
Reportage of Environmental Issues by Print Media: A Study of the Two Dailies with Reference to Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The State of Arunachal Pradesh in the Eastern Himalayas of India is among the 200 globally important eco regions. Environmental protection is the practice of protecting the natural environment by individuals, organizations and governments. The Government of India views the State as a powerhouse and an opportunity to bring in economic benefits and employment generation for the natives however, there also lays a matter of serious apprehension and conflict. The 26 major tribes and ethnic groups (2011 census) whose life and identity are tied to the land of this region view these hydropower projects as a threat that will alter the ecological and cultural landscape and create displacement and rehabilitation concerns. In this regard, the media of the State has a significant role to play to educate the masses on the pros and cons of the hydropower projects. The study employed content analysis of two dailies viz 'Echo of Arunachal' and 'The Times of Arunachal' to analyze the role of print media in communicating about the environmental issues in the state.

Introduction

Climate change can affect everyone and the ramifications are visible by the variation in temperatures and an increase of intense natural disasters.

In the midst of the entire globe enthralled in the fatal COVID -19 pandemic 2020, the Union environment ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) had resorted to take a call on granting

clearance to a hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley on April 23, 2020. A proposal that was long pending since 2014.

While the Dibang valley in Arunachal Pradesh is earmarked as one of the most biodiverse Himalayan zones but ironically the proposed 3,097 MW Etalin Hydroelectric Project is estimated to involve diversion of 1150.08 hectares of forest areas and felling of 2.7 lakh trees categorized under the "subtropical evergreen broad-leaved and subtropical rainforest".

The announcement of the decision by the various media platform brought about a lot of outcry from various sections of the society. Not only did the hydropower project gathered national support but also received a lot of regional and national media attention via electronic and print media. Twitter hash tag like the #Save Dibang Valley had also begun to take the top three spots in the trending topics.

Materials and Methods

To fulfill the objectives of the study, following research method was adopted.

■ Content Analysis

To understand the framing of environmental issues by media, the study conducted content analysis of news articles relating to environmental issues in Arunachal Pradesh. Although there are various media of communication available, the study selected the newspapers in particular because of its credibility and authenticity. Hence, in these context two local dailies namely the *Echo of Arunachal (1988)* - the first newspaper of the state and *The Arunachal Times (1989)* - the most popular and widely circulated newspaper were considered.

The proposed study was conducted for a period of three months and divided into two time frame, i.e., April 1, 2016 to June 30, 2016 during which Arunachal Pradesh had witnessed a huge anti-dam protest movement in Tawang resulting in loss of two precious lives in police firing. The second proposed period, April 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020 during which the Union environment Ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) had resorted to take a call on granting clearance to a hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley on April 23, 2020. The aforementioned proposal was long pending since 2014. The announcement of the decision by the various media platform in the form of reports and articles brought about a lot of outcry from various sections of the society. Not only did the hydropower project gathered national support but also received a lot of regional and national media attention via electronic and print media.

Review of Literature

There is a great deal of literature regarding the significance of environmental protection and conservation issues over the past few decades and role of mass media. A great deal of what most people hear about environmental issues such as the greenhouse gas effect, global warming, ozone layer depletion, water stress, air pollution, and environmental threats like global climate change, is likely to come from the annals of mass media like radio, TV, newspapers and new media (*Shanahan, et. al., P7, 1997*).

Media exposure has a direct impact on the knowledge and perception of an individual. Research studies across the globe suggest that attention to news media about global warming increases public knowledge and concern about the issue (*Zhao, 200929; Stamm et al, 200030; Krosnick et al, 200631*). Deepak Upadhyaya (2018) cites that there exists a significant association between level of use of mass media and being “not at all informed” about different issues of climate change.

Climate change communication literature reveals that media can influence both public opinion and policy outcomes at all levels whether it be in national or international spheres (*Pavone, 2010*)⁶². The media is a mechanism of information diffusion in the society and it has been a diffuser of information regarding climate change ever since the mid twentieth century.

The *Mc Comas* and *Shanahan* (1999) also emphasize that media reporting is as important an element in shaping the climate change debate as exogenous factors such as natural disasters.

Bord et al (2000) find that increased understanding of the climate change issue motives people towards action. As *Bisht* (2010) explains ‘voices and the rationale of the anti-dam groups fail to influence the policy makers on dam-building in Arunachal Pradesh’ due to the external and internal constraints such as Indian Government strategic importance of state transboundary water rights and diversion of Brahmaputra by China.

