organization, will work out various programmes
for utilizing students' spare time and energy in different constructive works and
in fighting evils in the society.

The All Gauhati Inter College Students' Union hopes that in near future the
students of Assam will stand united under the guidance of the "All Assam
Students' Union" and speak to the countrymen—"Here we students' assemble.
We assemble here to put our service to you. In our spare time, we will undertake
constructive works which will help you in raising your economic standard. We
will fight against corruption. We will fight against all the evils which put your
social life in distress. We hate to be influenced by mean political designs. We will
remain ever free from the shade of any political party. We are students and purely
students."

A fund has been raised in the aid of the All Gauhati Inter College Students
Union to carry on with the works of forming this "All Assam Students' Union". I
hope that each one of you will kindly donate fifty paise in minimum towards
this fund.

Thanks,
Sincerely Yours,

SUSHIL CH. GOSWAMI,
General Secretary,
All Assam Inter College Students' Union &
General Secretary.
The Cotton College Union Society
Gauhati-1
A committee of the All Assam Students' Union was soon formed and Lakshmi Kanta Saikia, general secretary of the Postgraduate Students' Union of Guwahati University and president of the All Guwahati Inter-College Students' Union, became its president, and Dilip Kumar Bhattacharjya became its general secretary.

The AASU (ad hoc) also criticized the food policy of the Centre which had resulted in a food crisis in Assam and in other parts of the country. The AASU (ad hoc) general secretary D. K. Bhattacharjya, in a joint meeting of the AASU and the Assam Students' Federation urged the students to fight resolutely to reject the government which had failed to save the poor people from the clutches of black marketers.

Lakshmi Kanta Saikia and Dilip Kumar Bhattacharjya thus earned the distinction of being the first president and the general secretary respectively of the AASU. The AASU held its first session at Tezpur in the first week of August, and decided to chalk out a general programme for the student community of Assam on the proposed reorganization of Assam, police excesses, unemployment problem and other problems confronting the State.

**Growth of the AASU**

It was in the Tezpur convention that the AASU constitution was adopted on August 8, 1967, under the presidentship of Tilak Gogoi (Dibrugarh) and the general secretaryship of Bharat Lohar (Tezpur). The AASU pledged, “We, the students of Assam, solemnly pledge to form an organization to establish social, economic and political justice, freedom of thought, equal status, respect for individuals and national unity and dedication towards the establishment of brotherhood and unite the entire student community irrespective of caste, creed and religion. We, hereby adopt this constitution in this Tezpur general session today at 5 a.m. on August 8, 1967 and are determined to implement it.” The Tezpur convention of the AASU also decided to strengthen the organization from the primary level. It also decided to agitate against the reorganization of Assam’s physical boundaries.

Tilak Gogoi, AASU president and Bharat Lohar, its general secretary held on to their posts till the Jorhat session of 1970, guiding the AASU base in various parts of the State. But the AASU failed to maintain the kind of goodwill and confidence.
it had generated soon after its Tezpur convention. The AASU nearly went into oblivion. Finally, the All Jorhat Students’ Union volunteered to organize an AASU convention at Jorhat on February 19 and 20, 1971. Pradip Dewan, who was the vice-president of the All Jorhat Students’ Union and general secretary of Jorhat Engineering College Students’ Union was elected as the president of the AASU while Atul Bora, general secretary of the Cotton College Union Society, as well as the man who initiated to revive the ‘moribund’ AASU was elected as the general secretary. The AASU flag was also adopted in the Jorhat convention. The convention also formed a state committee which met on February 20 at the J.B. College Hostel premises under the presidency of Pradip Dewan and adopted 21 proposals among which they demanded more seats in the three medical colleges of Assam and a fourth medical college in Darrang district. The AASU also demanded extension of broad gauge line to Dibrugarh, operation of the Brahmaputra Flood Control Board and allocation of necessary financial grant to it, free education to students up to Class V and 90 per cent reservation for indigenous Assamese in educational institutions in Assam, compulsory teaching of Assamese as a subject in all schools of Assam up to the Xth standard, etc.

The expansion of AASU units in various places began with an anchalik unit at Dimoria, on March 13, 1971. Very soon units in South Kamrup, Puranigudam, Mangaldoi and Goalpara were established. In many places like Baihata Chariali, existing students’ bodies changed their names and merged themselves with the AASU. The issue of shifting of capital of Assam characterized the period from 1969-1971. In the next convention of the AASU, held at the Assam Engineering College, Jalukbari in 1972, Pulakesh Barua, general secretary, Law College Students Union, Gauhati University and Prassana Narayan Choudhury, general secretary of Post-Graduate Students’ Union, Gauhati University were elected as the president and the general secretary respectively. The medium movement of 1972 was spearheaded by the AASU under their leadership.

In the Tinsukia convention of the AASU in 1973, Lalan Prasad Singh (Tinsukia) and Jatin Choudhury (Rangia) were elected the president and the general secretary respectively. They submitted the 21-point charter of demands to the Government of Assam and raised the 1974 movement. The Government of Assam used repressive measures and tried to create a schism in the AASU ranks.
In the meantime, a leadership crisis in the AASU resulted in the replacement of L. P. Singh and Jatin Choudhury by Pabindra Deka (Tihru) and Dipen Dutta (Golaghat) as the president and the general secretary respectively much before the expiry of their term, and then called for the holding of a session at Barpeta.

At the Barpeta convention of the AASU held from December 29, 1974 to January 1, 1975, Brindabon Goswami (Tezpur) was elected as the president while Dipen Dutta was elected as the general secretary. But due to personal problems of the general secretary, Tajmul Haque (Dhubri) replaced Dipen Dutta as the general secretary.

The AASU decided to strengthen the organization right from the primary units. It also decided to raise people’s awareness about the 21-point charter of demands. The AASU also backed the Assam College Teachers’ Association’s demand on educational policy.

In June 1975, Emergency was clamped in the country. In Assam too, the AASU came under severe pressure. Its leaders were tortured and put behind the bars.

At a special representatives’ meet in Kokrajhar after the lifting of Emergency, the AASU demanded the dismissal of the ‘autocratic’ Sarat Sinha Ministry. After a couple of years, in the first week of August 1977, an AASU convention was organized at Tezpur. Amrit Buragohain (Dhakuakhana) and Dharam Bora (Nowgong) were elected as the president and the general secretary respectively. But both were relieved of their posts for anti-organizational activities and were replaced by Lalit Chandra Rajkhowa (Sibsagar) as the president and Nagen Sharma (Tezpur) as the general secretary. The AASU under their leadership presented memoranda to Prime Minister Morarji Desai and President Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy on the influx issue besides other AASU demands.

However, in the March 7-10, 1979, Sibsagar convention of the AASU, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta (Nowgong) took charge as the president and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan (Sibsagar) as the secretary of the organization. The convention decided to launch a statewide movement against the ceaseless flow of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to Assam.
From 1979 till 1985, the AASU devoted itself wholeheartedly to the Assam Movement. It was at the Lakhimpur convention of the AASU held from October 7-9 where Kartik Hazarika (Tezpur) and Sasadhar Kakati (Barpeta) were sworn in as the president and the general secretary respectively of the organization. The most significant activity during their tenure was the submission of various suggestions on Clause 6 and Clause 7 of the Assam Accord to the Centre.

In the four-day Nowgong convention of the AASU beginning February 21, 1987, Keshab Mahanta (Nowgong) and Atul Bora (Golaghat) were elected as president and general secretary respectively of the organization. During their tenure, special attention was paid to the issues concerning the tribals of Assam, including those of their language. Another significant achievement of the AASU during the period was the dropping of 12 Cabinet Ministers by Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, on corruption charges, after the AASU raised the tempo on the subject. This had signalled the importance of the organization as the sentinel of the people of Assam and as a watchdog of the deeds of the AGP Ministry.

A new set of leaders took charge of the organization at the 11th convention of the AASU at Bongaigaon held from January 8, 1989. Atul Bora and Sammujjal Bhattacharjya (Guwahati) were elected the president and the general secretary respectively. During their term, the long-awaited tripartite talks involving the Centre and the State Government began in New Delhi. It was during this time that the controversy regarding electoral rolls emerged. The drive against the secessionist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) by the Centre also began during their tenure. They also took initiative in organizing a number of conventions in Guwahati and New Delhi on the IM (DT) Act, 1983, flood problem, voters' list and implementation of the Assam Accord in toto.

In the 12th AASU convention at Namrup from January 21-22, 1992, Sarbananda Sonowal (Dibrugarh) became the new president replacing Atul Bora while Sammujjal Bhattacharya was elected as the secretary for the second term in succession. They carried on the heat on the Centre and the State Government on the Assam Accord front but significantly the Centre did not hold any tripartite discussion during this period. However, the two Central Universities were inaugurated during this period while the IIT Bill was passed by Parliament and Numaligarh Refinery was established during their term.
In the 13th annual convention of the AASU at Tezpur held from April 8-10, 1994, Sarbananda Sonowal and Sammujjal Bhattacharjya were re-elected as the president and the general secretary respectively. Their tenure was marked by a series of tripartite and bipartite talks regarding the Assam Accord. They also held several rounds of discussion with the All Bodo Students’ Union, the Naga Students’ Federation, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union on issues of common interest.

In the Barpeta convention in February, 1999, Prabin Boro (Nalbari) and Amiya Bhuyan (Dhemaji) replaced Sarbananda Sonowal and Sammujjal Bhattacharjya as the president and the general secretary of the AASU respectively. It is during their tenure that the repeal of the IM (DT) Act, 1983, issue reached Parliament as well as the Supreme Court. Besides this, there were numerous rounds of bipartite and tripartite talks regarding the Assam Accord. Thus each president and secretary of the AASU continued to strengthen it and carry on the legacy of their predecessors.

Aims and Objectives of the AASU

An organization is judged by people on the basis of the degree of variance or rather the lack of it, while it continues to advance towards the aims and objectives set out in its constitution.

The special feature of the AASU constitution is its aims and objectives which clearly lay down the path, the organization needs to tread.

