Chapter 1

Stages of development of the newspaper industry in Assam since 1947

The newspaper industry in Assam prior to Independence was not at all in good shape nor was it based on the profit-making motive. A group of enthusiastic people either individually or jointly started running the industry in fragile shape in the hope that after Independence the difficulties would gradually disappear.

During the pre-Independence days, the newspaper industry in Assam, like those in other parts of the country, was meant for either educating the readers by way of serving the cause of the language and literature (in case of language papers) or arousing the spirit of the people to stand up and fight against the British regime. The language newspapers despite
contributing much towards enriching the language and literature also played a significant role in espousing the cause of the country's liberation from the British domination. A band of editors, most of whom were proprietors as well but unlike those of post-Independence period, were inspired by the high sense of patriotism. Some of them were even having the courage to face any consequence as they believed in the liberation movement as the end-all and be-all before them.

But with the Independence since 1947, the scene in the newspaper industry in Assam has undergone vast change. The industry has entered a new stage where the proprietors started looking for profit out of it. The missionary seal of the pre-Independence period has given room for the spirit of professionalism and in certain cases careerism has surfaced everything. The journalists also started taking the profession as their means
for livelihood. The atmosphere in the newspaper offices has also changed to a great extent. The modern machineries, mostly imported, gradually started replacing the old ones. The sophisticated rotaries, linos, monos, block-making plant and even the off-set machines appeared in the field of the newspaper industry in Assam.

With the increase in quantity of machines, there has been corresponding substantial increase in the number of both skilled and unskilled workers to run the industry. With the new look and contents, the newspapers in Assam started getting more and more subscribers, advertisements and thereby more revenue. The Assam Tribune group of publications, the biggest in the north-eastern region, has already accepted the all-India Wage Board's awards on fixation of pay-scales for journalists and non-journalists although no other organization has yet come up in the same way.
Three major stages:

To be precise, the newspaper industry in Assam since 1947 can be placed under three major stages, viz. (i) the stage of expansion, (ii) the stage of conformism and (iii) the stage of post-Emergency.

It must be admitted that one cannot put these three stages of the newspaper industry in Assam into three different water-tight compartments of periods. In the process of development of the industry, one period has strided over another making it difficult to divide the stages on the basis of particular period.

However, on the basis of certain factors which will be discussed in this chapter, the first stage can be placed between 1947 and 1960, the second stage between 1960 and 1975 while the third stage begins since the proclamation of the national Emergency on June 21, 1975.

Soon after Independence, the entire north-eastern region witnessed a mushroom growth of newspapers.
either in Assamese, English, Bengali, Hindi or in other tribal languages. These newspapers were of different periodicity, some daily, some weekly, some monthly, some quarterly, etc. The process of the growth of most of these newspapers was, by and large, unplanned and haphazard. "In Assam till today there is no consolidated organization for small newspapers to look after their best interests and probably the freedom of small newspapers in Assam is very shaky. Many small newspapers in Assam were published but they could not survive." (1)

There has been marked difference between the roles played by the journalists before and after Independence. The mission to serve a great national cause was gradually degraded to the level of mere profession and the zeal to serve and sacrifice that ruled the

pre-Independence era started waning. An atmosphere of working for bread had obviously enveloped the post-Independence period of journalism in our country and the same wind was found blowing over this far-flung north-easter region. A number of individuals ventured to bring out newspapers or journals having different motives—sometimes to bolster careerism.

The newspaper industry as a whole throughout the country grew up only in the metropolitan cities like Calcutta, New Delhi, Bombay and Madras. All the national dailies either in English or in any regional language are being published from these cities. Assam or in fact the entire north-eastern region is still to enjoy any metropolitan city. The only big town or so-called city in the region is Gauhati, now the capital of Assam. Since Independence, The Assam Tribune, the premier English daily of the region, has started appearing from Gauhati. The publisher and proprietor of The Assam Tribune, the late Mr. [Name]
a man of dynamic personality, had to work hard during
the initial years to make his paper vi able. For several
years, during the early fifties, Mr Baruah worked in
almost all sections of production and distribution,
except editing, of The Assam Tribune. Sometimes he
himself had to compose news, help in final printing
and binding and also on matters of distribution" (1).

