CONCLUSION

The scenario of the civic life of Hailakandi town began to be affected by different dimensions of administrative problems unleashed with the perpetual growth in population and continuous process of shifting rural population towards the urban centers. The environmental change put the available civic services to severe strain. The extension of Municipal limits and overgrowing public requirements for more and better facilities of housing, water supply, sewer, sanitation conservancy etc, further complicating the problems, stretched the functions and responsibilities of the urban administration to a breaking point. Last the exigencies of the situation should lead to qualitative and quantitative deterioration in the existing civic amenities. Moreover, certain loopholes existed in the system of Municipal administration from the beginning.

The historical background, community relationship, socio-economic condition, cultural considerations, religious ideologies and political interests were the effective variables involved deeply in the articulation of leadership pattern.

The numerical strength of Municipality belonged to Middle Income Group. The poor class representation was on the decline mainly for the reason they could not afford the election expansenses and the political parties generally fielded those who had enough money to spend on election campaign.

The occupation-wise break-up of the town fathers shows a persistent decrease in the representation of land owners and increase in that of
professionals and business. As far as the domination and control over the civic body is concerned, it was concentrated in the hands of landed magnates and businessmen, throughout the period under study.

Regarding the female representation the study reveals that there was no female representation till 1991. In 1992 the first female commissioner was elected. The female representation in the Municipal board has been overwhelmingly increased in 1997 election when out of 10 wards, 5 wards elected female commissioner under the reservation of seats as provided by the 74th Constitution Amendment. But in spite of this the study reveals that women awareness is far from satisfactory.

The political situation of the 1997 Municipal Board revealed a peculiar style of voting behavior and nature of leadership, which is a distinctive feature of recent Municipal Politics. Equal number of commissioners from B.J.P. and Congress were elected. As a result there was deadlock in the formation of the Board, ultimately leading to prolonged supersession. The year 1999 brought forth a few defectors, three in number, the trend setter of the civic politics. Defecting from their party, the B.J.P. they joined the Congress and thereby paved the way for the formation of new Board.

The Municipal institutions live and thrive on the initiative of bureaucracy or civic personnel. In comparison to the representative wing, the religious-wise break up of the administrative wing presents quite a compact set up, having consistently at least 90% Hindus throughout the period under study. The strength of Muslim remained nominal. The Cast-wise distribution shows that the bureaucracy was perpetually dominated by General Cast-Hindu whose strength remained always above 80% throughout the last 35 years. However, the predomination of the same caste group in both the wings, to a great extent, maintain a working political relationship between the two.
The work culture is declining and an element of permissiveness has grown in administration. The transaction of illegal incentives has engulfed the organizational behavior. The code of disciplinary action serves no remedial function due to political and other interferences in administration.

The administration of the Board was fairly efficient. But for a long time there was no popular participation in the administration of the Board. During 1963-69 and again in 1987-90 there was ad-hoc Board. The Chairman was Government nominee during 1963-69 i.e. the then Sub-divisional Officer (Civil) and during 1987-90 the Chairman was Government nominated person. The members were ex-officio and nominated. During the periods of suppressions there was the Executive Officer appointed by the State Government.

The principle of adult-franchise has not been introduced for Municipal Election. While the members of panchayats are elected by adult-franchise, the town dwellers have no right to elect representatives. Franchise is restated to those who pay tax. There is limited franchise. The town dwellers have the right to elected the members of Parliament and State Legislative Assembly but not the Municipal Commissioners. This is no doubt a political anachronism which must be done away with. Recently the Assam Government has decided to grant voting rights to all those Indian citizens who have attained 18 years of age living in urban areas, in all Municipality and Town Committee elections irrespective of their being rate payers or not. The Assam Municipal (Amendment) Act, 2003 has made universal adult franchise possible in the Municipal election of the state.

The office of the Chairman after it was thrown open at election, was filled up by ordinary man with one exception. Sri Keshab Chandra Chakroborty who was elected as Chairman for the first Chairman for the first two consecutive terms and acquired fame for his contribution to the development of human happiness. He is a notable example of what a Chairman ought to be. But at
present good man are not seeking election to the office. As a consequence, there is deterioration in the administration of the board.

The Chairmen were drawn from Hindu Community. The General Cast Hindu dominated this office. There is provision of women reservation of the office of Chairman, but in the board under study the office is not reserved for woman. Man who have had some administrative experience as members were elected to the office. Half of the elected Chairmen could not complete full terms. Only one was removed from the office by the Commissioners.