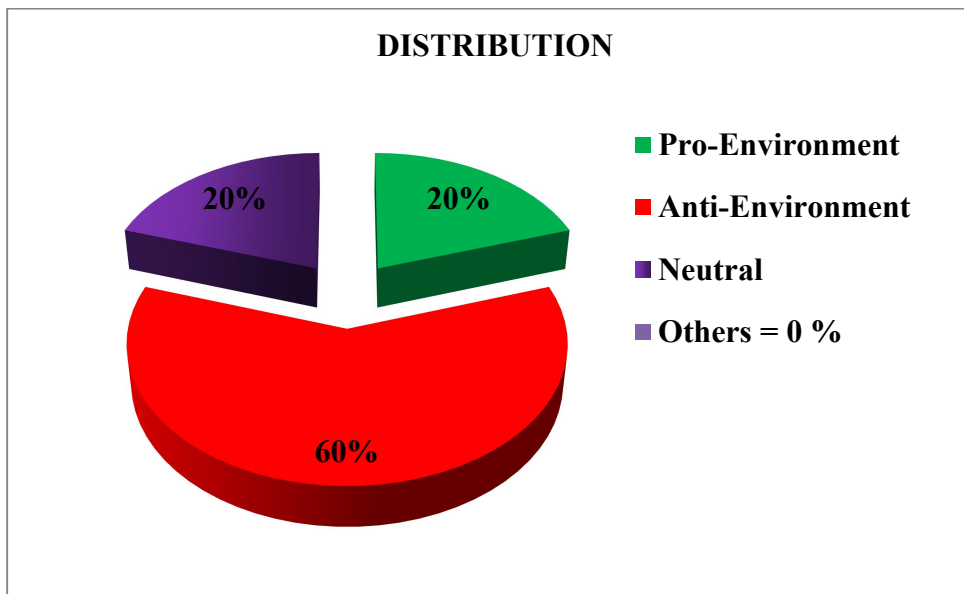
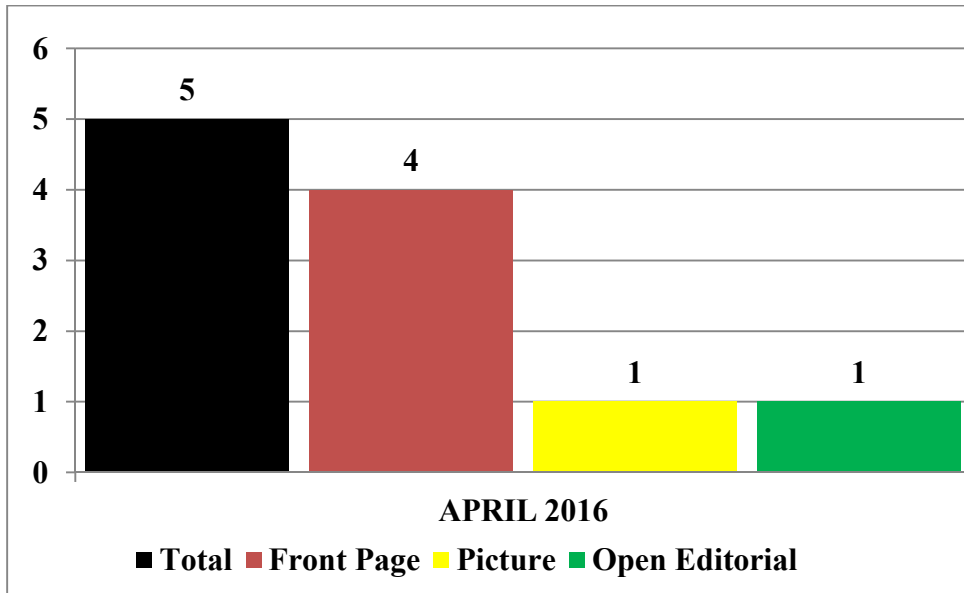
From the above mentioned few studies it is evident that media plays a pivotal role in communicating about the environment to the masses. However, there have been many environmental debates in the past and in recent times, not many attempts have been made to study the importance of environmental communication in Arunachal Pradesh. The present study is an attempt to fill in this gap.

Results

The study covered the collection of news, articles and features of the *Echo of Arunachal* and *The Arunachal Times*. All environmental related articles, news items were collected over a selected 90 days period in the month of April, May, June’ 2016 and 2020 purposively.

Graph 1: Category wise distribution of news reports published in Echo of Arunachal for April-2016

ECHO OF ARUNACHAL



The above figure indicates that in the month of April 2016 reported 60% anti-environmental, 20% pro-environmental and 10% neutral news with 1(one) open editorial on solid waste management.

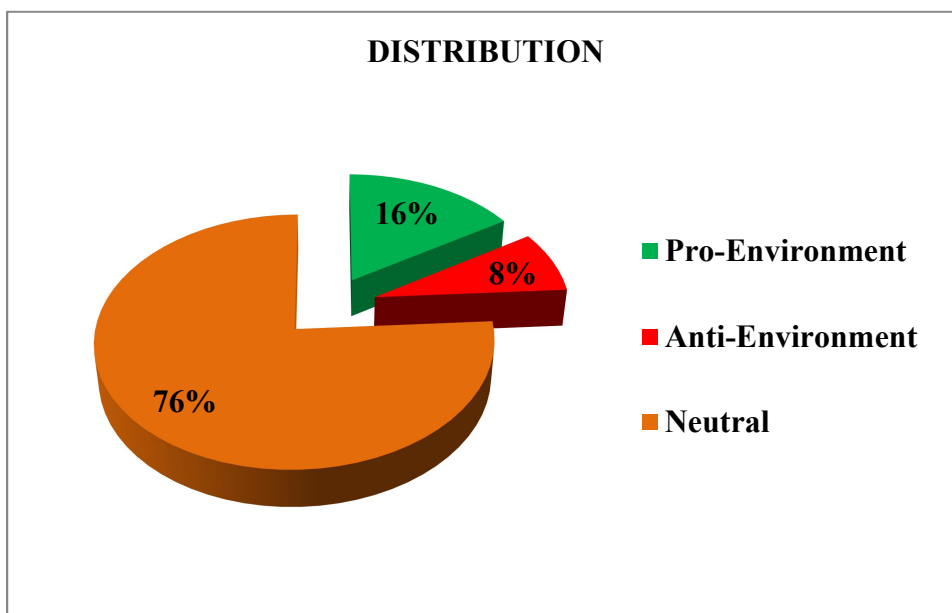
Anti Environment news: Government notifications focused on restoration of micro hydels and harnessing the hydropower capabilities of the state to its full potential. An article with the headline “Pul

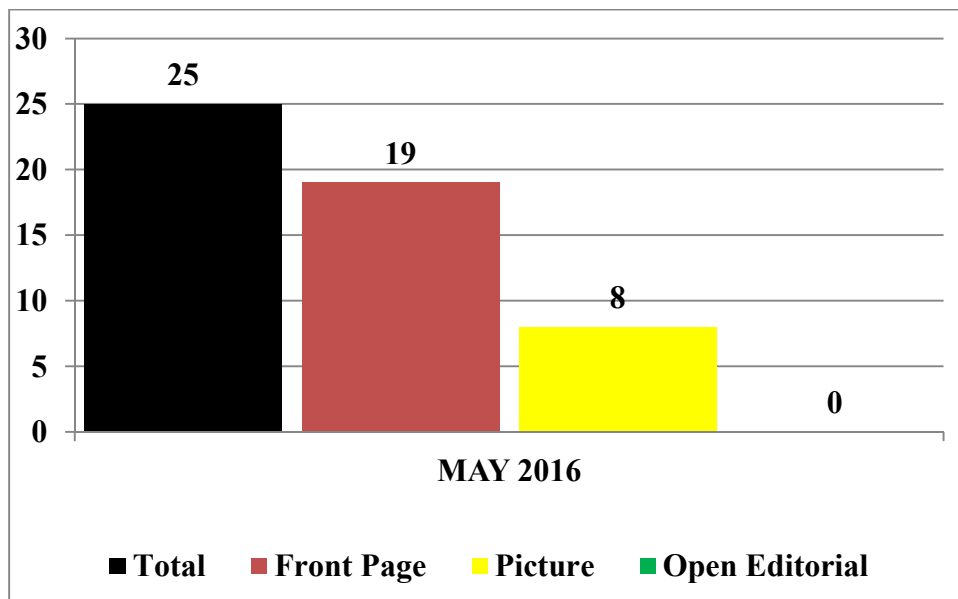
meets Javadekar, pitches for single window clearance to expedite power projects execution” wherein the State Govt. requested the centre to delink basin studies from forest clearance has been categorized as anti-environment as single window clearance could ignore the possible danger it pose to ecosystem and environmental.