With years, the Assam Tribune organization grew up
as there was no competition in the region. Mr Baruah
gradually expanded his organization and in 1953
he launched a weekly in Assamese, the Asam Bani, now
commanding a total circulation of over 40,000. (2)
In 1965, he started another daily in Assamese, the
Dainik Asam, now the highest circulated Assamese daily,
with a total circulation of over 30,000. (3)

Mr Baruah who was earlier an Insurance Agent, went

(1) Biography of R.G. Baruah: By Nirode Choudhury, in
(2) 31,795 copies per week in 1977 (21st annual report
of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, 1977)
(3) 24,335 copies daily in 1977 (Press in India, 1977)
expanding his organization by way of purchasing more modern, sophisticated machineries for the press. By 1963, his press included two rotary machines, eight lines, one independent studio-cum-block making plant, number of monos and other necessary printing materials. Now the Assam Tribune press can easily compete with any other major printing press in the country. The entire Assam Tribune organization has a total man-power strength of about 700. It has two full-fledged news offices at New Delhi and Shillong, and five business offices at Calcutta, Bombay, Kanpur, Madras and New Delhi. The organization has its own office even at London.

Mr R.G. Baruah, who became the first Mayor of Guwahati Municipal Corporation, had his ambition of bringing his organization upto the level of a national one. He dreamt of making The Assam Tribune a national English daily and he communicated his ideas to his three sons during his later years". (1)

All other newspapers in Assam during the decade of fifties were, by and large, depending on hand-compose system although by now some of the printing presses do have their own linos and monos. But no other press has the rotary machine in Assam. Most newspapers and journals in Assam, during the fifties, were not having their own printing presses. These newspapers and journals had not at all enjoyed any organization of their own to boost circulation or to collect advertisements. "It was really a wonder how some of the newspapers and journals in Assam had managed to exist from year to year depending on slender resources"(1). As these newspapers and journals could not afford to employ editorial staff, the editor himself had to perform all the duties of reporter, feature writer, sub-editor, proof reader and even lay-out designer. For news source, their main

(1) Journalism in Assam (article in English) by Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, published in the annual souvenir of the Guwahati Working Journalists' Association, Feb. 27, 1966.
dependence was on the news bulletins broadcast in slow speed by the All India Radio and the usual hand-outs occasionally sent by the Press Information Bureau and the Public Relations departments of the other Government and private organizations. Most of these newspapers and journals could not afford to subscribe any of the national news agencies primarily due to financial stringency. All the newspapers in the region were and still are of small and medium in size and as such their main source of revenue has been the patronage from the State and Central Governments by way of advertisements. Without such patronage, the small newspapers cannot survive.

"Many small newspapers in Assam could not survive, probably due to the various unavoidable reasons and more particularly for want of government patronage, lacking in commercial advertisements and non-availability of newsprints regularly ".(1)

According to the definition given by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, medium and small newspapers are those with a circulation ranging between 10,000 and 50,000 and small newspapers below 10,000. Later it was revised saying that the medium newspaper has a circulation between 15,001 and 50,000 copies per publishing day while the small newspaper has a circulation upto 15,000 copies per publishing day. (1) A study made by the Press Institute of India during the sixties, reveals that of the 107 towns with a population ranging between one and ten lakhs, 64 towns have either no daily newspaper or daily with a circulation below 5000 or with no accurate circulation figures available. The study made on the all-India level found 44 towns with 113 dailies with a total circulation of 1,300,000, the overwhelming majority of which are language newspapers.