It is suggested that no one shall be eligible for re-election for a second term. The idea behind this suggestion is that the Chairmanship is a post of honour, dignity and prestige. He is the first citizen of the town and popularly known as Town/City Farther. Therefore, it should be available for a greater member of persons. The term of Mayors of Guwhati Municipal Corporation is one year. Similarly, the Chairman should hold office for a single term of five years.

The Assam Municipal Act of 1956 provides for the removal of the Chairman. A Chairman removed by the Government should not be eligible for re-election. When the Government removes a Chairman it should have been for valid reason. The purpose of removing a Chairman from office is defeated if a board re-elects the person removed from Chairmanship.

As regards the membership of the board, there is no adequate information to arrive at any conclusion. But it must be admitted that there has been some amount of decline in the quality of members. It is due to the fact that good man decline to be the members of the Board. The Ex-officio member i.e. M.P. and MLA has no interest in Municipal affairs. The study reveals that they never attended Board's meeting. They have no role in civic administration. So, they should be replaced by government nominated members having special knowledge in Municipal Government as provided by the statute.
The list of qualifications of the members (commissioners) of the Municipal board is not comprehensive. In order to keep out the undesirable person and at the same time maintain the independence of the members it is suggested that all persons should be excluded from the membership of the board if he is not a voter, if he has been convicted of an offence involving moral turpitude. The Assam Municipal Amendment Act, 2003, made declaration by a candidate on his/her antecedents and property in the form of affidavit, mandatory.

The administrative area of Municipal board has been determined not on any scientific basis. But it must be admitted that viable units were not easy to be determined due to difficulties such as uneven nature of landscape. The Assam Municipal Act 1956, Section II fixes the minimum and the maximum number of commissioners of the Municipal Board at 10 and 30 respectively. The State Government determines the strength of the Board from time to time. There is no uniform principles of determination of the strength of the board. It is, therefore, suggested that population should be the principal factor that ought to be taken into account in the determination of the strength of the board. The number of commissioners must be determined according to population. The minimum population for a Municipal board may be 10,000 and there may be one commissioner for every 2000 people and the maximum strength of a board may be 30 members. In case of Gauhati Municipal Corporation it is decided to have one councillor for every 7,500 population subject to the maximum of 60 members.

The urban self-government to be effective must have a strong committee system. There should be a number of standing committees. But in practice the urban civic body is to transact all business in the Board Hall. As a result, several items on the agenda are not discussed or hurriedly discussed. So, the Municipal board should constitute a number of standing committees for all major subjects.
Besides standing committees there should be a co-ordination committee for co-
ordination of the activities of various committees.

It is observed that in most case the member serves on most of the committees. Committees are very important and if one and the same member works on the same committee he is likely to do injustice to the ratepayers. So, it is suggested that one member should not serve on more than two committees.

The kingpin of Municipal administration is the Executive Officer. The efficiency of municipal administration depends on him. But there is no permanent executive officer in the Board. During suppression of the Board Executive Officer is appointed temporarily. So, there should be a permanent Executive Officer which is favoured by all the Municipal employees as the survey reveals. The Executive Officer should be non-political, permanent and professional. He is to be selected by the Assam Public Service Commission and appointed after giving necessary training in the Assam Administrative Staff College for the purpose. The appointment of permanent Executive officer does not mean that the political executive will cease to exit. But there will be division of functions between them. The Chairman will concern himself with the deliberative and policy-making functions and the executive officer will concern himself with the executive functions.

It has been observed that more than 80% of the revenues collected is spent on the establishment. As a result the rate payers are not provided with minimum needs. It is, therefore, suggested that the establishment should be downsized as far as possible. Civic services should be maintained by local taxes. Government grants should not be given for the maintenance of establishment.

It has also been observed that there is no real control over the Municipal board. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner can not provide effective supervision of the Board. The Municipal Board is, therefore, left to itself to a great extent. Sometimes even the Government orders are not properly implemented.
Though a Director, Municipal Administration has been appointed, but he has not been given enough powers to deal with municipal board. So, it is suggested that there must be rigid state control and supervision over the Municipal Board.

The Municipal Board derives its income mainly from taxes and fees. At present most of the householders pay taxes at the rate as assessed 20-25 years ago. The rate of tax is minimum. So, it is suggested that such houses should be reassessed and fresh tax should be imposed. The existing machinery for the assessment of house tax is not satisfactory. The Chairman and the Commissioners are not the persons that should be entrusted with this function. Allegation have been made that the assessment were not fair and even. Efficient financial administration contemplates that it must be divorced from politics and should be administered by persons who have specified knowledge in this work. It is, therefore, suggested that the general principles to be observed in the assessment of property should be framed by the Director of Municipal Administration. Appeals against the assessment of house tax should be submitted to the Objection Committee (Review Committee). The State Government should appoint a board of assessors for the whole state for the equal revision of tax. If this suggestion is not acceptable some special officer who is conversant with real property taxation should be appointed for revision of taxes.