Although there were ongoing protest against the development of hydropower projects in Mon region of Tawang by Save Mon Region federation, there were just fewer articles reported in the month of April, 2016. Most of the reporting were not in favour of the environment, as it can be seen from the graph. It is persistent to mention here that The Echo of Arunachal did not carry/publish any story regarding the arrest of one Lama Lobsang Gyatso, General Secretary of Save Mon Region Federation in the month of April.

Graph 2: Category wise distribution of news reports published in Echo of Arunachal for May 2016

ECHO OF ARUNACHAL





The above figure for the month of May 2016 reported 8 % anti-environmental, 16% pro-environmental and 76% neutral news.

Neutral articles: The articles were follow-up of Tawang Firing incident; Organizations/Unions were seeking free and fair investigation along with adequate compensation to the victims of the incident.

Four pro environment reports focused on sustainable development, plantation programs, biodiversity celebrations and MoU signed for free plastic zones.

Two anti environmental reports; the Chief Ministers showed willingness to expedite the development of pending hydropower projects while in the other article Parliamentary Secretary’s press for early restoration of damaged hydels. Both the articles were primarily focusing on developmental aspect and did not delve into any negative impact on environment.

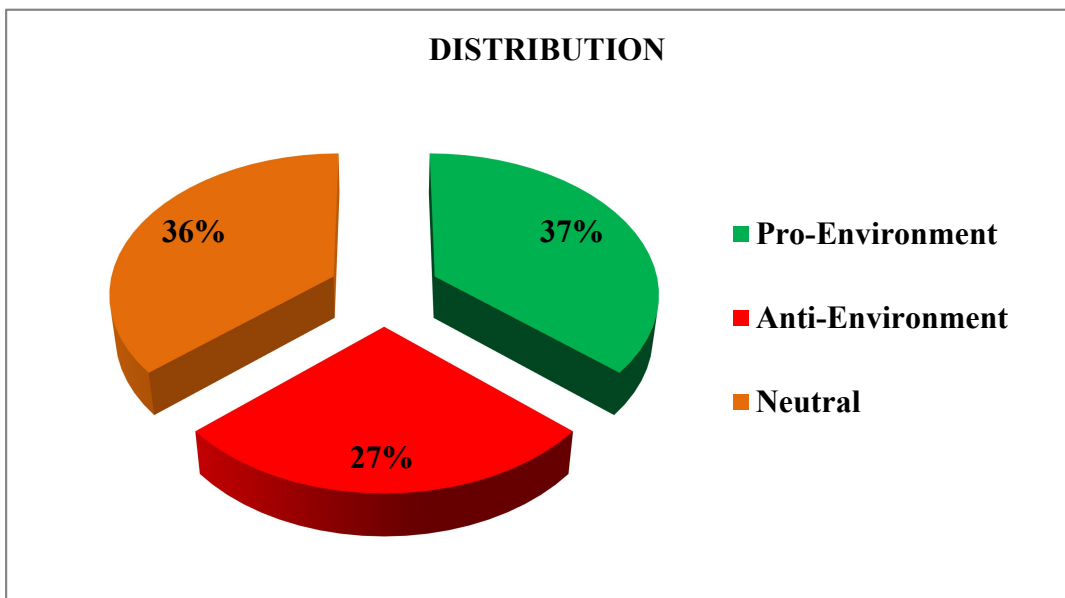
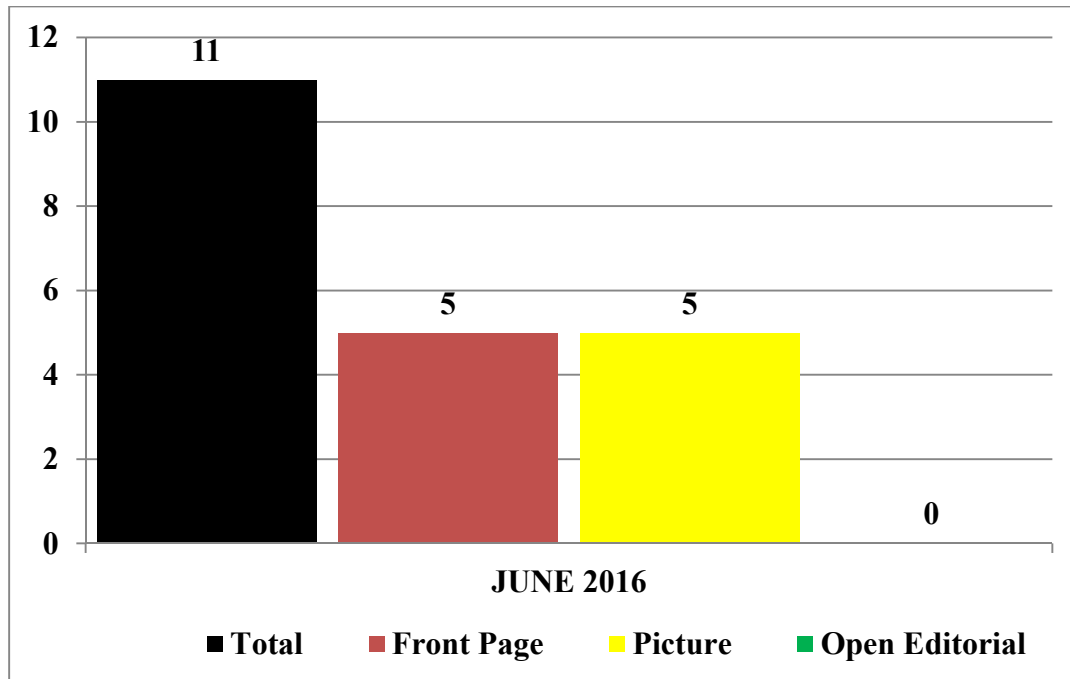
This month witness a protest on 2nd May, 2016 carried out by Save Mon Region Federation police were called in to control the protester and mob. During the event, the police resorted to firing in which two individuals were killed and several injured.