Of these, 58 are medium and 55 small newspapers. (1)

Again, the annual report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, gave an interesting picture of the printing and processing facilities available to the medium and small newspapers in the country. It said among the medium sized dailies, 13 were having no press of their own, 62 were depending on flat-bed machines, 27 on rotary machines, 62 on hand composing, 20 having linotype machines, 20 monotype machines, 63 having no processing department of their own and 56 having their own processing departments. Among small newspapers, 47 having no press of their own, 26 having their rotary machines, 54 flat-bed machines, 12 cylinders, 12 treadle and only 18 having their own processing departments. (2)

The PII survey maintained that the small and the medium sized newspapers had the tendency to keep their circulation down due to several factors: the lack of

(1) Advertising and Small Newspapers: By Subrata Banerjee (PII publication), 1964, page 5.
(2) Press in India, 1963, Chapter one, on general review.
adequate communication facility being one of them. For the small newspapers, the circulation generally remained confined to a range between 70 and 150 kilometres and in case of the medium newspapers, the circulation range covered about 400 kilometres.

In Assam, the only newspapers which can be placed under the category of medium sized newspaper are the three publications owned by the Assam Tribune group: The Assam Tribune, the Dainik Asam and the Asam Bani. It is a fact that the newspapers in Assam have been facing competition from the newspapers coming everyday by air service from Calcutta. The Calcutta newspapers are generally 'Big' newspapers being published by richer monopoly groups. They can afford to give more pages and more reading materials at comparatively lesser cost of production.

The newspapers in Assam have to face the problem of newsprint shortage, non-availability of other printing materials and lack of trained personnel. While their cost of production is high, due to less advertisements
and less circulation, their income is less. This is more evident in case of the language newspapers in Assam. The fate of two so-called popular Assamese dailies, viz. the Santidoot edited by Mr. Devendra Nath Sarma and the Natun Assamiya edited for over forty years by the noted journalist Mr. Harendranath Barua was the same as both the dailies had to die because of financial problems.

At present, two Assamese dailies are thriving, the odds. One is the Dainik Asam from the Assam Tribune group, while the other, the Dainik Janambhumi, published from Jorhat by Mr. K.C. Sharma since 1973. Mr. Sharma who also owns the oldest Assamese weekly, the Janambhumi, is yet to own a modern printing press having the rotary machines. During 1977, the total circulation of the Dainik Janambhumi was 9,567 copies per day while that of the weekly Janambhumi 12,905 copies per week. (1)

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(1) 21st annual report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, 1977, page: 105
The circulations of both these papers are generally restricted among readers in Upper Assam and due to the three newspapers being published in better way by the Assam Tribune group from Guwhati, they failed to capture the market for readership in Lower Assam. The Dainik Asam which commands the highest readership in Assam is also being subscribed by readers from Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram.

By and large, the language dailies in Assam command very poor readership in India, the highest circulated daily is the Ananda Bazar Patrika in Bengali and published from Calcutta. "The Ananda Bazar Patrika, Bengali daily published from Calcutta with a circulation of 2,91,129 copies maintained its position as the largest circulated single edition daily newspaper in the country in 1976". (1)

Another English daily published from Guwhati is the Assam Express being edited by the proprietor

Mr Jibakanta Gogoi himself. Mr Gogoi who was earlier working with the Assamese daily, the Natun Assamiya, now dead, started publishing and editing first an English weekly. However, the weekly did not do well and he then ventured to publish the English daily from a rented house in Gauhati. The paper is still printed in a small hand composing press with bad printing and get-up. It is a regular 4-page daily enjoying few advertisements from State Government and also from DAVP quota. The paper first launched in 1973; the then Congress Government in Assam extended/encouraging financial backing since the Government stopped giving any advertisement to the major English daily, The Assam Tribune, on political grounds. Even then, the Assam Express failed to come up and its total circulation is hardly beyond 5000 per day.