Clause 1 of the AASU constitution adopted the name “All Assam Students’ Union” for English usage and “Sadau Asom Chatra Santha” for Assamese usage for the organization. Clause 2 limits the AASU jurisdiction to the State of Assam. Clause 3 adopted the symbol representing a red circle with Assam of pre-1950 in green with a left hand fist in white right at the centre of the map and the river Braut in white. The motto is ‘Jai Aai Asom’ in a crescent. The name of the organization in tandem with the motto covers the inner layer of the circle written in white. Clause 4 of the constitution specifies the proportion of the AASU flag at 3:2. The colour of the flag shall be white and the symbol would be lodged at the Centre. The diameter of the symbol is three-fourth of the breadth of the flag.
Clause 5 of the AASU constitution enlists the aims and objectives of the organization. They are:

Article A: To form a student organization independent of affiliation to any political party.

Article B: To encourage and strengthen patriotism and respect for the masses.

Article C: To dedicate the struggle of students to free the masses from exploitation.

Article D: To encourage students to establish socialism and work towards uplift of the State and that of the country.

Article E enlists sub-clauses
a) To protect the independence and sovereignty of the motherland.

b) To protect the interest of the indigenous Assamese.

c) To launch a campaign against illiteracy and disparity in education.

d) To raise social, political and cultural consciousness among the students.

e) To do away with communal feeling and superstition.

f) To establish friendly and cordial relationship with student organizations of other States, having similar aims and objectives, in order to strengthen national integration.

Clause 6 of the AASU lists its duties. They are:

Article A: To make the students united and engaged in a continuous struggle for creating and producing a conducive educational atmosphere.

Article B: To publish posters, magazines and newsletters for propagating the aims and objectives of the organization.

Article C: To organize symposia, debates, public meetings and various get-together.

Article D: Publication of a house journal.

Article E: To organize seminars amongst different strata of students and people for finding out ways and means to achieve the aims and objectives of the organization.
Structure of the AASU

The AASU has come a long way since its inception in 1967. Unlike now, there was no district and subdivisional units in all districts then. Only in Darrang and Dibrugarh districts, the AASU had some degree of presence. In other districts, various student organizations existed which finally merged into the AASU partaking the character of the latter.

The AASU, since its inception, was not very rigid about membership criteria. However, to be a member of the AASU, a student has to fulfil the following:

1) a) One must be a regular student of an educational institution in the true sense.
   b) One must have loyalty to the aims and objectives of the organization.
   c) One should not be a member of any political party.

2) A student will be a member of any local unit (primary unit) at the first instance.

3) Payment of (prescribed) fixed amount of fee to the union is mandatory.

The AASU is a five-layered organization as envisaged in Clause 5 of its constitution. They are:

1) The Primary Unit.
2) Anchalik Unit.
3) Subdivisional Unit.
4) District Unit.
5) State Executive Committee.

The local or primary unit is formed out of the AASU members of each educational institution, and is under the control of the executive committee elected by the members themselves.

The Anchalik unit comprises the local units of a particular region. The jurisdiction of such units is decided by the State executive committee in consultation with the subdivisional and district students' units.
The members of the executive committee of the local units decide on the executive committee of the Anchalik unit. This unit is named after the region. For example, if the name of the region is ‘A’, it begins with the name ‘A’ Anchalik Students’ Union. This unit would form branches or sub-units for its smooth working. This unit will have full control over such branches.

The jurisdiction of the subdivisional (Mahkuma) students’ union includes the administrative boundary of the subdivision and all anchalik units. One subdivisional unit includes at least five anchalik units. The units are named after the name of the subdivision.

Article E of the AASU constitution states that the political and administrative boundary is the jurisdiction of the district students’ union. The district students’ union comprises the subdivisional students’ units. Its executive body is decided by the elected representatives of the anchalik and subdivision students’ units.

The names of the district students’ unions start with Sadau (All). For example: All Kamrup Students’ Union. The president and the secretary of the subdivisional students’ union are the ex-officio members of the district students’ executive committee.

The State executive committee holds the all important position in the organizational structure. It includes two representatives from each district union and two members from each local units of each university. There are five members each from undivided Dibrugarh, Nagaon and North Lakhimpur districts in the State executive committee. From Darrang, which has been divided into two districts—Sonitpur and Darrang—there will be one additional member alternatively as per advice of the State Executive. The AASU constitution was amended on February 1999 to include two members from the All Guwahati Students’ Union in the state executive committee. However, members from the district units may be varied increased or decreased, according to administrative and organizational requirements.

The State executive posts among the members of the committee are as follows:

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In the general conference of the AASU, the representatives elected by the district unions to the state executives elect the office-bearers—president, vice-president, general secretary, assistant general secretary, education & cultural secretary, information and publicity secretary and the office secretary. The AASU finance secretary and organizing secretary are selected by the president and the general secretary as per recommendation of the executive committee.

The AASU general conference is supposed to be held at one year's interval and it is represented by an equal number of representatives from each district. The number is decided by the State executive. The district executive equally distributes the number of representatives among the subdivisioal units and instructs the subdivisional executive to send their respective representatives. The subdivisional executive elects its representatives keeping in mind the interest of the anchalik students' unions. The candidates, however, should be regular members of a students' union and if they cannot be elected unanimously, they should be elected by secret ballots.

Between two general conferences, the state executive committee would be the apex body, which would be responsible for implementation of the decision taken in the general conference. It holds the overall responsibility for achieving the aims and objectives as per its constitution. It has to liaise between the district unions. It also acts as a body to settle complaints received from general members of primary anchalik, subdivisional or district bodies.
AASU and its Activities

A. From 1967 to 1979

The AASU carried out numerous activities true to the aims and objectives listed in its constitution. Among the major activities in the period from 1967 to 1979 were the medium movement of 1972, the 21-point charter of demands in 1974 and the 18-point of demands in 1974.

A. (a) AASU and the Medium Movement

The medium movement of 1972 was but a logical extension of the language movement of 1960. Here too, the Assamese community, students in particular, felt that Bengalis posed a threat to their socio-cultural existence as most of them had since 1960 declined to accept Assamese as the official language of the State and also the medium of instruction.

The medium movement virtually started on June 6, 1972; when the Academic Council of Gauhati University (GU) in conformity with the language policy of the Union Government, decided to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under its jurisdiction along with English with effect from July 1972. However, the students were free to write answers in Assamese, English or Bengali. Earlier on May 16, 1970, the Council took a resolution which stated "the changeover to regional language in the pre-university course be effected from 1972-73. It also resolved that the instructions be imparted only in Assamese or English but option should be given to the students to answer in Assamese, English and Bengali"

However, people in Cachar were dissatisfied. They demanded Bengali as medium of instruction. The Assamese students did not object to the decision of the GU Academic Council, but opposed the decision of allowing students to write in Bengali. That is why the Councils decision of June 6, 1972, was greeted with a spate of protest.

The AASU in tandem with students of GU started a movement. They submitted a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor and demanded that (i) medium of instruction and examination should be Assamese (ii) in the pre-university classes, it should be effective from 1972-73 and for degree classes from 1974-75, (3) English should be
the alternative medium up to 1978, (4) question papers should be in Assamese and English, (5) no district should be treated separately.¹⁴

Very soon, more organizations like the Assam College Teachers' Association and the Gauhati University Teachers' Association joined the protest. The Academic Council rescinded its previous decision after a meeting on June 12, 1978 and resolved to keep Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under its jurisdiction. It, however, made a relaxation by allowing English as an alternative medium for ten years.

Meanwhile, the Cachar students sought legal remedy to the revised Academic Council decision. The Silchar-based Gurucharan College filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the Council's decision. The AASU, on the other hand, appealed to all non-Assamese communities of Assam to accept the GI decision. It observed 'Demand Day' on September 15, 1972, to press GI for immediate implementation of its decision.¹⁵ It blamed the government action for the prevailing tension. The AASU also submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha wherein it said, "It was unconstitutional on the part of the Assembly to interfere with a sub-judice issue". The AASU said that the issue should be guided by the education commissions, the State Reorganization Commission and the National Policy on Imparting Education.

Since this issue was an emotional one, the movement turned violent. Considering the magnitude of the movement in the Brahmaputra as well as the Barak Valleys, the Assam Legislative Assembly resolved, "the medium of instruction at the university stage for Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities should be Assamese. English also, however, be continued as the medium of instruction. In the spirit of the Official Language Act, this Assembly does further resolve that a separate university be set up with territorial jurisdiction over the district of Cachar and that the Government of India be moved in the matter."¹⁶

This resolution of the Assembly evoked considerable resentment in the Brahmaputra Valley. The AASU demanded the withdrawal of the resolution failing which it threatened a vigorous movement. With no sign of Dispur backing down on the resolution, the AASU launched its agitation. The Government clamped curfew in major towns of the Brahmaputra Valley. Yet, in Gauhati, Nowgong and Dibrugarh...
violence spread. The AASU rejected the Government of Assam’s offer to hold parleys in New Delhi. The AASU justified its stand by saying, “By dragging the issue to the discussion table, the ruling party in collaboration with Opposition parties has made an attempt to adopt delaying tactics”. The State Government refused to budge from its stand. The AASU, by that time, was able to generate a strong sense of Assamese nationalism, at least in the Brahmaputra Valley. For it the issue involved the question of the existence of Assam and the Assamese. It felt that the policy resolution of the Assam Assembly reflected a failure on the part of the Government to give due recognition to Assamese as the sole legitimate regional language of the State. In the meantime, the Assam Government decided not to implement the resolution of September 23, 1972. But the AASU carried on the movement despite Dispur’s announcement. In November 1972, it put forward five specific demands to the State Government to be fulfilled. They were: (i) Immediate rescinding of the Assembly resolution on the floor of the Assembly, (ii) endorsement of GU and DU Academic Councils’ decision, (iii) introduction of Assamese as a compulsory subject in all non-Assamese secondary schools from 1973, (iv) unconditional release of arrested persons in connection with the movement and (v) judicial probe into the death of Muzamil Haque, Anil Bora, Pramod Bora and Bolin Rajkhowa. The AASU started a gana satyagraha from November 6-16, 1972, in the fourth phase of its movement. The situation was getting tense. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Assam and urged the AASU to call-off the movement. The Chief Minister also assured the AASU that, “As Assembly resolution of September 23, 1972 has proved unacceptable to the people both in the Brahmaputra Valley and in Cachar and the Government has made it clear that the question of implementation of the said resolution cannot and does not arise. There should be no misgiving about the said resolution to be implemented.”