Due to the above event, there was a drastic surge in the number of environmental related publication in the Echo of Arunachal, 25 reports compared to just 5 in the preceding month of April. This month also witnessed more pro-environment related reports compared to April.

However, the overall reports of the month were fundamentally neutral (76% of the total reports published) in nature.

Graph 3: Category wise distribution of news reports published in Echo of Arunachal for June 2016

ECHO OF ARUNACHAL



The above figure for the month of June 2016 reported 28% anti-environmental, 36% pro-environmental and 36 % neutral news.

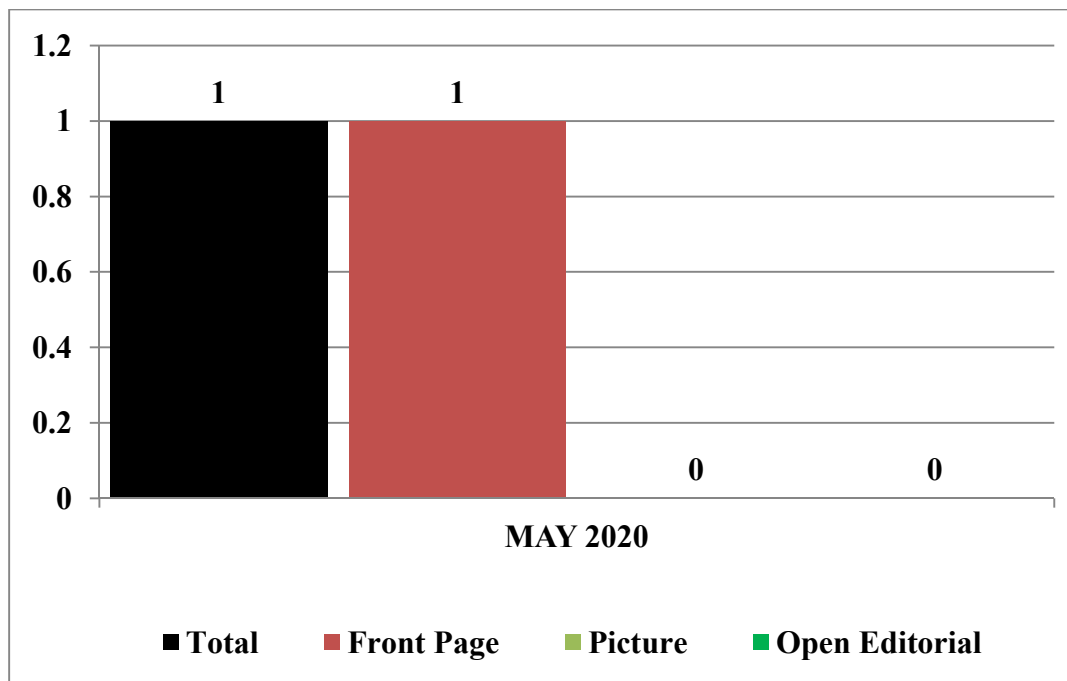
This month reported equal percentage of pro environment and neutral news. However, the pro-environmental news was mere reports of World Environment Day celebration and tree plantation drive. The anti environmental articles were reported wherein Niti-Aayog and Centre were keen on extending support in developing more hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh and promised to discuss with Ministry of Environment & Forest to consider the ban on development of small hydro-power project. The above reports did not highlight/focus on any of the possible detrimental effects to the environment because of the construction of these Hydropower projects.

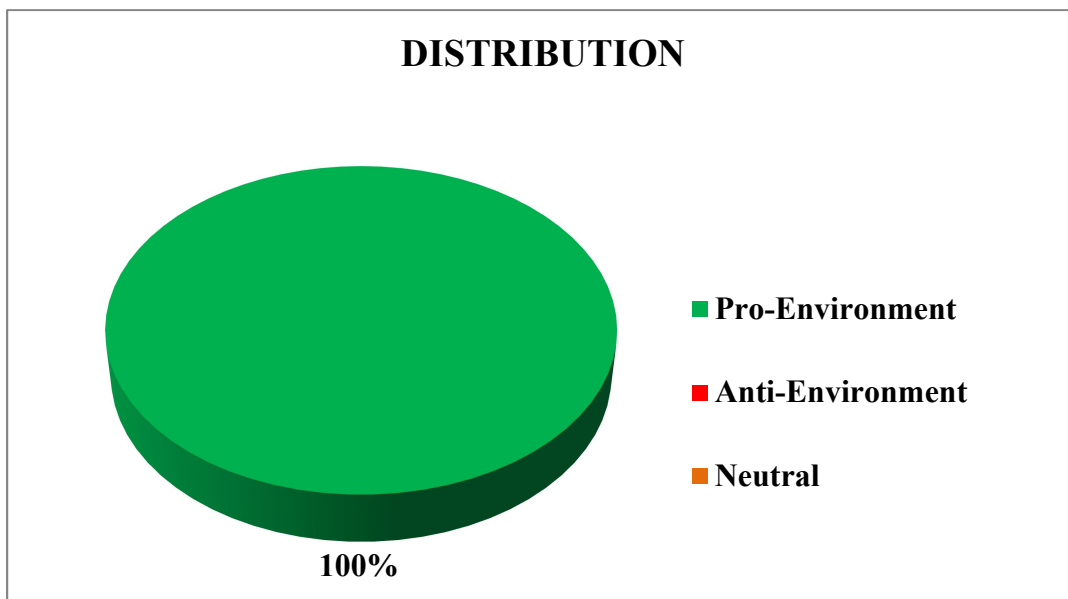
This month witness no editorial on any environmental issue.