Shillong, the present capital of Meghalaya, was having an English daily: The North East Mirror, first edited by Mr Ranjit Kumar Naug, who was also the editor of another Shillong English daily: The Frontier Times.
Both these Shillong English dailies stopped appearing mainly due to financial difficulties. The North East Mirror finally reappeared as a weekly under the editorship of Mr. W.K. Kyndiah, a young Khasi journalist, who is also the owner of the press and the paper. He also owns another weekly in Khasi language. Several English weeklies are still appearing from Shillong. They are: The Shillong Times, the Shillong Herald, the Shillong Observer, the Implanter and the Young India. All these weeklies are being owned and edited by the same persons. Their circulation hardly exceeds 2000 copies per week.

The very process of expansion of the newspaper industry in the entire north-eastern region is still on. However, due to the rising prices of all raw materials, no paper has come out during the last few years. The other English dailies being published from other places of the region are dailies in name—practically they don't appear daily. The growth of the industry as a whole in the region is discouragingly slow. The Assam Tribune group which has been publishing the three largest circulated papers is also
facing difficulties to run the papers properly. On several occasions, during last few years, the group failed to maintain regularity of all the three publications. The Assam Tribune which usually maintains a 6-page standard has to appear on many occasions with only four pages due to non-availability of adequate quota of newsprint.

The group has to collect its newsprint quota from Calcutta through the State Trading Corporation and then it has to bring the reels through road transport. Due to sudden difficulties in getting diesel throughout the country, the movement of newsprint between Calcutta and Gauhati through road transport has been affected, resulting in financial loss to the publishers. If the present state of affairs continued for a few more years, some of the newspapers in Assam and other parts of the region will have to face closure.

There was earlier a proposal to set up a STC newsprint distributing centre at Gauhati with a view to ease the situation; but the proposal is still to be materialised.
The idea of conformism comes when the newspaper organization itself is established on weak economic foundation. All the newspapers from the north-eastern region have to depend on Government patronage and as such there cannot be an escape from being conformist. The Assam Tribune group which enjoys a relatively sound economic footing, still has to depend on Government patronage. But the organization had to face more than once rough weather when the Assam Government either directly or indirectly stopped issuing any advertisement to its all three publications. During the period of Emergency, The Assam Tribune, the Dainik Asam and the Asam Bani were deprived of the Central Government advertisements which were being released through the DAVP. During those periods, the original sizes of these three publications had to be cut, sometimes even bringing out the publications only with four pages (in case of the two dailies).

The newsprint crisis which affected the newspaper industry of the entire country, and even of the world,
had severe effect on the newspaper industry of the north-eastern region. All the newspapers of this region had to cut their sizes and obviously it had damaging impact on their circulation. On the other hand the price of all the newspapers of the region had to be raised in view of the high cost of production. The usual Sunday magazines sections had to be put off and several other regular forums had to be disconnected due to shortage of space.

In 1973, the Assam Government stopped giving advertisements to the three publications of the Assam Tribune group without assigning any reason. The Journalists Union of Guwahati strongly criticised the Government action in stopping the advertisements to the group of newspapers. In a resolution the Union said that "such arbitrary action may irreparably harm the relationship existing between the Government and the Press which is vital to the functioning of democracy and may curb the right to freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitution."
The issue was even raised in the Assam Assembly on July 9, 1973. Replying to the question, the then Minister of State for Home, Mr. Hiteswar Saikia, said that the advertisements to The Assam Tribune and the Dainik Asam were restricted on grounds of economy. But the then Chief Minister Mr. Sarat Chandra Sinha intervened and said that the stoppage of advertisements was not only on grounds of economy, but also because the papers published news in such way as disturbed the peace in the State.(1)

The Assam Tribune described the Chief Minister's contention as "amazing" and said: "If the Chief Minister was convinced of the ground on which the advertisement to The Assam Tribune were stopped, the proper course for his Government was to bring specific charges against the paper before a court of law either under provisions of the Assam Specific Powers (Press) Act, 1960- the Act 3 of 1961- or any appropriate law of the land, say Section..."