The AASU, on such an assurance, called-off the movement. The Cachar students, however, continued their agitation. Even after two rounds of discussion with Central leader K. C. Pant and State Chief Minister S. C. Sinha, the issue could not be resolved. In such a situation, the Central Government evolved a formula according to which Assamese was to be the medium of instruction in the Brahmaputra Valley, Bengali in Cachar and English for an indefinite period. The AASU rejected this three-language formula and said, “the medium mo
sponsored by the AASU was suspended on November 12, 1972, with the sense of confidence reposed on the Chief Minister and the Assam Government that the November 11, 1972, statement would be implemented with due honour. The weakness on the part of the leadership in the State has now provided scope for the Centre to interfere unduly with a matter of State jurisdiction. Even then, the AASU and the Assamese people would not tolerate any such interference and a long term movement would be geared up.”

The Assam Assembly, in the prevailing circumstances, adopted a new resolution which said, “the Assam Assembly does now revoke the resolution unanimously adopted by the House relating to the medium of instruction in universities in Assam and also for the establishment of a separate university in Cachar during the September session of the Assembly. The movement in the Brahmaputra Valley subsided and the Cachar leaders finally relented after Chief Minister S. C. Sinha and K. C. Pant met them at Shillong and arrived at a decision that the universities allow continuation of English for a long term.”

A. (b) AASU’s 21-point Charter of Demands

The 21-point charter of demands submitted to Assam Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha on February 21, 1974 by the AASU constituted the foundation for solving the various problems of Assam through gradual socialization of the economic system. The Charter was also known as Economic Charter as most of the items were on economic lines. The demands were as follows:

1) To establish economic equality through socialist means, by avoiding mixed economy.
2) To arrange for land ownership to the actual tillers of land by translating the land reforms laws into action.
3) To make arrangement for irrigation with increased production of hydro electricity and control of flood.
4) To establish more industries in the public sector.
5) To nationalize the big industrial houses of capitalists.
6) To nationalize foreign industries without paying compensation.
7) To remove the impediments in the issue of licences by the Government in ease of industries and raw materials.

8) To arrange payment of loan from nationalized banks on easy terms.

9) To implement job-oriented education system which should be non-discriminatory and need-based.

10) To take over the collection and distribution of all essential food stuff.

11) To collect and distribute all other essential items and fix their prices, keeping in view the purchasing power of the people.

12) To make all necessary arrangements for the welfare of undeveloped areas and backward classes.

13) To bring about harmony between waterways and roads by strengthening the inland water transport.

14) To stop eviction of cultivators from areas like Dayang, Kaki, Rengna, Mingnang, Mridangpara, Philbari, etc.

15) To refrain from signing accords as that of Assam-Nagaland Interim Border Accord, which is detrimental to the interest of people living in the border areas.

16) To employ indigenous people in all government services below the pay-level of Rs. 500.

17) To stop flow of outsiders to the State.

18) a) To strengthen the facilities for travel by establishing B. G. Railway Line and constructing bridges across the Brahmaputra at Pancharatna-Jogighopa and Silghat-Bhomoraguri.

   b) To extend the metre gauge rail line from Silchar to Jiribam.

   c) To establish a division of N. F. Railway at Rangia.

19) To establish a refinery near the oil fields so that oil produced in Assam is refined in the State.

20) To order a judicial enquiry into the brutal death of Nilima Bora, a class X student of Dayang High School, in an eviction operation, and punish the guilty.
21) a) To distribute three kg of rice @ Rs. 1.20 per kg and two kg of flour @ 0.70 per kg to each person per week through cooperatives or fair price shops.

b) To distribute sugar in both villages and towns at controlled rates.

c) To stop distribution of items unfit for human consumption and destroy them publicly.

d) To establish a buffer stock in each district of the State in order to meet emergency situations.

e) To increase Central share in foodstuff and other essential items for Assam.

The day the AASU submitted the charter of demands, it also observed a protest day all over Assam. Students of different educational institutions all over the State abstained from their classes. They protested against Government’s failure to curb price-rise and demanded rehabilitation of the evicted persons from Government reserved forest areas. After the submission of the charter, AASU president Iaham Singh and general secretary Jatin Choudhury asked the people to refrain from violence. The AASU began organizing street-corner meetings and carrying out processions to explain the 21-point Charter of Demands to the people of Assam. On March 20, 1974, the first meeting between the Government of Assam and AASU leaders was held on the Charter of Demands. The State Government, despite agreeing in principal with the genuineness of the demands, failed to convince the AASU regarding its seriousness. Thereby, the talks failed. The AASU launched its movement again. The Government, on its part, started using repressive measures when it saw that the AASU has been very successful in articulating the rationale of the charter to the people and peasants of the State. On June 10, 1974, two young satyagrahis—Gajen Ingti and Putul Saikia—were shot dead by the police at Bhurbanda in Nowgong district.

As State repression increased, the AASU called for an Assam bandh on June 25, 1974. The State police and the CRPF, however stormed the GU campus and ransacked hostels even injuring scores of students. The movement on charter of demands ended without achieving anything concrete, but it laid the foundation of the movement against foreign nationals starting from 1979 through its demand number 17 demanding a stop on flow of outsiders to the State.
A. (c) AASU's 18-point Charter of Demands

With the imposition of Emergency on June 25, 1975, all student activities came to an abrupt halt. Then came the 1977 general elections. The Janata Party came to power. In the February 1978 Assembly elections, a new Janata Dal Government headed by Golap Borbora came to power. But the rising expectation from a new government was belied soon. The AASU organized a conference in July 1978 at Jorhat, wherein they prepared an 18-point charter of demands. The demands were:

1) All the public and private industrial, financial and other establishments should reserve for the indigenous people all jobs carrying less than Rs. 800, and at least 80 per cent of the jobs carrying more than Rs. 800.

2) a) The headquarters of all public and private industries and business establishments like Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd., tea industry, Oil India Ltd, Hindustan Paper Corporation Ltd, etc., should be shifted to Assam.
   b) At least 50 per cent of the members of the board of directors of all public and private industrial and business establishments located in Assam should be from the State and the selection board for these establishments should consist of men from Assam.

3) The Government of Assam should implement the following demands of the All Assam Engineering Students' Union soon. They are—
   a) The headquarters of the Bongaigaon Refinery should be shifted to Assam within a month.
   b) Enquiry should be made as to why no candidate from engineering colleges of Assam was selected for the Bongaigaon Refinery among 40 engineers appointed so far.
   c) The Managing Director of the Bongaigaon Refinery should be either dismissed or expelled from Assam for his activities detrimental to the interests of the local people.
   d) The appointment orders of all non-local people for jobs carrying salary less than Rs. 500 should be withdrawn.
e) Arrangement should be made to enable the local engineers to acquire proper training and skill so that they are appointed in Central industrial establishments.

4) Work should immediately start in the fertilizer factory of Mazenga and jute mill of Dalgaon.

5) A railway divisional office should be immediately set up at Rangia, and at least 80 per cent of the jobs in the N. F. Railway should be reserved for the local people.

6) The Government should take all responsibilities for flood control measures.

7) All students in Assam up to Class X should be exempted from paying fees.

8) Measures should be adopted to check the price rise of essential commodities so that these are within the purchasing power of the general people.

9) All political prisoners and students and workers imprisoned during student agitation should be released immediately.

10) The students who boycotted examinations in 1975 should be compensated by relaxing one year in the case of appointment, etc.

11) The Government should publish all textbooks and supply them to the students at cheaper rates. Continuous change in textbooks and syllabi should be stopped.

12) All cases of the students who participated in different AASU agitations should be withdrawn.

13) Enquiry should be made into the murder of Gajen Ingti and Putul Saikia, the mysterious deaths of Keshab Sharma and Golap Sharma and the murder of Parimal Roy, a member of the AASU executive committee.

14) Scholarships should be given in consideration of economic condition, not of caste and community. Moreover, regular monthly payment of scholarship should be made.

15) The bus fare of the ASTC should be immediately reduced.

16) The Government of Assam should immediately accept the demands of the students of ITI.
17) Enquiry should be ordered into police atrocities on students at Dhumarkin on August 2, 1997 and guilty police officers and other antisocial elements should be severely punished. The family of Harmohan Das should be provided with proper compensation and persons responsible for his death should be punished.

18) The incessant flow of outsiders should be stopped. All foreign nationals illegally staying in Assam should be deported from Assam.

The 18th demand in the 1978 Charter turned out to be the most significant in the annals not only of AASU history but also of Assam as well. In its appeal to be people, the AASU observed, “Refugees from Bangladesh staying in India without securing Indian citizenship according to the 1955 Citizenship Act have no right to stay in India. Steps must be taken to expel Bangladeshis who are not Indian citizens.”

AASU Activities since 1979

It is a general perception that a students’ organization is generally evaluated on the basis of its contribution towards the uplift of the educational scenario in the geographical area it represents. But the AASU, since its inception in 1967, has found itself beset by problems in the social, economic, political, educational and cultural space of the Assamese society. Therefore, it was inevitable that the AASU was destined to play a key role in all these inter-related spheres which matter to the society.

Since its inception, the AASU never made bones of the fact that it was not primarily an organization formed to work in the educational scenario of the State. Starting with the language issue, the food crisis, the opposition to the Federal Plan of the Centre, the refinery movement, the medium movement and the 21-point Charter of demands leading finally to the agitation against the foreign nationals—successive AASU leaders were aware of the fact that unless economic and social uplift of the society was achieved, social amelioration would be a far cry.

B. (a) Educational activities of the AASU

Being a students’ body, it comes naturally to everybody that the AASU is to be evaluated based on its role in uplift of education and creation of an environment which promotes education. The medium movement of 1972 was the first major area
where the AASU played a prominent role in ensuring that Assamese is used extensively in schools and colleges, including the university, as a medium of instruction.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF THE AASU

Preface

Stagnancy is the major ailment which the educational system in Assam is suffering from. With a view to bringing back the derailed educational system on track, from time to time, the AASU has been submitting sets of proposals to the State Government, but only to be left unattended.

The AASU is of the opinion that the educational system in the State will be a dynamic one only if the steps being taken by the State Government without following any well-thought educational policy are replaced with steps based on a well-planned educational policy. The AASU had constituted an education commission, which, after interaction with many educationists and others in the field, recommended a number of proposals. After a thorough study of the proposals made by the commission, the AASU made only the proposals related to policy matters available before the people of the state.

The two key proposals

Teaching process should be totally free from the shackles of politics. Development of human resources of a state should not depend on the liking and hasty decisions of a political party. The whole education system should not be pivoted on the ideologies of political parties. Giving a protective shield to the new generation is indeed a difficult task, and its responsibility should not be entrusted on the Government alone. Some policy decisions in the state need to be implemented permanently if the educational system is to be made fruitful.