- *There were no news article published on environment in April, 2020*

Graph 4: Category wise distribution of news reports published in Echo of Arunachal for May 2020

ECHO OF ARUNACHAL

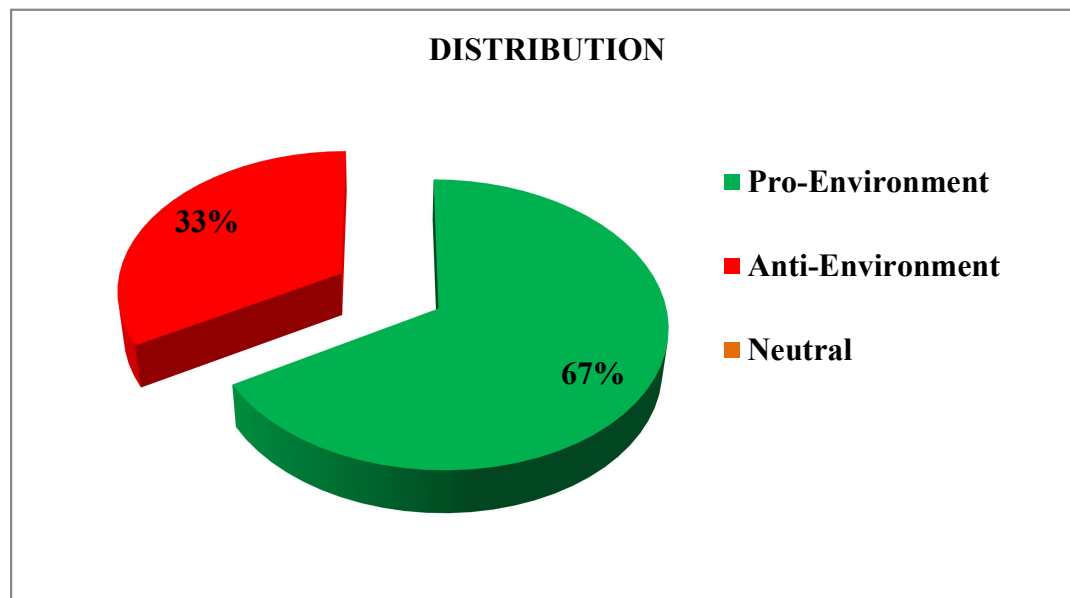
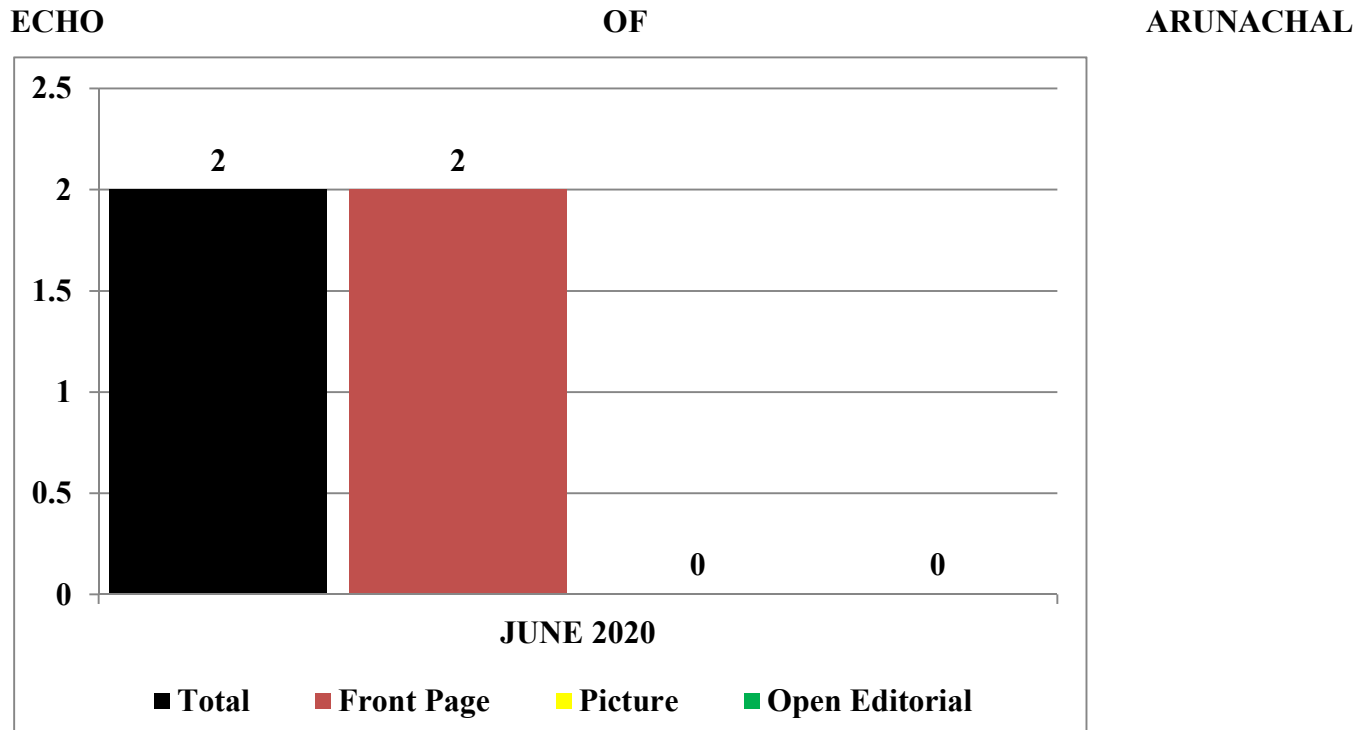




The above figure for the month of May 2016 reported just one environmental related news article for the month.

The story was pro-environment in nature. The articles focused on twitter tweets such as *#SaveDibangValley*, *#SaveDehingPatkai* and *#SaveAmazonofEast* led by North Eastern colleges and universities student under the banner of Northeast Solidarity for Environmental Justice (NSEJ). The tweets garner supports by citizens from and across the country leading to sudden “Twitter Storm” and was among the top twitter trending hastag.