(1) Proceeding of Assam Assembly: 9th July, 1973
Or the Government could have referred the alleged conduct of The Assam Tribune to the Press Council of India which is the proper body to give the right type of opinion on matter like this. Obviously the Government did not resort to either of these two courses open to it: on the contrary, it, by a sheer executive order, withdrew all Government advertisements, an action that has violated the Government of India's advertisement policy which is followed by and applicable to all State Governments. Indeed the Government does not possess any discretion to deny its advertisements to any paper unless the latter is guilty of preaching violence or similar offence proved before an appropriate body. The Government advertisements are, according to the policy laid down by the Government of India, not essentially or primarily a measure of financial assistance to newspapers. Since we are convinced fully that this paper has faithfully followed a sober policy on public affairs, the Assam Government by withdrawing its advertisements had committed a serious error of judgment constituting a real threat to the freedom of the
But the Assam Government headed by the then undivided Congress leader Mr Sarat Chandra Sinha did not pay any heed to such editorials and it continued its stand for about four years till the fall of the Congress regime both at the Centre and at the State after the Lok Sabha elections of 1977. The new Janata Government released all the advertisements to all the three papers belonging to the Assam Tribune group. The three papers which were deprived of the Central Government advertisements through the DAVP also started getting those advertisements. But the policy of both the State and the Central Governments had badly affected the economy of the organization. The proprietors could not take any bold steps against such pressure tactics of the Governments because its financial position was not so strong. So came the stage of conformism and this had affected not only the owners of the newspapers in Assam but also the working journalists who also failed to project the things in their correct perspectives.

The stage of conformism could be sensed in almost
the newspapers, both in English and other regional languages of the region due mainly to indirect pressure on the economically not-so-sound organizations. According to one senior journalist of Assam, "the newspapers in the State have played generally a negative role during the post-Independence period because the publishers are not financially sound to be bold enough. The newspapers in Assam are yet to become free and fearless in their role to uplift the cause of democracy."(1)

During the fifties and the sixties, the newspapers in the north-eastern region, had remained just like some light literary publications with more stress on publishing articles mostly other than political. The political articles, whatsoever published, were, by and large cooked up in such way as to please the establishment. The political reporting also remained consistent with mostly focussing of the speeches of the leaders. The socio-economic aspects of the people had been badly

left out in the reporting and as such there had not been much in-depth study of the prevailing political situation that had paved way for certain historic decisions or developments, like the reorganization of the entire north-eastern region in 1971. The political map of the region had been drastically changed during the last two decades; but not a single paper in the region could either foresee or assert its role on any major decision or development. They had remained either silent or just passive on-looker of such issues concerning the region.

During the post-Independence period, the newspapers in Assam seemed to have ignored the basic causes of the people living in the hills. This was because the then rulers of the undivided Assam belonged to the plains. These rulers from the plains wanted to overlook the idea that the leaders from the hills also could stake their claim to become the Chief Minister of Assam. What was more interesting to note was that some of the
leaders from the plains " even tried to establish their names by way of naming certain localities of Shillong,
then capital of Assam, after their names - like Bishnupur after the name of the former Assam Chief Minister Mr Bishnuram Medhi and Motinagar after the name of former Assam Minister Mr Motiram Bora." (1)

All these activities of the leaders from the plains angered the leaders of the hills and thus there in the hills started the movement for separatism which finally resulted in creation of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh out of the then Assam. In course of all these political developments, the newspapers of the region, particularly of Assam, failed to play their roles in proper way. The hopes and aspirations of the people living in the hills were not properly projected by the newspapers which remained busy only in pleasing the establishment for its patronage.