In this regard, the AASU says in its first proposal that the educational system should be totally free from the influence of political parties and their leaders. In the greater interest of the next generation, political parties and their leaders need
to make a solemn pledge before the public that they would not interfere in the
State's educational system.

In its second proposal, the AASU is for a perfect decentralization of
management of educational institutions. It feels that giving a protective shield to
all educational institutions will be easier only if the concept of decentralization
of power and management is implemented at all levels. A massive change in the
educational system can never be brought without a proper decentralization of power
and planning.

Other policy proposals

The teachers got government employees status way back in mid 1970s. Though
the move is considered a boon for the teachers, yet it has proved to be a bane
for the smooth running of schools. After this move, the school managing committees
have been stripped of many powers which they exercised earlier. School managing
committees are there now, but without the required teeth in their jaws. They are
there for name sake only.

The AASU proposes that the school managing committees should be
strengthened giving them more powers. The responsibility of teachers' appointment
should be entrusted with the managing committees as was the practice before mid
1970s. This apart, the AASU feels, the managing committees should be given powers
like termination of services of teachers who are neither capable of performing their
duties of teaching, nor dedicated to the service, and who have failed to perform.
The absence of punitive and administrative provisions, the AASU feels, has given
much scope to some teachers to give a body blow to the educational system. If
a provision for the dismissal of service of irresponsible teachers is not implemented,
the atmosphere in educational institutions, according to the AASU, will never be
congenial.

For the all-round development of educational institutions in the State, the
AASU proposes that school and college managing committees should be given all
constructive powers. But, the managing committees and heads of institutions should
also be made accountable if they fail to maintain congenial educational atmosphere
in their institutions.
The AASU wants that there should be well-set rules for the formation of managing committees and appointment of teachers so as to avoid misuse of powers.

**Creation of Posts**

In accordance with the proposal from the AASU, the responsibility of managing educational institutions should be vested with the managing committees. But the onus of creating new posts should rest on the Government. The managing committees, according to the AASU, should have the power to take decisions on matters like opening new branches in educational institutions, introduction of new subjects etc., but subject to approval by the government after a thorough study. The students will not be deprived of studying new subjects if the government approves and implements the decisions of the managing committees without delay.

The AASU is against the prevailing system of teachers’ transfer. It wants that appointment of a teacher should be permanent in one school.

**Policy on Languages**

The educational system in Assam is yet to have a proper policy on languages. The language policies adopted by the Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA) and the Assam Higher Secondary Educational Council (AHSEC) are discriminatory, as they are tilted in favour of English medium schools. At any stage, the burden of languages should be equal for students of all media. Citing an example, the AASU says that a student having Assamese as the medium of instruction can complete his or her school and college studies without any deep study of Assamese. At school stage various textbooks are written in the same language. At +2 stage an undue importance has been laid on Alternative English giving an opportunity to a number of students to complete their education learning only English. The students from vernacular media, on the other hand, have to learn two languages. For the interest of students from all media of instruction, the AASU feels, the SEBA and the AHSEC should adopt a common language policy for all.

Another practice that irks the AASU is that, in some schools in Assam more than one language is taught at primary level. This is against the national educational
policy of teaching through mother tongue at primary level. Imposing the burden of English, Hindi, Sanskrit etc., besides the mother tongue on the children of six or seven years, is unscientific. If more importance is laid on subjects like mathematics, literature, environment, and drawing etc., the students will be at home at the following stages. If the base of perception of students can be strengthened at primary level, they will not be in trouble to learn more than one language after class V.

The AASU, therefore, proposes that the mother tongue should be the only medium of instruction at primary level and the burden of other languages should be imposed on them only after class V.

**Teaching English**

English is taught from class V in vernacular medium schools. Even after learning English from class V to XII, most of the students are not confident enough to speak English. This is, the AASU feels, because of lapses somewhere in the teaching process. Many experienced teachers are of the opinion that laying less importance on grammar from the beginning will not be in the interest of the students. The AASU wants that the grammar-based English teaching should be strengthened with a fresh vigour. The same teaching method, according to the AASU, will not serve the purpose of students who need English in their day-to-day life and those who do not, as well. The present Government wants to introduce English from class III with a view to developing English knowledge among the students, but the AASU feels, this decision is nothing but an attempt to satisfy the people out of nothing. The AASU says that no new step or system can bring a change for the better in this regard if the current problems that ail the whole system are not solved. For a better result in this regard, the AASU proposes that English teaching should be only from class V, and emphasis should be laid on reformation of teaching method.

**Medium of Instruction**

All national-level education commissions recommended that the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction at primary level, and the AASU extends full support to this policy. But the AASU is not against English as the medium of
instruction at primary level for students whose mother tongue is English. The AASU favours regional languages as media of instruction at primary level for those whose mother tongue is not the medium of instruction.

**Pre-primary Education**

Specialists are of the opinion that the character of a child takes a definite shape in the first two years of its life. If a child is taken care of properly during this early stage of its life, it will be physically and mentally stronger. Likewise, 3 to 5 years of age of a child is the right period to prepare him or her for taking lessons. Imposing the burden of formal education on them at this tender age tantamounts to committing a social crime. But this fact was grossly neglected during the last 50 years in Assam. The AASU thinks, to make the education system in Assam a dynamic and fruitful one, implementation of preprimary education is a precondition. The AASU, therefore, proposes that preprimary classes should be connected with each and every primary school in the State without further delay. Nobody has the right to deprive the children of Assam from this right. Among all the schemes, the one related to preprimary education should get top priority. The AASU clarified that imparting formal education at preprimary stage is harmful to the children. During this stage, children should be prepared for formal education through games and sports without imposition of any formal bindings. The primary stage should start from the age of six years.

**Establishing new educational institutions**

The setting up of new educational institutions of any level should not be permitted sans a thorough study. Before giving permission for new institutions, the government should ensure all infrastructure for an institution. The system prevalent now is that schools are first set up under private sector, and then efforts are being made for their affiliation. This trend is responsible for the falling standard of education in Assam. The AASU proposes that the Government should set some strict rules for the setting up of new educational institutions. Educational qualification of teachers, teachers' salaries, facilities for students, atmosphere in the surroundings etc., among other things, should be within the rules. The Government should set
up schools on its own in areas where these are no schools or where there are no enthusiastic people for the setting up of schools. It is unfortunate that there is no example of setting up schools in Assam by the government on its own eyeing at the educational needs of the students even though the ruling party's interference is always the most in the Education Department.

**Teacher - Student Ratio**

The AASU has noticed that no definite policy is being followed in the State on teacher-student ratio. About 70-80 students are being enrolled in each stream and consequently a bench is sometimes shared by 8-9 students. Such situations negate all efforts for the uplift of education in the State. The AASU wants that the Government should set conditions before the managing committees that in a particular stream over 40 students should not be enrolled. The colleges should abide by the laid down rules on the number of students in each stream. In the event of violation of such conditions, college authorities should be made accountable.

**Holidays**

The holiday lists being followed in schools and colleges in the State discourage the students from cultivating work culture. The State Government and university authorities fail to implement the recommendations of the National Education Commission. The AASU is of the firm view that neither the State Government nor the university authorities should prepare the list of holidays. The responsibility of preparing holiday lists should be given to the managing committees, and the government should only make it mandatory that the number of working days for every school should be 220 days. Of course, the Government can make some holidays compulsory considering their social importance. Likewise, the Government should set a precondition before the college managing committees and university authorities that the minimum number of working days in colleges should not be less that 180 days a year. College authorities should be made accountable to the State Government and the university in the event of reducing the number of working days. If necessary, college authorities should face punitive action.
System of Examination

The examination system being followed by the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) and the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC) does not match with the time. In many cases, students boast of securing more marks by mere parroting. The commission is of the opinion that the SEBA and the AHSEC should do away with the practice of detaining students for not getting qualifying marks in some of the papers. It favours grade for those who can qualify all subjects and simple pass or course completion certificates to those students who can not qualify in one or more subjects. This policy, the AASU thinks, will prevent a large number of students from going for higher education, and higher secondary school examination will be the last examination for a large number of students.

The AASU also wants to bring a change in the evaluation process in degree and master degree levels. In these two stages, the AASU thinks, the thinking and analytical power of the students should be evaluated. And this, according to the AASU, can be done with the implementation of semester system. The question papers for examinations makes the educational system drab.

Vocational Education

The total failure of the educational system in Assam is its vocational education. In many a school, the provision of vocational course is a total failure and misuse of funds is rampant. This area needs a re-evaluation by the Government. The vocational courses in education fail to attract the students. The AASU, therefore, feels that the Government should do away with the system of vocational courses in schools and colleges. The AASU, however, favours the revitalization of industrial training institutions (ITIs) and making them dynamic. If the pass-fail system is done away with in the final examinations in class X and class XII, a large number of students will flock to the industrial training institutes. The AASU thinks that introduction of new subjects in ITIs will seek to solve the unemployment problem of the State to a great extent.

+2 Stage

The way the +2 stage of education in Assam is being run has exposed the lack of well-thought planning in the State. Unlike other States in India, there are in Assam, three different types of institutions viz. higher secondary schools, junior colleges and colleges for imparting education at +2 stage. There does exist difference between
in quality of education imparted in these three different types of institutions at +2 stage, and for this difference the students have to bear the brunt. According to the national education policy, +2 stage is an integral part of school education and the AASU supports this view. It may be mentioned here that all colleges charge huge amounts of fees for +2 stage of education, and enrol students in large numbers and this practice affects teaching at degree level. The junior colleges, according to the AASU, are not at all necessary. The AASU further says that educational qualification for teachers from class IX to XII should be postgraduation. This is indispensable to keep pace with the level of textbooks and syllabi being followed nowadays.

Role of Universities

This is a matter of serious concern that the role of universities in Assam has become ineffective to a great extent. It is only research work which can preserve the unique and true feature of a university. Actually there should not be any berth for persons not connected with research work in any university. It should not be taken as granted that the essential research environment has disappeared in the universities in the State due to cash crunch. The absence of a research atmosphere in universities in the State has led to stagnancy in the education system. Barring a few persons, the greater Assamese society has badly felt the absence of silent researchers who are needed to make a university attain the status it deserves. The AASU proposes that the universities in the State have to find ways to generate funds on their own even though the government is bound to extend grants. This apart, the universities should only spend the funds they get from various heads in the name of research, and not for other purposes.