Graph 5: Category wise distribution of news reports published in Echo of Arunachal for June 2020



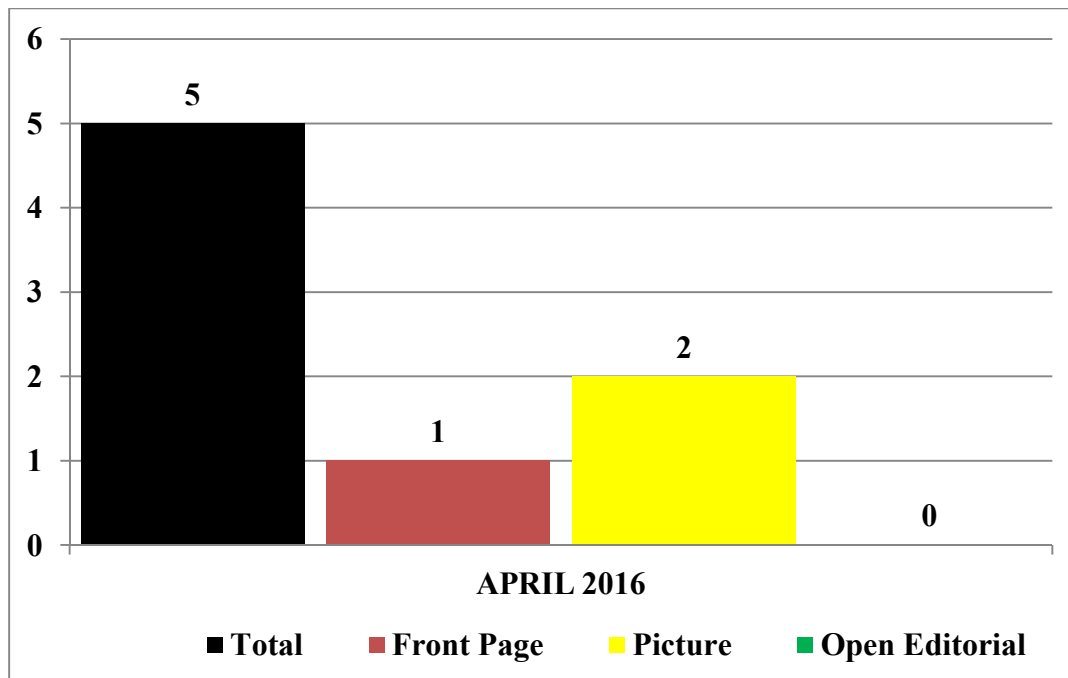
The above figure for the month of June 2016 reported 2 articles with 50% pro-environmental and 50 % anti-environmental news.

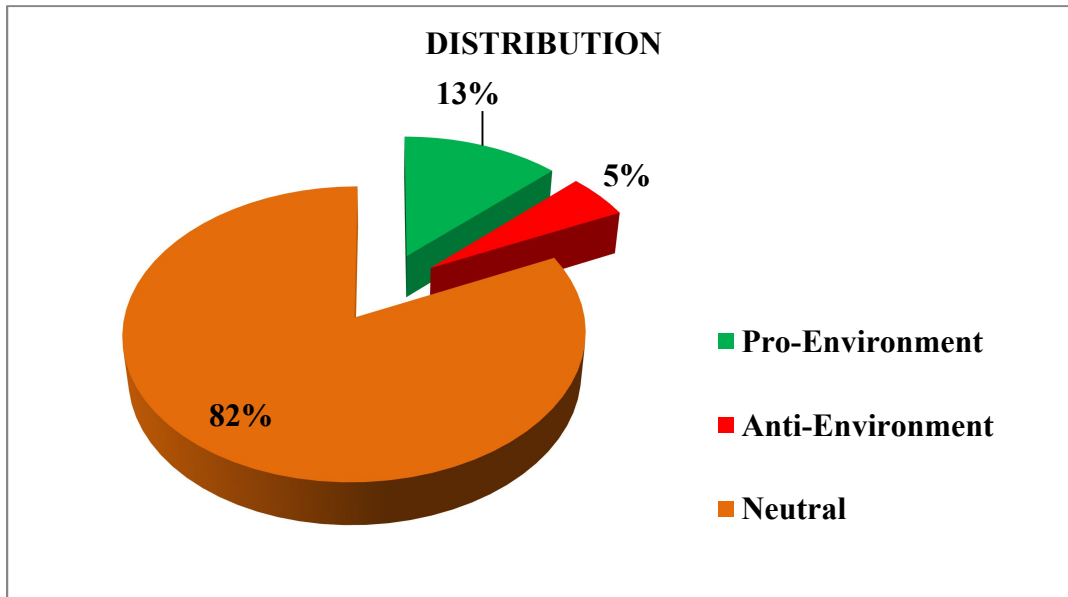
The one pro environmental news reported strong resistance by a group of Idu Mishmi people to the construction of 3097MW Etalin Hydroelectric Project in Dibang Valley district. The group rejected the assurance for compensatory afforestation saying that no amount of compensation can replace the essential forest ecosystems that will be lost due to the mega dam . The news highlighted that in a letter addressed to Union Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda, the group opined that the Wildlife Conservation Plan presented by Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for the Etalin HEP is incorrect and scientifically biased.

The other news classified as “anti environment” reported the commissioning of 600 MW Kameng Hydro-electric project by Chief Minister Pema Khandu. The news highlighted CMs optimism that the project will help promote revenue, create employment opportunities and industrialization in the State however; the detrimental effects of the Hydropower project to the environment and the initiative to minimize the damage to environment or ecosystem was not discussed in the news.