During the sixties, following the agitation launched by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference for a separate

(1) Role of Assamese Newspapers (article in Assamese)
Hill State, The Assam Tribune came up with an editorial with the caption: "Hill State Tangle" in which it said:

"The hill people would do realize that the opposition of the plains people to their demand for a separate State is entirely because of the latter's genuine anxiety to preserve what is left of Assam after Nagaland's severance and virtually Mizo Hill's now. If, however, hill leaders insist on their demand and New Delhi accedes to it under duress, the hill areas would be affected economically more than any area in the plains districts. Doubtless the Government of India, already burdened with liabilities because of the existence of a few economically unviable tiny States, will be a great sufferer too. Therefore, we would like to utter a word of warning to the policy-makers that, should Assam be further truncated, the State capital will have to be shifted from Shillong, an eventuality which will spell a great disadvantage to the hill people themselves, not to the people of the plains in any case."(1)

The then Chief Minister of Assam, the late Mr B.P. Chaliha, while talking to newsmen at Gauhati on January 11, 1967, made it clear that the Government is determined to oppose any proposal to disintegrate Assam which will jeopardise the security of the entire north-eastern region and if our views are ignored the entire responsibility of the consequences of disintegration will have to be borne by the Government of India. (1) This statement of the Chief Minister of then Assam was given prominent publicity by The Assam Tribune while generally ignoring the say of the hill leaders.

During the hill State movement, the newspapers in Assam seemed to have played a biased role, always favouring the cause of Assam. Not a single in-depth study on the various aspects of the cause of bifurcation was published by any newspaper in Assam. This obviously cast a reflection on the journalists working for the Assam newspapers; but indirectly it also showed the dependence

of the newspapers in Assam on the State Government on matters of such important political issues.

Despite the opposition of the newspapers in Assam, the Centre had created Meghalaya as a separate Hill State curving out of the two erstwhile districts of Assam. The fear expressed by the then Assam Chief Minister on matters of security is yet to be proved genuine and today nobody entertains such fear.

Again the apprehensions expressed editorially by The Assam Tribune, the premier English daily in the north-eastern region, on matters of impending economic crisis of the hill people following the shifting of the Assam capital from Shillong to Dispur have been found far from reality. Meghalaya people are not found complaining against the creation of separate Hill State out of Assam.

But it will be unfair to say that the anti-Hill State stand taken by the Assam newspapers was based more on emotions than on arguments. It was the decision of the then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi who had her own ideas on governing the different areas of the country.
aware of the fact that the north-eastern region as a whole was posing threats to the country's security by way of demands from the underground Nagas and Mizos for independence. Nagaland and Mizoram. Besides the underground elements were at work in Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura and even in the plains of Assam. The late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru also knew the problem well and his was the idea of winning over the tribals through love and affection.

Mr Nehru in his forward to Mr Verrier Elwin's book: "A Philosophy for NEFA", expressed fully his ideas saying: "We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take interest in them. In the world of today that is not possible or desirable. At the same time we should avoid over-administering these areas and, in particular, sending too many outsiders into tribal territory." He also outlined five fundamental principles to be pursued within broad framework for socio-economic development of the tribal areas. Mrs Gandhi tried to pursue those five-point formula and during her
11-year rule (first term) as the Prime Minister, she finally vivisected the north-eastern region through the North-Eastern Region Re-organization Act, 1971, into five States and two Union Territories although it is a known fact that the small States are not at all economically viable. But she must have taken into consideration what her father said: "We should judge results, not by statistics of the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved." (1)

The age of conformism continued with the newspapers in Assam as years rolled by and there had been more and more centralization of political powers during the last phase of the Congress regime under Mrs Gandhi. The newspaper industry in Assam as a whole is not at all economically stable. It has to depend on the Government patronage by way of advertisements through either the DAVP or the DIPR of the State Governments. But these advertisements are only possible if the newspapers could follow the dictates announced, directly or indirectly, by the

(1) Forward to "A Philosophy for NEFA", By
Government. The stage of conformism was therefore the result of economic dependence on the Government's favor. The Assam Tribune group had to lose such favor for more than once during the last two decades; but the economy of the organization could not entirely be shattered through such repressive measures since it was able to receive public sympathy in abundance. The readers and well-wishers of the organization extended all out support to it during those hard days. Had it been some other organization, the publications would have ceased by now.