Without evolving a system for the true evaluation of intelligence, ability in conducting research work etc., of the students, the universities in the State would not be able to get rid of the current ailment.

Areas needing effective role from the Government

The work load of the Education Department will be reduced to a great extent if the managing committees are entrusted with the responsibility of managing schools and colleges, and appointment of teachers. In that case, the government can engage itself in other areas like — creation of new posts as per requirement.
setting up of schools in neglected and far-flung areas, evaluation of educational institutions, upgrading of syllabi and textbooks, teachers' training at all levels, production and publication of quality textbooks and handbooks, etc. Keeping an eye on the pace at which education is being spread elsewhere in the nation, the Government should introduce new subjects at various levels. Our students will continue to lag behind if time and job-oriented courses and subjects are not introduced in both technical and general institutions. The foundation for development in the State will be stronger if the government plays the role of a guide in the field of education. It is a matter of serious concern that the Education Department in the State could not bring anything new after the Independence and that, according to the AASU, is because of its busy schedule with matters like appointment and transfer of teachers. Identification of talented students and helping them develop their creativity is another role the Government has to play in an effective way. But, so far, the government has not done anything worthwhile in this area.

Conclusion

Nobody can deny this truth that most of the problems ailing the educational system in the State are created by the ruling parties. Lack of clear-cut policies and corruption have created all these problems. Without any hesitation, the AASU proposes that for the greater interest of the coming generation, the responsibility of managing the educational system should be left with the educationists. The government should only find out and introduce new subjects and areas, but leave the responsibility of management to the managing committees. Bureaucrat-centred system of management will push educational institutions towards destruction.

The New Educational Policy was adopted on January 12, 1999 coinciding with the election of AASU's new president Prabin Boro and general secretary Anand Kumar Bhuyan.

The AASU has succeeded in establishing a Gauhati University campus at Kokrajhar and the introduction of Bodo language in postgraduate courses in Gauhati University. The AASU had set up a Central Library in the University premises on January 7, 1989. The AASU has resorted to massive protests against the perennial financial crisis facing the three universities of the State in March, 1989. It called for an Assam bandh on January 21, 1994 against the Centre's attempt to curb the power
of GU and DU. It had also successfully agitated to force the University Grant Commission to open its regional office in Guwahati.

The AASU had constituted an Education Advisory Board to look after the educational affairs of the State and to suggest measures for solution to the problems in the field.

An AASU Centre of Academic Information Guidance and Development has been functioning fully since December, 1995 to guide students on choice of careers and opportunities in education. A computer centre in all district headquarters of Assam built at the initiative of the AASU and with donation from Kuldip Nayar's MP's Local Area Development fund is actively engaged in imparting computer education to students. More than 5,000 students have benefited from the computer centres so far. The AASU has been very sensitive on the issue of education in schools. It has succeeded in bringing history and geography in the curriculum of school students. Often, it has called for effective inspection of different educational institutions. It has always protested vehemently the delay in supplying and at times non-availability of textbooks to primary and high school students. It has protested political interference in the managing committees to run schools and colleges and has asked politicians of all hues to resign from educational panels. The AASU believes that educationists should be entrusted with the job of administering the education system. It has been very vocal on arbitrary transfers of teachers and anomalies in checking examination answer sheets. At the same time, the AASU has kept a close scrutiny on students adopting unfair means in examination, as well as ragging and eve-teasing. It also organized summer training camps for students appearing in the HSLC exams. AASU activists are also engaged in distribution of free textbooks to underprivileged students. Students who top the HSCE Examinations are felicitated each year in a public function.

It also asked the Government of Assam on November 28, 1998 to provide benefits to students by installing V-SAT-based communication network. The AASU has adopted a number of educational institutions, especially the LP schools and are running them successfully.

On March 16, 2000, it forced the Controller of Examinations, Board of Secondary Education, Assam to step down for anomalies in question papers, after gheraoing the SEBA office. Similarly, the All Guwahati Students' Union had in the...
past gheraoed SEBA and the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council offices demanding action against persons responsible for discrepancies in HSLC exams. It has submitted memoranda to the SEBA to maintain parity in language burden on students of vernacular medium schools vis-a-vis English medium schools.

The AASU has been very sceptical of the way medical colleges in the State are being run. On August 23, 2003, it demanded a judicial probe into the anomalies in medical and engineering colleges. The AASU has been successful in taking away from the Chief Minister of Assam, his discretionary quota of seats in medical colleges. On August 25, 2002, it launched an Assam Medical Colleges bachao stir to seek development of the AMC and halt its deterioration. The AASU has been very critical of the State Government’s education policy for a number of years now. It has flayed the Tarun Gogoi Government’s cut of grants to colleges, especially the grant-in-aid colleges. It said that the step will create two classes—educated and uneducated—in the State.27

On its part, however, the AASU has been trying wholeheartedly to facilitate the pouring of more funds in the State’s educational sphere. It has advocated a cess of 50 paise per kg of tea produced in the State for development of education. It has asked all corporate houses having business interest in the State to contribute to the development of education.28 It has stressed the importance of ayurvedic, homeopathic, polytechnic, veterinary as well as studies relevant to the natural resources of the State.

On the operation of the Assam Public Service Commission, the AASU had asked it on July 6, 1992 to allow final year graduate students to appear for the APSC examinations. It also had demanded arrest of former APSC chairman Tara Pada Das on charges of massive anomalies in the APSC. Even, the district units of the AASU act as sentinels of education in their own districts. On September 6, 2001, the Nalbari district unit of the AASU gheraoed the Principal of the Nalbari College demanding action against teachers involved in illegal appointments in the teachers service.

The AASU has maintained a close rapport with teachers’ bodies in the State, especially the Assam College Teachers’ Association (ACTA). It has pressed the State Government to better the lot of teachers, including timely release of salaries. With the ACTA, the AASU has resolved to work for better educational atmosphere after a joint meeting of both the organizations on May 13, 1994.29
Another feather in the AASU cap has been its Academic Calendar. The AASU raised this issue for the first time on August 12, 1991. However, the Government of the day did not respond to it. Finally, the AASU took it upon itself to manage a meeting among various organizations of the teachers, from L. P. school to the university-level, like the All Bodo Primary Teachers' Association, the Assam State Primary Teachers' Sammiloni, the All Assam M. E. Teachers' Association, the Assam High School Teachers' Association, the Assam Secondary Teachers' Association, the Employees' Union, the All Assam Higher Secondary Teachers' Association, the Assam Sikshak Karmachari Samonnay Samiti, the Assam Junior College Teachers' Association, the Assam College Teachers' Association, the Assam College Principals' Council, the Gauhati University Teachers' Association.

After a one-year exercise, going into details, the AASU in tandem with these organizations prepared a comprehensive Academic Calendar for the first time and submitted it to the State Government for immediate implementation. The Government, however, persisted in its earlier stand. But when the AASU upped the heat on the State Government, including the call for a massive stir, the Congress Government relented. In a series of meetings involving leading intellectuals of the State, academicians, all teachers' organizations, the Asom Unnati Sabha, the AASU Education Department officials including the Education Minister Mr. Pankaj Bora, the decision to implement the Academic Calendar from January 1, 2005 was taken.

The motto of the academic calendar is: Not to waste a single day. It basically reflects the New Education Policy of the AASU in that it stipulates nearly 180 days of college education. It also calls for computerization of examination system to the fullest extent.

B. (b) Economic Activities of the AASU:

Beginning 1979, the AASU resorted to a life and death struggle against the influx of Bangladeshi and Nepali immigrants which it believes, based on historical facts, had altered the socio-economic fabric of the Assamese society. Even during the six-year-long Assam movement, the AASU activists tried to raise the consciousness of the rural peasants and workers against the menace of unceasing migration. The AASU also realized that the standard of living of the people can only be raised through speedy economic growth of the State. Also, meticulous homework by the AASU in conjunction with leading intellectuals of the State pointed out to the
growing economic deterioration of the State. The AASU had to resort to all kinds of pressure tactics ranging from dharna at Delhi to threat of reviewing the Accord to make both the Centre and State Government to adhere to their commitments.

It was at AASU’s continuous pressure that various task forces including the L.C. Jain Committee and a Task Force on Economic Development of Assam were set up by the Planning Commission to suggest measures to improve Assam’s economy. The AASU has also continued to forward various suggestions to the Centre including steps to realize the full economic potential of the State, and has continued to direct its energy to realize these economic objectives.

One key demand of the AASU has been the reservations of jobs for indigenous Assamese. The economic charter or the 21-point charter of demands of the AASU of 1974 had its first demand as “all the public and private industrial, financial and other establishments should reserve for the indigenous people all jobs carrying less than Rs. 800 and at least 80 per cent of the jobs carrying more than Rs. 800”. The AASU has also demanded 100 per cent reservation in Group D category in N.F. Railway, IIT, and all PSUs in the State. It has squatted, demonstrated and protested in front of the N.F. Railway headquarters, the IIT, OIL, IOC, NEEPCO offices a number of times to push through its demand. It is against these backdrop that the cases involving the burning of forms for the Group D examination of N.F. Railway by the AASU on July 29, 2003, in Guwahati and the subsequent violence that marred the State’s social fabric have to be seen.

The AASU’s economic activities are reflected in the various proposals and memoranda it submitted to the Centre from time-to-time. The following reflects AASU’s suggestions and concerns, in their own words, touching all aspects of the economy of Assam and the north-eastern States.

**Assam Economy:**

Over the last 50 years, the economy of the State of Assam is going down at a faster rate. The State’s dependence on other States has increased so much that annually Rs. 1,500 crore of consumables are imported to the State, meaning that the State is wholly dependent on supplies of all consumable commodities required for human consumption. In the construction sector, goods worth Rs. 200 crore are imported to the State annually which means that the State is equally dependent on
construction materials on other States. The State Domestic Product has gone down in comparison to the all India average. The per capita production of rice decreased from 173 kg. to 134 kg (1995-96), while population increased 3 times. 40 per cent of Assam's population is below the poverty line. Performance of irrigation is extremely poor, hardly 50 per cent of cropped area are under irrigation. Performance of Industry sector is extremely bleak with rising trend of industrial sickness. The Assam's economic record is given at Table I and a comparison with other States is given at Table II.