Graph 6: Category wise distribution of news reports published in The Arunachal Times for April 2016

THE ARUNACHAL TIMES

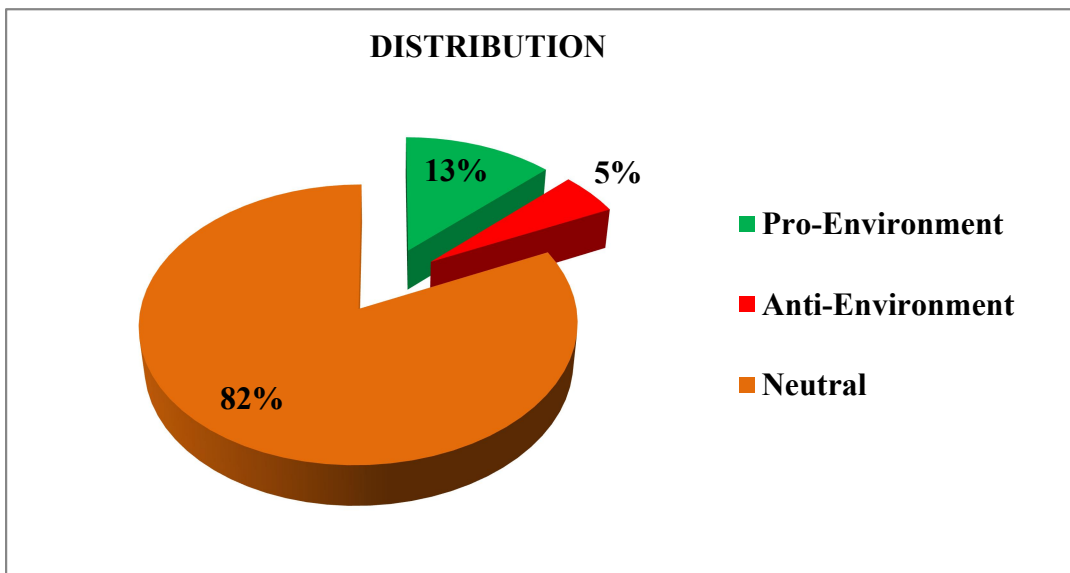
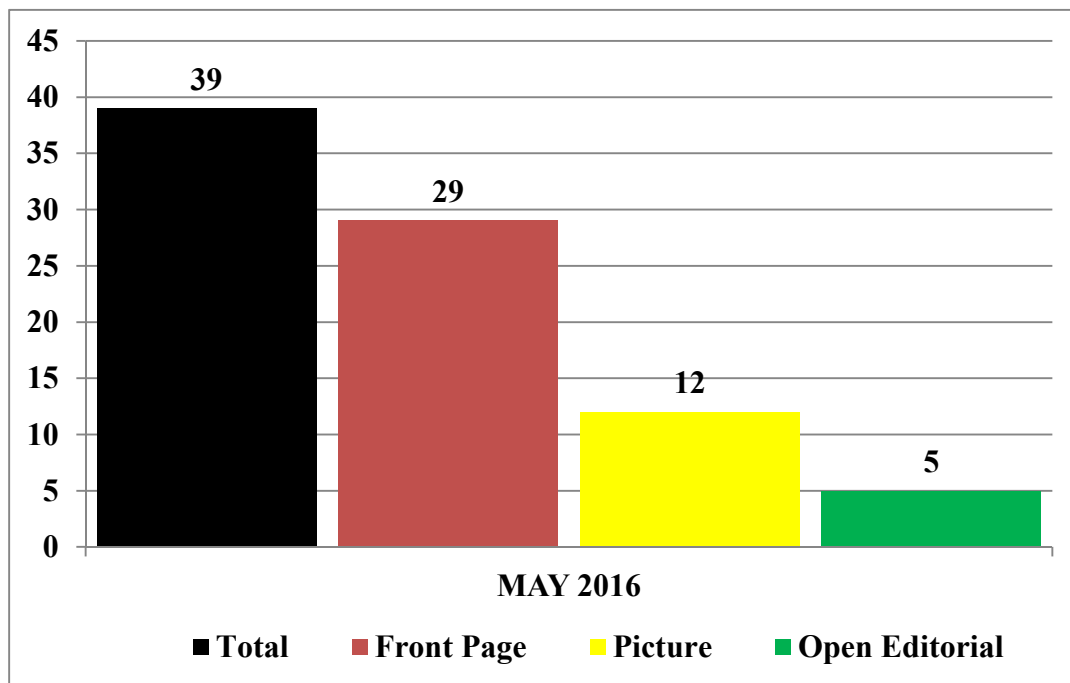




The above figure for the month of April 2016 reported 40% anti-environmental and 60 % neutral news. An article in Readers Forum was about climate change. However, it only discussed about devastation in Arunachal due to monsoon while the western part of the country like Maharashtra were facing drought. Anti environment article appeared where the then CM of Arunachal Pradesh Kaliko Pul was seeking denotification of reserved forest in urban area for developmental activities.

Graph 7: Category wise distribution of news reports published in The Arunachal Times for May 2016

THE ARUNACHAL TIMES



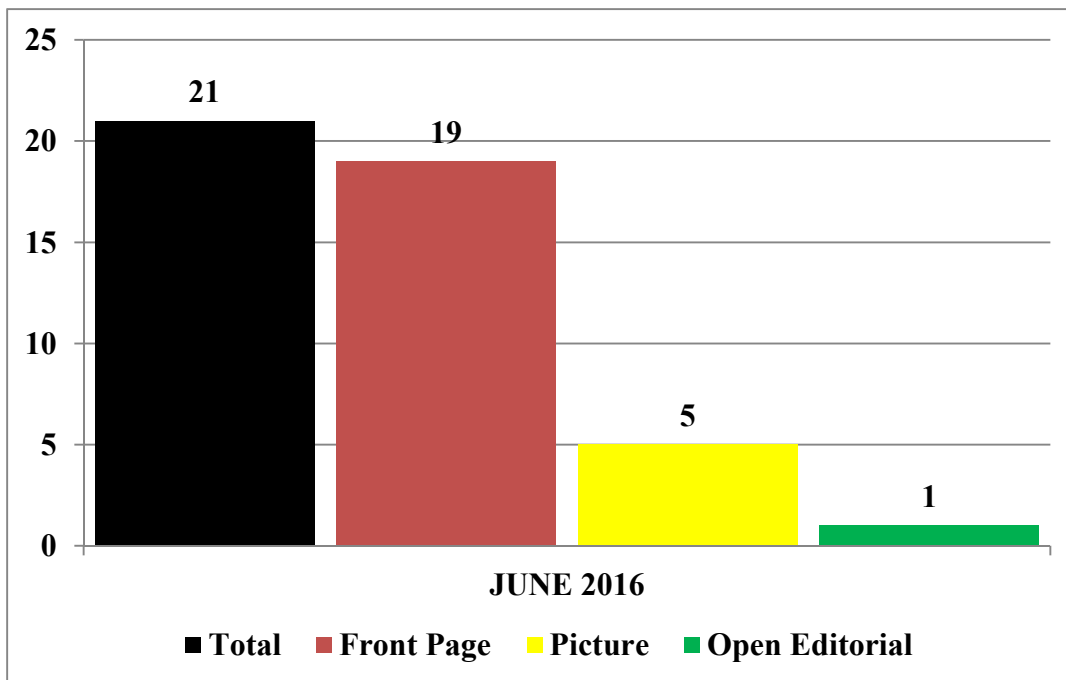
The above figure for month of May 2016 reported 5% anti-environmental, 13% pro-environmental and 82 % neutral news.