As soon as the Emergency was proclaimed in the country on June 25, 1975, it was only the two newspapers of Assam, The Assam Tribune and the Dainik Asam, which came out with blank space meant for the editorials on the following day's issues and perhaps these two were the only newspapers in the entire country expressing resentment in such a way. This was definitely a rare feat exhibited by such regional papers on such a major national political development. What was surprising was that the big newspapers having nationa
standing could not dare come out in such a way.

During the days of Emergency, both these two papers were harassed up to the maximum limit by way of withdrawing all the advertisements due to them both from the State and the Central Governments, cutting usual quota of newsprint and imposing too much censorship on the news reports and editorials. The harassment came in different ways: sometimes through verbal dictations of certain Government officials whether to publish or not to publish certain news items, sometimes questioning the authority of the reporters and also the editors in publishing certain news, sometimes compelling the editors to publish certain news or articles in favour of the establishment, so on and so forth.

During the days of Emergency, all the copies of news items and also of the advertisements had to be sent to the censor office where the censor officials, mostly the officers in State Directorate for Information and Public Relations, used to give guidelines. The censor officials even sometimes used to keep certain copies of news items and articles for days.
together and sometimes copies of news items and advertisements even got lost during the transit. The editorials were minutely scrutinized and more often than not mutilated by the over-zealous censor officials.

The nightmare continued for over twenty months. The newspapers in Assam had to behave timidly and listen cowardly to any dictate from any censor official during that period. The newspapers had to follow the so-called code of ethics drawn up by a group of alleged editors and dished out to every newspaper office through the local office of the Press Information Bureau. The newspapers were forced to highlight the so-called "gains of Emergency". The Assam newspapers had to obey as the newspapers in the entire country behaved in the same manner.

It is true that the Press, by and large, submitted to the dictates of the establishment. But the Press is no more and no less blameworthy than the entire political system in the country which passively put up with the Emergency giving its perpetrators the notion that their handiwork had, in fact, been popular.
Fortunately or unfortunately, no journalist of Assam was arrested during the days of Emergency. This showed that the newspapers of Assam behaved properly during those days. But as soon as the Lok Sabha Polls were announced, the newspapers in Assam in general and The Assam Tribune and the Dainik Asam in particular, started a vigorous campaign although in an intelligent manner, to focus the case of the anti-Congressism. The Assam Tribune, almost regularly started publishing news items on how many left the Congress in the region. It went on highlighting the case of the Janata Party and also of the Congress for Democracy in the region. It tried to explain to its readers that this time the voters had a very crucial role to play in order to safeguard democracy in the country. The language newspapers in Assam, particularly the Dainik Asam and the Asam Bani (Assamese weekly from the Assam Tribune group), played a significant role in moulding the mind of the people during the Lok Sabha elections in 1977.
Commenting on the election scene during 1977 in the hill areas of the north-eastern region, an edit-page article in the Assam Tribune said as follows: "The hill areas of the north-east, particularly Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram will witness tough fight in the coming Lok Sabha elections between the candidates belonging to the Congress and the regional parties..... The tribals in the hills of the region are, by and large, keen and very careful on election issues. This was evident when there was 78.75 per cent turnout of voters in Nagaland's elections during 1969 and that was the highest turnout by far in any Indian State."