**TABLE-I**

**ASSAM'S ECONOMIC RECORD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1950-51</th>
<th>1971-72</th>
<th>1995-96</th>
<th>All India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Domestic Product per Capita at 1980-81 Prices (Rs.)</td>
<td>1,173</td>
<td>1,226</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India Per Capita NNP (Rs.) 1980-81 prices</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td>2,573</td>
<td>846.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (million)</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>24.7*</td>
<td>27.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density (Per Sq. Km)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>317*</td>
<td>307*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice Production (million tonnes)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity of Rice (Kg./ha)</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>1,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Rice Prodn. (Kg)</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average size of Operational Holdings (Ha.)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.31*</td>
<td>1.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Electricity Consumption (KWH.)</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>270.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Length per 1000 Sq. Km.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>817.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons per Hospital Beds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,707</td>
<td>1,968*</td>
<td>1,924*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (%)</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>52.5*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Relates to 1991 ** Relates to 1994

The following conclusions can be highlighted from the Table I.

* Population of Assam is rising faster than the all India average (All India remaining constant, density of population has increased over time. This has caused land fragmentation, low forest coverage, congestion and pressure on infrastructure.

* While rice production increased by two-and-half times during the last 45 years, per capita production has gone down from 173 kg. to 134 kg. productivity of almost all agriculture commodities is much below the all India average.
In 1950-51 Assam’s performance was relatively better than All India average for State Domestic Product, the yield and host of other indicators. But other States in India progressed more rapidly than Assam. As a result Assam has fallen far behind in almost all sectors.

In terms of total road lengths (not surface road) and railway coverage Assam has done well overtime. But in terms of length of surface roads and meter gauge conversion Assam’s record is poor. Only recently, the performance of the Railways has improved significantly.

Though Assam’s production of food grain has increased by two-and-half times, population has also tripled.

Per capita consumption of electricity has risen, but in the other States it has risen so much that Assam’s per capita consumption is less than one third of all India average.

Now let us see how Assam has fared in comparison with some States and All India average figures. Table-II shows the result.

### TABLE-II
**ASSAM'S RECORD IN COMPARISON WITH SOME OTHER STATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASSAM</th>
<th>ANDHRA PRADESH</th>
<th>GUJARAT</th>
<th>ORISSA</th>
<th>WEST BENGAL</th>
<th>ALL INDIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Per Capita State Income</td>
<td>5,999</td>
<td>7,155</td>
<td>10,578</td>
<td>5,157</td>
<td>6,877</td>
<td>8,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at Current Prices (1994-95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Life Expectancy at Birth</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1989-93) year.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Infant Mortality Rate</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1995) Per 1000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Literacy (1991) %</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rice Productivity kg/ha</td>
<td>1,350</td>
<td>2,630</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1,430</td>
<td>2,160</td>
<td>1,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1994-95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gross Irrigated Area (%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1993-94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Per Capita Milk Production</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kg) (1994-95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Production of Fish per Capita (Kg) (1991)</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>13.48</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>13.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Percentage of Household with Drinking Water</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Population per Hospital Bed (1991)</td>
<td>1,968</td>
<td>1,505</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>2,168</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>1,322</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table II shows Assam’s record of development in comparison with four other States and all India average at a point in time. Wherever possible data relates to 1994-95 or just earlier. The highlights of analysis are:

- Per Capita State Income of Assam is way behind all India average and other States except Orissa;
- Life expectancy is the lowest amongst the comparators;
- Infant mortality rate is higher than all three except Orissa;
- Irrigation, rice productivity and electricity consumption is the lowest in Assam;
- Social indicators like availability of drinking water, hospital beds, doctors, housing shortages, are not favourable for Assam;

For rapid economic uplift of the region, the Government of India and Government of Assam should actively involve in the following areas:

**Infrastructure**

Due to serious lack of infrastructure facilities, no tangible development projects have taken place in the State. Innumerable foreign investors visited the State for last three years, but, lack of basic infrastructure facilities stood on its way. It is the dying need of the region for development of the following areas.

1) **Surface transport**:

   a) Construction of a four-lane national highway from Farakka to Dibrugarh, linking to Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Assam being the gateway for the entire North-east, any bottleneck in the State adversely affects economic development of the neighbouring States.

   b) The existing single-track broadway lines should be converted into double track broadway lines, which will mitigate the problems of transportation of people and goods at faster rate connecting with the rest of the country. The present single-track broadway lines are the main cause of delay of running of trains, because the authority gives priority to Rajdhani Express and in the process other long distance trains are halted 2 to 3 hours before Rajdhani Express crosses other long distance trains. This has led to tremendous sufferings of the people of the North-east.
c) Provision should immediately be made for electrification of the railway track from Farakka to Dibrugarh.

d) Railway network should immediately be extended to the foot hills of other neighbouring hill States, so that goods can be transported much easily, which due to stiff terrain, could not be hauled to the interior hill States.

2] Airways :

a) The existing airways network in the region is totally inadequate. There is a burning need of connecting the seven capitals of the North-east by bigger size aircraft, seating capacity in the range of fifty passengers with provision to fly everyday irrespective of the weather. This is most essential because of lack of proper medical facilities available in far-flung hill States. With the growing business, air connections to all the capitals is mostly left by the common people as surface transport takes 20-24 hrs. to reach people from Guwahati to Aizawal. It takes more than 2 days to reach the capital of Tripura.

b) The Guwahati airport should be made the hub for repairing and maintenance of aircraft of the north-eastern region.

c) Upgrading of Guwahati airport into international standard should be expedited and it should be targeted to complete by December, 1998.

d) The Guwahati airport must have Custom Bonded system with air conditioning facilities so that perishable and exportable items could be despatched without any hindrance, non-availability of such facilities is the basic reason for failure of entrepreneurs to export floriculture and horticulture-based products to south-east Asian region, which awaits a great market for the North-east.

3] Inland Water Transport :

The mighty Brahmaputra should be converted immediately into an alternative water transport highway to ease traffic load on the national highways.

4] Telecommunication facilities :

The telecommunication facilities in the region are absolutely hopeless which require immediate upgrading by installing automatic telephone exchanges, satellite system as well as internet system so that the region is connected globally at a faster rate.
5] Power :
The Brahmaputra has its power development capacity of 34,000 MW, but, so far, nothing has been done. Similar is the power potentiality of Arunachal Pradesh. Scheme should be initiated to generate huge power supply which could be exported to neighbouring Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal as well as to other Indian States. This is a sheer neglect on the part of the Govt. of India and the State governments concerned. With the installation of power grid system, this is an immediate feasibility for the region.

6] Coal :
The North-east and the State of Assam are boasting of huge stock of coal. Bangladesh requires great deal of coal. Installation of a Coal Slurry Project is an immediate necessity, and steps should be taken to instal the same.

7] Natural Gas :
In spite of signing an MOU for setting up an ethylene gas cracker project in the State of Assam, no progress has been achieved, and gas is being flared up conveniently. If there is any hesitancy by private sector in setting up the proposed Assam Gas Cracker Project, then OIL & ONGC may be advised to set up jointly the gas cracker project to avoid further flaring of natural gas which is a nationally criminal act.

8] Exploration of Oil :
It is extremely disheartening to note that the BRPL is considering to import crude oil for running BRPL refinery as it is stated that with the commissioning of Numaligarh Refinery, there will be shortage of crude oil. This is unbelievable in the State like Assam, which is floating on crude oil. Oil India and ONGC must be instructed to expand their exploratory works in the Northern Bank with a positive will. It will ensure locally available crude and will stop flow of foreign exchange. The hydrocarbon sector should be seriously looked into which is an extremely neglected sector for the last 50 years.

9] Tourism :
The Government of India must withdraw restrictions on entry of foreign nationals to the North-east, so that foreign tourists can be allowed to land on their own aircraft and play Golf in the tea gardens of the region.
10] Industry, Handloom and Handicraft :

a) The recently-announced incentives for the North-east should be implemented immediately. Monitoring of implementation of the growth centres and export promotion parks should be vigorously followed up and there should not be any lapse on the part of the Government concerned. Entrepreneurs are awaiting Government facilities and they are denied the privilege in the growth centres as neither Government in Assam can allot land to entrepreneurs nor the growth centres are coming up as expected.

b) There is a demand for the setting up of a product exhibition centre near Guwahati airport, which will allow display of industry and handloom products to foreign buyers, a model like Pragati Maidan of Delhi. Both the Govt. of Assam and Govt. of India are extremely slow in setting up this much needed centre for the entire of North-east.

c) The closed public sector units should be revitalized by private participation if feasible, otherwise they should be closed down to avoid idle labour payment and destroying the work culture of the labour force of Assam.

11] Agri sector :

Agriculture being the predominant avocation of the people of Assam and North-east, the Government must take a special policy to improve agriculture horticulture and plantation products. A separate policy should be incorporated for the development of three and more agri crop plantations, horticulture crop development, setting up of cold storage, establishing marketing network for procuring agriculture products, encouraging plantation of rubber and tea and other forest-based spices for high value addition.

12] Fishery and Animal Husbandry :

A positive step should be taken for the development of fisheries and animal husbandry, and both should be given industrial status.

13] Control of Environment :

The Government must come out with stringent measures to control the environment pollution and energize Brahmaputra Board for taking positive steps for controlling flood control measures in the State.
14] Banking and Finance:

The Banking sector operating in the North-east requires immediate revitalization as the banks are not extending required cooperation to the entrepreneurs of the region. NABARD must finance potentially viable and professionally managed projects directly without routing through commercial banks, which is the greatest hurdle in the whole of the region. The role of North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) should be broad-based with adequate funding by financial institutions so that NEDFi can extend assistance in agri plantation, forest plantation, transport sector development and tourism in an effective way.

15] North Eastern Council (NEC):

Functioning of the NEC should be more meaningful and it should be responsive to the needs of the north-eastern region. The NEC should work more closely with the NEDFi, which has the grass-root information of the problems and prospects of economic uplift of the entire north-eastern region.

Finally, the Govt. of India should consider opening Defence Product Manufacturing Facilities in Assam to meet the various requirements of defence department. This will have far-reaching effects:

a) It will bring a disciplined work culture to the entire region.

b) With defence production centre around the region, this will invite large employment scope.

c) The very presence of defence personnel and utilization of manufacturing facilities of the region will reduce youths embarking upon insurgency.

d) It will greatly contain environment pollution and initiate a decent lifestyle to start with.