The municipal authority is not able to enforce the penal provisions of the Act for the collection of taxes for obvious reasons. As a result, the collection of taxes is very poor. There is no incentive for prompt payment. Demand notice are not issued in time. It is, therefore, suggested that the demand notices may be not yearly but half yearly. If payment is not made written 15 days from the date on which notice is issued penal provisions must be used of. If it is paid within due date a rebate may be given.
In order to improve the financial conditions of Municipal Board it is suggested that the Municipal Board should be authorized to levy and collect certain new taxes it deems necessary. At present the property of the Union Government enjoys immunity from local taxation. This system may continue. But the Union Government may be requested to make certain contributions to the local bodies in which property is situated in lieu of taxes as practised in Great Britain. Regarding commercial enterprises of the Union Government they should pay to the Municipal Boards full tax instead of making any contribution in lieu of taxes.

It is also suggested that a portion of the land revenue levied and collected by the State Government should be assigned to the Municipal Board. There should be a proper assessment of the resources by taxation of the Municipal Board. Then there should be assessment of the needs of the Municipal Board and its cost. The difference between the total income and total expenditure should be paid by the Government. The financial relation between the board and the Government should be yearly reviewed. The recommendations of the first State Finance Commission should be implemented in letter and spirit.

It may also suggested that the urban local body should establish effective relationship with the public. At present there is practically nothing of the kind. So, the general ignorance and apathy about civic administration is not surprising. Urban local administration can justify its existence only when it can induce the citizen to evince interest in its activities. Therefore, every urban local body must enable the ratepayers to understand that his interest in local administration does not end with dropping of the ballot paper once in five years. The fact that not even 50% of the voters do not do that even indicates their apathy towards the administration. It is, therefore, necessary that urban local body must develop effective public relations.
To sum up it may be said that the town has faced acute civic problems. There is malfunctioning of the existing organizational set up coupled with the leadership crisis. It is said that one may judge the efficiency of civic government by testing its water supply. In case of Hailakandi this is true. The town lacks an efficient civic administration. The civic body could not gain much success in fulfilling the growing public requirements of more and better civic amenities like sufficient drinking water, road, streetlight, conservancy etc. The general people of the town are not at all satisfied with the working of the Municipal Board and the services rendered by it. The Board does not run things well at all. The Board has no significant image among the general people. There is gap between the general civic services rendered by the Municipal Board and the services expected by the people of the town. The general feeling in the public is that the Municipal Board is not competently able to discharge the duties assigned to it. The municipal board is not able to play any role in town development.

The present day urban crisis is a great pointer to many ills and weakness of our present day urban administration. Both the success stories as well as failures, as case-studies, can provide valuable lessons.

**Recommendations:** It is not easy to frame a set of recommendations to tone up urban administration to be more democratic, decentralized and pro-people. However, some salient points are proposed for consideration. These points may be regarded as a package for rebuilding the Urban Local Bodies:

**Strengthening of financial base of the ULB:** Necessary financial avenues – tax and non-tax must be provided to the Urban Local Bodies in such a way that a balance of functional responsibilities and finances is maintained.

**Refurbishing the financial administration:** The accounting, budget and taxation aspects of the ULBs need special attention. The existing accounting and
budgeting procedures have become back-dated and mostly remain in formality. Necessary reforms should be brought out in the accounting practices and budget so that the entire exercise becomes purposeful, performance oriented and useful. The tax administration should also be streamlined.

**Focusing on HRD requirements:** The human resource aspect has been a much neglected aspect in the local government system in India. In the face of fast urban growth, the personnel in Urban Local Bodies must be well equipped and properly trained to meet the emerging challenges in terms of planning, execution, financing, co-ordinating and involvement of the people.

**Building information system:** In the context of emerging information technology, the ULBs also must be developed based on the changing needs of the urban communities. Urban data on various dimensions must be documented regularly and database should be computerized for its multiple applications and effective monitoring.

**Performance improvement:** The ULBs carry a very bad image among the urban communities due to their inabilities, inefficiency and corruption. Their performance, thereof, should be improved, at least on par with other government organizations. This will also facilitate more devolution of functional responsibilities to the ULBs. The techniques like performance rating, which has been introduced recently in Andhra Pradesh, should be applied to encourage competitive performance among the ULBs.