The article went on: "Considered still to be a new party, the Congress is yet to make a distinct impact in the hill areas of the north-east although in Arunachal Pradesh it is still the only party to reckon with..... But in areas like Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram, the Congress faces tougher challenge than ever before. This is not only because of the
fact that the Congress has not yet established its stronghold in these areas but also because the tribal electorates in the hill have become very shrewd with experiences of the past and they are still to get completely rid of the attachment they developed towards the regional political parties. They have come to know this time that the present poll is quite unlike any other the country has gone through so far. It was generally believed that with Mrs Gandhi's addressing the public meetings in three places in the hills, the wind would start blowing in favour of the Congress. But evidently it was not so."

(1)

The Assamese weekly, the Asam Bani, which commands the largest circulation in the region, in its editorials and weekly political commentaries also tried to explain to its readers that this time the so-called "Indira Wave" was missing and the voters would judge the rulers for the damage done to the institution of democracy during the days of Emergency.

The post-Emergency stage of the newspapers industry in Assam has again been a period of expansion. With the new Janata Government installed both at the Centre and in Assam, the newspapers in the State started enjoying complete freedom of expression and there was no discrimination done by the Janata Government to any newspaper in Assam during the short span of its rule.

The Assam Tribune group of newspapers again started giving all the advertisements both from the Central and the State Governments and as such its overall economy started taking new shape. The Assam Tribune started giving regularly six pages and weekly twice or thrice eight pages. It also started publishing the Sunday magazine section which remained suspended for several years due to shortage of newsprint.

During the period of Emergency, the editor of The Assam Tribune, Mr Satis Ch. Kakati, retired and the Assistant editor, Mr Bobindra Nath Barooah, took over charge. Mr Barooah is the third editor of the paper. He started his journalistic career with the paper first as Sub-editor in 1954. As editor he started taking keen interest in
development of the paper. He also immediately faced a challenge when the All Assam Students' Union along with the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad launched a mass movement demanding detection of foreign nationals in Assam, deletion of their names from the electoral rolls and their deportation. Mr Barcede as the editor of The Assam Tribune showed his mettle during this crucial period beginning from December, 1979.

The AASU and the AAGSP piloted the entire movement in such a way that the Lok Sabha election, 1980, could not be held in twelve out of 14 seats in Assam. Similarly, the election could not be held in one of the two seats in Meghalaya where the students launched similar movement. The students in Assam suffered a lot during the movement, their leaders had talks with the Prime Minister Mrs Gandhi and the Union Home Minister Mr Zail Singh; but till the writing of this piece, there was no settlement as the Central leaders are still unprepared to accept 1951 as the base year for determination of foreign nationals in Assam.

The Assam Tribune and the Dainik Asam are the two major
newspapers which are mainly responsible for consolidating
the movement in Assam on the issue of foreign nationals. Both
the papers went on publishing a series of articles
and news items espousing the cause. The Assam Tribune published
several articles giving details about the alarming problem
of Bangladeshi nationals in the State.

The other newspapers in Assam also equally played vital
role in projecting the issue. The Dainik Janabhumi, Assamese
daily published from Jorhat, published a series of articles
written by a number of scholars, detailing the problem created
by the Bangladeshi nationals in Assam. One article published
by the daily even tried to explain why there was election
in two Lok Sabha seats in Cachar district of Assam.

Although the newspaper industry in Assam is free from any
pressure at the moment and it has been enjoying improved
financial situation, the latest rise in prices of all raw
materials, including the shortage of petroleum products, has
again affected its process of growth. The industry has to
survive on raw materials which are to be brought from Calcutta.
either by road transport or by rail. The cost of transport has equally gone up affecting the overall growth of the newspaper industry in Assam. However, during the period of the problem of foreign nationals, the circulation of all the newspapers has suddenly gone up. The circulation of The Assam Tribune and the Dainik Assam has shown an unusual rise during this period.

The future of the newspaper industry in Assam cannot be uncertain since there has been gradual growth of literacy. It can easily be expected that the newspapers in Assam will command bigger circulation in days to come. More and more young boys and girls are also taking interest in journalism as a career and it can be hoped that in future the newspapers will be able to get trained or efficient staff to produce better newspapers for the readers.