Another key area where the AASU has been very vociferous has been the poor utilization of water resources in the State and the perennial floods by the mighty Brahmaputra and the Centre's lackadaisical attitude towards floods in the State. The AASU said that this being a highly capital-intensive proposition, it was imperative on the part of New Delhi to take the initiative. The AASU also organized national
seminars on floods in Guwahati and New Delhi to draw the attention of all political parties and policy-makers on the issue. The AASU has been very vocal in pressing Dispur and New Delhi to treat floods in Assam as a ‘National Problem’.

On the other hand, the AASU has also blamed the Centre for not harnessing the hydro-power potential of the Brahmaputra. In its pleas and memoranda to the Centre on various occasions, the AASU has regretted that the State’s waterways have not been put to use for navigation, transport and generation of cheap hydel power despite a total potential of 45,000 MW. It has also been dissatisfied on the slow progress of the Subansiri Multipurpose River Project which, besides generating 4,800 MW of cheap power can, according to AASU, bring about a green revolution to this predominantly agricultural region.31

The AASU has also taken to task the Brahmaputra Board for its inaction in controlling floods in the State. So much has been the AASU peeved at the Board’s failure that it forced the closure of the Boards’ headquarters for nine days since October 16, 1987.

Continuing with the water issue, the AASU has also protested against an ambitious Rs. 560,000 crore scheme of the Central Government seeking to interlink all major rivers in the country. The AASU, on its part has also demanded a study on the requirements of water for Assam and the other north-eastern States for the next 200 years. The AASU convened an all-party meet in July 2003 at the Swahid Bhawan in Guwahati where it rejected the inter-linking project. On June 27, 2005, the AASU formed a human chain on the banks of the river Manas to register its protest against the Centre’s move.

On the issue of the gas cracker plant at Tengakhat in Dibrugarh district, the AASU has repeatedly asked the State Government to replace Reliance with the Tatas so as to end the uncertainty on the prospective project.

The AASU has from time-to-time resorted to blockades of oil and coal whenever it felt wrongdoing on the part of the Centre. The blockade movement at Margherita and subsequently at the Noonmati stock yard on November
19 and 20, 1988, and the indefinite blockades of oil drilling at Duliajan, Sivasagar, Digboi and Guwahati both during and after the Assam Movement clearly demonstrated AASU's grasp of the means necessary to achieve that ends.

On March 13, 1989, the AASU resorted to a 96-hour oil blockade. Again on March 21, it resorted to an indefinite bandh of oil drilling and production of oil against not giving employment opportunities to locals in the ONGC. Further on May 6, 1989, the AASU decided to launch a 3-day oil blockade starting July 5, 1989, to protest against the further diversion of crude oil from Assam and to press for the withdrawal of the loop line scheme. It was the fourth oil blockade resorted to by the AASU since 1985.

Of particular significance has been a letter written by the AASU to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on September 16, 1988. The letter said that when gas was struck in Bombay High in 1976, the 1,700-kilometre HBJ pipeline was immediately thought of, so that this precious gas could be used productively, instead of being burnt as is the case in Assam. Even a gas cracker unit for Maharashtra was immediately sanctioned. But, even after 40 years of continuous flaring of Assam's gas, a gas-cracker unit is a distant dream. In citing Gujarat's case, the AASU wrote: “In Gujarat, the State's entire production of crude is refined within the State itself and a mammoth petrochemical complex was set up as early as 1964. This complex has transformed the economic scene of the State. In Assam, most of the crude is refined outside the State leaving very little naptha for such a petrochemical complex.”

The AASU, in keeping with its avowed aim to establish a socialist economy, had once opposed the privatization of the North Bank Oil Project especially when oil was to be drilled with success under the Brahmaputra Valley Exploration Project. The AASU had once also opposed the privatization of the Sugar Mill at Boruabamunhaon. It demanded that the mill be run in the cooperative sector. The AASU was also very vocal against the Centre's reported move in October 1997 to privatize the Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited. It had opposed the reported moves on the privatization of BTPS. It succeeded in forcing the Centre to bifurcate HFCL, Namrup, after submitting a memorandum to the effect on April 7, 1992 to the then Union Fertilizer Minister. The AASU in July, 1997 had also agitated
against tea companies of the State in support of its four-point charter of demands including increase of minimum wages, shifting of tea companies' headquarters to Assam, etc. At the same time, it undertook the creation of an environment conducive for business. It has sought transport subsidies, sale tax exemption and other facilities for entrepreneurs and industrialists. The AASU also assured the latter of full support in carrying out their activities without hindrances. It has sought reduction in Income Tax and Professional Tax for individuals. The AASU had forced the Centre to rescind the latter's notification regarding the withdrawal of Central Excise duty on units established in Assam under special initiative of the State Government's industrial policy.

The AASU has stated in very clear terms that the future of the region as a whole lies in the development of agriculture, pisciculture, horticulture, livestock, etc. According to the AASU, if the youth of Assam take on the above trades; engineers, technical personnel and other individuals can be fully engaged.

It had asked the Centre to direct the Post and Telegraph authorities to ensure reliable telecommunication and telegraph services to and from every subdivisional town and district headquarters in the State. It has stated clearly in its memoranda to the Centre that to promote the development of scientific temper in the State which it felt would go a long way to ensure speedy economic development, funds be provided to establish a computer communication network between each of the subdivisional towns, district headquarters and the State capital with a view to enabling the creation of a data base for economic planning and monitor the progress of development work.

The AASU had called for the treatment of the north-eastern zone as a separate zone for national and developmental activities like the North, West, South and East zones so that head offices and regional offices of certain major government institutions could be located in Assam.

The AASU had even blamed the Centre and the State Government for the moratorium against Purbanchal Bank Limited by the Finance Ministry as recommended by the Reserve Bank of India. It said that the State Government failed to give patronage to a bank established to cater to local needs.
AASU's protest against price rise of essential commodities, especially after the post-flood days, has kept the district administration and traders busy in ensuring that 'black marketeers' cannot have the last laugh at the woes of the people of the State.

B. (c) Political Activities of the AASU

It would be a heresy for many to know that the AASU has played a key role in Assam politics since its inception. It was development in Assam politics that forced the AASU to play a key role. The Federal Plan of the Centre, the food crisis, the refinery issue, all these issues called for the intervention of the students of Assam. In 1975, the AASU activists rallied themselves against Emergency. It was getting clear to them that they would have to play a bigger role in State politics, staying apolitical to ward off Centre's injustice to Assam and its people. The AASU for the first time, took a definite stand against the Congress Government in the 1978 Assembly elections. In fact, many still give credit to the AASU in the formation of the Janata Dal led-coalition Government in the State headed by Golap Borborah.

It's role in State politics assumed a new role with the formation of the Assam Gana Parishad in 1985 and helping it to capture power at the Assembly polls the same year. In spite of all these, the AASU continued to maintain its apolitical entity, because it knew that the mass support it had enjoyed during the six-year-long Assam movement from the people of the State was basically a support to an apolitical entity. Since AGP's assumption of power, the AASU has played the role of the sentinel of the people of Assam.

AASU's call for a true federalism in the country reflects immense political maturity of an organization well aware of the political reality of a huge democracy like India. In a two-day national seminar organized in New Delhi from November 14, 1992, the AASU opposed the growing centralization of political and economic power in India, which, it said, "poses as the biggest stumbling block to any healthy, natural and real development of national unity even 45 years after the exit of British colonialism from the Indian soil."33

The AASU, in its paper 'Restructuring of Indian Constitution to Provide for a True Federal Republic' set out clearly the change it sought in the Constitution to achieve true federalism.
In the matter related to reorganization of the State boundaries, the AASU has called for modification of Article 3, which provides for referring the Bill to the President to the legislature of the affecting States for expressing their views thereon within a stipulated time limit, pertaining to the formation of a State boundary, naming, etc. The AASU wants that the President should be made legally bound to act according to the views of the State Legislature.

The AASU has vehemently advocated a total modification of the Article 14 of the Constitution dealing with citizenship to accommodate dual citizenship in the Constitution in accordance with federal principles.

The AASU has demanded a provision similar to “The Constitution (Application to Jammu & Kashmir) Order, 1954” calling for safeguard to the interest of the Assamese people who have bore the brunt of migration from Bangladesh. At the same time, it has also called for limited applicability of certain constitutional provisions like Article 249, 258A, 347. The AASU suggested that the applicability of these Articles insofar as Assam is concerned should be made to have effect only with the expressed concurrence and approval of the majority of the members of the State Assembly voting, and by two-third majority thereof.

The AASU has called for protection to minorities under Article 30 of the Constitution to these categories of persons:

a) The foreigners who would be retained in Assam in terms of the Assam Accord.

b) Foreigners who came from Bangladesh & Nepal, and who acquired Indian citizenship and have settled in Assam.

It has sought a review of the provision of the 42nd amendment of the Constitution which restricts further delimitation of the constituencies till 2000 A.D. (Later extended up to 2026). The AASU believes that massive migration have defeated the very provision of the amendment and have sought its waiver in Assam’s case.

The AASU has sought amendment to Section 3 of the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955 which contains certain restrictions in the conferment of citizenship by birth, but
is silent on children born in India to illegal migrants. The AASU has always held that children born to parents, who have entered India illegally could never enjoy the right of Indian citizenship. Various AASU appeals and memoranda to the Election Commission and the Home Ministry have expressed similar concerns throughout. In fact, in most of the tripartite and bipartite talks, these issues have caused a great deal of embarrassment to the Centre. The National Register of Citizens first prepared in 1951 and which has since never been updated has also been raised by the AASU at effective fora.

The AASU has been very vocal in demanding the creation of a second chamber in the State Assembly to contain ethnic unrest and loss of confidence among the ethnic population of the State by giving them proper representation as per Article 169 (I) and 171 of the Constitution. This, the AASU feels, will also give numerically small groups of bona fide citizens their due and proper representations. The AASU has also been very vocal on the issue of 100 per cent reservation of seats in Parliament, State legislature and other democratic fora like the Panchayats, for indigenous people. The issue has also figured very prominently in various tripartite and bipartite talks with the Central and State Governments. The AASU have also pressurized State MPs and MLAs to press for this demand at their respective fora.

Another key area of AASU's political action has been on the issue of repeal of the IM (DT) Act, 1983. The AASU has used all conceivable means to arouse people of the State against a grossly unjust piece of legislation. From boycott of politicians to national seminars, the AASU has gone all out to focus public attention on the issue. Even filing of petition against the Act in the Supreme Court has been done by leading intellectuals of the State after they had been convinced of the legitimacy of the AASU demand.