**Fostering partnerships and networking:** In the age of globalisation, liberalisation and privatization, the present catch-words across the globe, ULBs must develop appropriate strategies for working together with private entrepreneurs, non-governmental and voluntary organizations and with other sister public organizations at the one end, and the local communities and self-
help groups at the other end. In the resource scarce situation of the developing countries, this has become inevitable and demanding.

**Coping with natural disasters:** The ULBs have to play a key role in managing the natural disaster like cyclones, floods, draughts, and earthquakes. They should be well equipped in terms of resources and techniques for providing temporary shelter, food, health-care, etc., to meet such situations in an effective manner.

**Accountability to people:** Accountability to people should be the primary responsibility of administration, which can be fulfilled to a great extent by informing the people, motivating their co-operation, redressing their grievances, catering to their needs more satisfactorily and above all developing a clean and transparent administration that could win their constant appreciation as well as confidence. These are invaluable virtues for any urban administration to cherish.

**Formation of ward development Fund:** The scheme of commissioners’ Ward Development Fund like MP’s Local Area Development Scheme and MLA’s Area Development Scheme should be introduced. This type of scheme has already been introduced in Zilla Parishad. The scheme will help to develop the municipal area.

**Formation of Citizen’s Council:** The Citizen’s Council can be formed to monitor the activities and performance of Urban Local Bodies. It will play a role to involve citizens in development activities, to arise awareness, develop healthy civic sense in our citizens by holding group discussions in various parts of the town, public discussion on matters of interest to the citizens as well as by making available in vernacular the rules and regulations relating to their rights, duties and responsibilities as citizens of the town.
Vision for Development: The town must have vision statement for its development in the next 50 years. The vision statement must take into account the projected growth rate of the population, the aspirations of the citizens and realistic aspects of economic growth and resource allocation, the capacity to absorb changes and above all the impact of modernity in the urban ecology over the period of time. The new master plan for the town on the basis of the 'cardinal principles' that might be laid down in the vision statement. Besides, the transparency in the process of the finalization of the master plan must be ensured for its easy acceptability and it should also reflect the phases of development priorities.

The passing of 74th Constitution Amendment Act marks a water-shade in the history of decentralization in India as the Urban Local Bodies receive a constitutional mandate. The move was initiated to limit the hegemony of the state governments over Local Bodies, devolution of powers and opportunity for planning at the grass-root level. The 74th Amendment is the first serious attempt to make the Government accessible to the urban people. The Act is real Megna Carta of Urban Local Government in India. It tries to reorient the planning effort from the "top-down" to a "bottom up" approach. While it widens the scope of public participation, several questions remain unanswered and eventually it depends on the political will of state government to make it function effectively.

In urban centers the crisis accentuated due to sub-standard living. The first imperative is to provide meaningful jobs, furnishing decent incomes that give meaning and dignity to life. Jawaharlal Nehru has the prescience when he suggested: "We must provide for the basic necessities, in particular, for good work, opportunity for education, reasonable health care and sanitation, improved living conditions (shelter), minimum level of income which will ensure tolerable living standards".

Given the Indian context and its democratic secular polity, a basic imperative before planners and policy-makers in the coming decades will provide meaningful employment to 4-5 million new entrants to the labour force every year. In my view: (a) Urban development (b) Provision of housing (shelter) (c) appropriate modes of transportation that includes constitution of road and
transit lines and (d) the development of basic infrastructure (water supply, sanitation, solid waste collection and disposal) together provide enormous potential to furnish meaningful employment to large number of people. However, the planning and management of the situation demand fresh thinking, innovative approaches and new methodologies. There is still time to think and plan the future in a careful and sensitive manner, pursuing alternatives for "Sustainable Development". In this quest, one must develop a genuine understanding of the country's unparalleled heritage and look beyond tomorrow with renewed respect for local vernacular forms. So far, however, little research had been undertaking on how to address the issue of employment, illiteracy, shelter, poverty and environmental pollution in an integrated manner.

In short, we must regain our ability to dream, because without dreams there cannot be new ideas or vision. And without ideas, no planning is possible. As a dreamer extra-ordinaire, the scientist and the president of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam urged: To Dream, Dream and Dream. Turn dreams into thoughts and thoughts will transform into action.

As we look forward, planning and development demand redefinition, one which explicitly acknowledges the spatial dimension in its myriad manifestations at various levels and scales, where future of the Indian habitat, rural and urban, is articulated on principles that provide not just the economic growth in conventional sense, but social equity ensuring quality of life which provides dignity to every one.

Finally, as Jawharlal Nehru exhorted: Do not limit your vision. You must think of things ahead and think of the future, because there is no journey's end when a nation is marching. The important thing is to take the first step with confidence and courage and faith in India's destiny.