The AASU has on a number of occasions, boycotted politicians on issue of non-implementation of the Assam Accord. Its continuous boycott of its former president and Assam's former Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta, stopping the latter from attending meetings and rallies, demonstrated the AASU's political clout.

The AASU has played a key role in trying to defuse domestic boundary disputes between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and also between Assam and
Nagaland. It has been proactive in holding talks at the students’ level between the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union and the Naga Students’ Federation and then leading a joint delegation to the chief ministers of the three States. The AASU has held talks with other student organizations of the State like the Karbi Students’ Association and numerous discussions with the All Bodo Students’ Union, the Assam Tea Tribe Students’ Union (ATTSA), etc. The AASU has been able to ink a deal on the ATTSA’s 20-point charter of demands on economic and educational improvement of the tea and the ex-tea labourers as well as their political representation. The Political Department of the Government of Assam is the nodal agency for the accord. The AASU has also, from time to time appealed to the tea labourers soliciting their support for its activities including those at the time of the Assam Movement.

The AASU has been a key observer of Assam politics. It severely castigated the 1983 polls in the State, the taking charge by Hiteswar Saikia as the Chief Minister, the imposition of President’s rule, atrocities of the Army, and demanding dissolution of the Hiteswar Saikia Government. It has also sought Government’s interference on key issues of the State, the sealing of Bangladesh border and has also volunteered to act as a mediator between the ULFA and the Government of Assam to bring peace to the State. It was instrumental in forcing Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta to drop 12 Cabinet Ministers on charges of corruption from his Ministry in 1988.

The AASU protested the Centre’s decision to extend its truce with the NSCN (IM) to Assam by staging a four-hour sit-in demonstration in all district headquarters of the State on July 7, 2001. The AASU staged a sit-in demonstration on November 8, 2001 against the Centre’s move to promulgate POTO. It said that the Central Government was trying to murder democratic system in the country. Again in December, 2001, the AASU protested the delay in finalizing the powers and functions of Autonomous Councils formed during the Congress (I) rule in the State from 1991-1996. It also expressed its displeasure on boundaries of the Councils not being demarcated.

In October, 2003 the AASU charged AGP leaders including its former president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and president Brindabon Goswami of ‘betraying’
the aspiration of the Assamese people. It even termed that Assam was not safe under Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and clarified that it was opposing Mr. Mahanta due to ideological differences. It accused the former Assam Chief Minister of being behind secret killings in the State. The AASU also termed Brindabon Goswami, the Opposition leader in the State Legislature as a failure. The AASU displayed its disgust over the exclusion of the Rajya Sabha nomination of Bhupen Hazarika in September 2003. It also demonstrated in front of the BJP State head office in Guwahati. However, when Dr. Hazarika joined the BJP, it was the AASU which voiced its criticism of his decision.

B. (d) Socio-Cultural Activities of the AASU

Assamese society’s acceptance of the AASU was also because of the untiring activities it carried out to uphold the socio-cultural values in the society. People of Assam were, from the very beginning, tolerant and blessed with better understanding. Even the massive migration from other provinces of the country in the early 1900s did not evoke any murmur of protest. The AASU has also accepted this tradition of accepting people from other parts of the country but has been very critical of migrants from East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) and Nepal, because the AASU believes that this massive influx has threatened the very existence of the society, leave aside the socio-cultural ethos of the Assamese. Since then, it has taken the cudgels on behalf of the people of Assam to preserve the socio-cultural identity of the Assamese.

The AASU had zealously guarded the traditional structure, lores and culture of the Assamese society, going to the extent of protesting uncalled for reforms in celebrating Bihu in the State. And on its part, it perennially organizes open Bihu (Mukali Bihu) at the Judges’ Field in Guwahati. It has also asked all its units throughout Assam to celebrate Bihu in a befitting manner. It has also vehemently protested commercialization of Bihu in Assam. At times, the AASU has also become overzealous to protect Assamese culture, which has led it to act as the cultural sentinel of the people of Assam much to the discomfort of many. That was why once when it had stopped a proposed programme of a foreign band from performing in Guwahati, it drew a lot of criticism from the people.
The AASU has been very cautious of political interference in cultural sphere of the society. In November, 2003 when the Nalbari Raas Mahotsav Committee invited the Chief Minister to inaugurate the festival, AASU activists swung into action to prevent the Chief Minister from inaugurating it. Finally, the Mahotsav Committee was forced to withdraw the invitation. In the same festival, the AASU barred a circus show at the Shahid Park protesting dishonour to the martyrs of the Assam movement. When the Deputy Commissioner, Nalbari failed to take notice, more than one thousand activists protested and faced the wrath of police torture.

The Nalbari unit of the AASU organizes an annual One-Act Play Competition in the name of its former AASU general secretary Prassana Narayan Choudhury, while the Kamrup unit organized a volleyball tournament in the name of Nashir Hussain, ex-president of the AASU, Kamrup district unit.

The AASU has been earnest to recognize the contribution of artistes in the cultural sphere of Assamese society. It has used every possible opportunity to honour them. The AASU has shown tremendous closeness with music maestro and singer Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, including the issue of his Rajya Sabha nomination, at the same time it has not forgotten the unparalleled contribution of Goalpariya folk song singer Late Pratima Pandey. So much sensitive has been the AASU towards Pandey, that the care it took of the legendary singer during her sickness, and even after her death, has become folk lores in itself. AASU activists took turn to be always by her side when she was in hospital. After her death, the AASU took the body to her native place and organized a massive funeral procession. It did the same to another noted artiste Pradip Chaliha.

The All Guwahati Students' Union has created a fund known as Students, Artistes and Writers' Welfare Trust to ensure the welfare of State's artistes and writers.

The AASU has used culture to draw different people together. On November 21, 1987, the AASU organized a cultural procession at Hailakandi in an attempt to bury the hatchet between the people of the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley. The ties between the two valleys were ruptured on a number of occasions whenever the AASU tried to establish the identity of the Assamese language and its people.
The AASU has not fallen short even in criticizing the highest literary and cultural body of Assam—the Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASS)—when the latter had fallen short of expectation. This is not that, it has maintained a distance from the ASS. It is indeed very difficult to imagine any annual ASS session without students—especially the AASU. But whenever the Sabha had erred on key issues, the AASU always stepped up the ante on the ASS. In 1995, prior to the 61st ASS session at Sarthebari in Barpeta, the AASU demanded government’s interference in improving roads and bridges leading to the venue while during a session at Dibrugarh, the AASU while continuing to help the Sabha, refused to participate in the session citing ideological differences with the Sabha.

On the social front, the AASU has been rendering yeoman’s services to flood-hit people since its inception. During the Dhemaji floods of 1994, the AASU went to the extent of demanding Governor’s interference in the matter of distribution of relief materials to the flood-affected people citing corruption in the process. The floods issue has been so vehemently espoused by the AASU that the issue has assumed a political dimension. The AASU has also come to the aid of victims of epidemic and other natural disasters by free distribution of medicines and other relief materials, thanks to its huge network of branches in the State. The AASU has been critical of various departments of the State Government like the Health, PWD, Education, Flood Control etc. It has been very critical of the Food and Civil Supplies Minister under the Tarun Gogoi Ministry for successive cases of food poisoning in the State.43

The AASU has waged a war against corruption in the State ever since the first AGP Government was formed at Dispur. It had protested corruption in the Jyoti Chitraban Film Studio and at the same time demanded more Central and State Government aid for the Studio.

On the issue of providing basic minimum amenities, AASU activists had once from August 29 to September 4, 1989 picketed the Guwahati Municipal Corporation’s office.44 It had then asked tax payers to withhold tax due to GMC on account of its failure on the above count. The AASU has condemned single-drum lotteries in the State and had succeeded in forcing the State Government to stop it.
It had in 1993 organized a bicycle rally throughout the State protesting the single-digit lottery.45

It had called on the National Human Rights Commission on a number of occasions to keep a tab on the Army and force the latter to respect human rights during counter-insurgency operation. It protested against police firing at Khetbang Tea Estate in October, 2003, in which seven labourers were killed. The AASU had picketed coal despatches, because of pollution, on a number of occasions in 1988 (May 4, October 17, November 19-20). On November 17, 1995, the AASU had warned the State Government against mining at Chandardinga Hills in Dhubri. It asked its Dhubri district unit to mobilize support against mining on the Hills which attained a sort of historicity through the popular myth of Chanda Sadaga. The Chandardingya Hills is believed to be a treasure of granite.

The AASU had once sought the attention of Maneka Gandhi, a minister in the Union Cabinet on the pathetic condition of animals at Kaziranga.46 The AASU has kept a close check on the activities of surrendered ULFA activists even to the extent of entering in a serious collision with them. It has, time and again, asked them to desist from antisocial activities. The AASU has, at the same time, been very critical of ULFA’s acts. Thousands of AASU activists congregated at Majuli on August 12, 1995 to protest against the abduction and murder of Sanjay Ghose, an activist of AVARD—NE, an NGO. The AASU had also condemned in no uncertain terms the killing of Assam Medical College Principal Dr. H. P. Barooah in Dibrugarh on November 24, 1994. It had then asked for black flags in all educational institutions in protest against the killing.

The AASU has been very critical of the private nursing homes operating in the State. It had demanded a probe into their functioning while seeking that they should disclose their fee structures.47 The AASU has demanded that the B. Barooah Cancer Institute in Guwahati, the only cancer institute of repute in North-East India, be headed by a local doctor.

The AASU’s concern for the socio-cultural growth of Assam and its people can be gauged from the fact that it has formed the Asom Unnati Sabha in conjunction
with eminent intellectuals of the State to work for the all-round development of ethnic people of Assam. The Sabha was formed on May 27, 1998.

The All Guwahati Students' Union, since 2000, has been holding a one-day convention titled—Ashar Asom—highlighting the positive happenings in the State every year. The convention is held on the last day of December each year and dwells on the positives in socio-cultural, political, education, sports and economy etc. The AASU also conducts Raij Mel wherein topics of importance to society are freely discussed by all willing participants.

In a nutshell, the AASU has been able to touch all aspects of State’s society and has left no stone unturned to uplift the economic, political, socio-cultural and educational status of its people. The AASU’s has been a becalming presence in the State’s civil society whenever the secular fabric of the Assamese society has come under threat from any quarter, be it in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992 or the serious anti-Bihari campaign that was orchestrated in the State in November 2003.
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