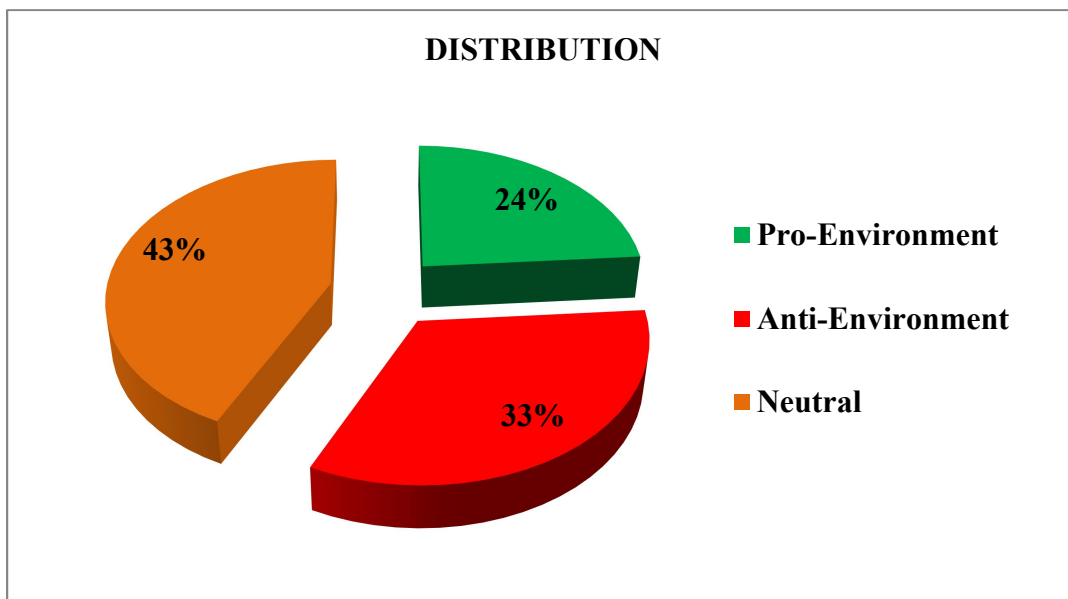
One brief article titled *‘Don’t encroach on nature’* was published which stated that encroaching nature excessively leads to nature’s fury and climate change.

There were two anti environment articles. One of them highlighted the potential of Arunachal Pradesh in terms of Hydropower installed capacity, which is 58,000MW, one third of India’s total capacity. The author endorsed development of the projects that will lead to financial benefit for the state. The article projected the concern of to-be affected population as mere vested-interest of some groups.

Graph 8: Category wise distribution of news reports published in The Arunachal Times for June 2016

THE ARUNACHAL TIMES





The above figure for the month of June 2016 reported 33 % anti-environmental, 24 % pro-environmental and 43% neutral news.

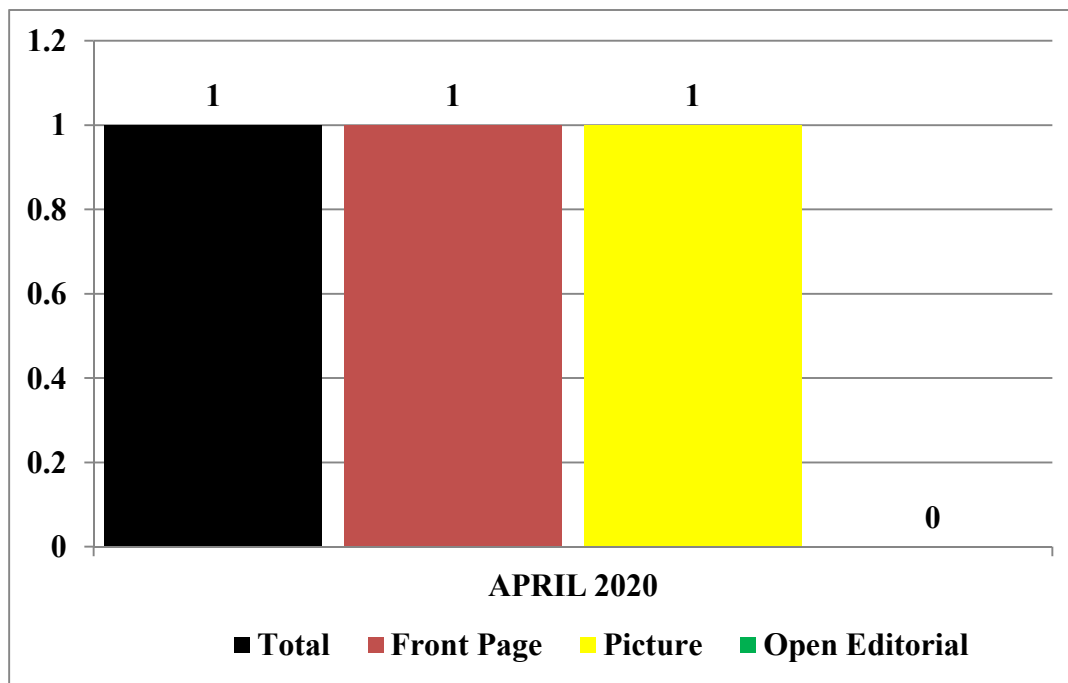
Pro-Environment articles: An open editorial “Save Environment” highlighted global environment concern raised by the scientist. It also discussed pollution cause to rivers around Itanagar due to release of waste product leading to damage of aquatic life. NITI Aayogs decision to declare projects of 100MW as small hydro power projects were strongly opposed by the Adi Anong Autonomous Kejang. Two articles reported World Environment Day celebration across the state. While an article reported Arunachal Governor’s report on World Environment Day appealing use of renewable energy to the citizens.

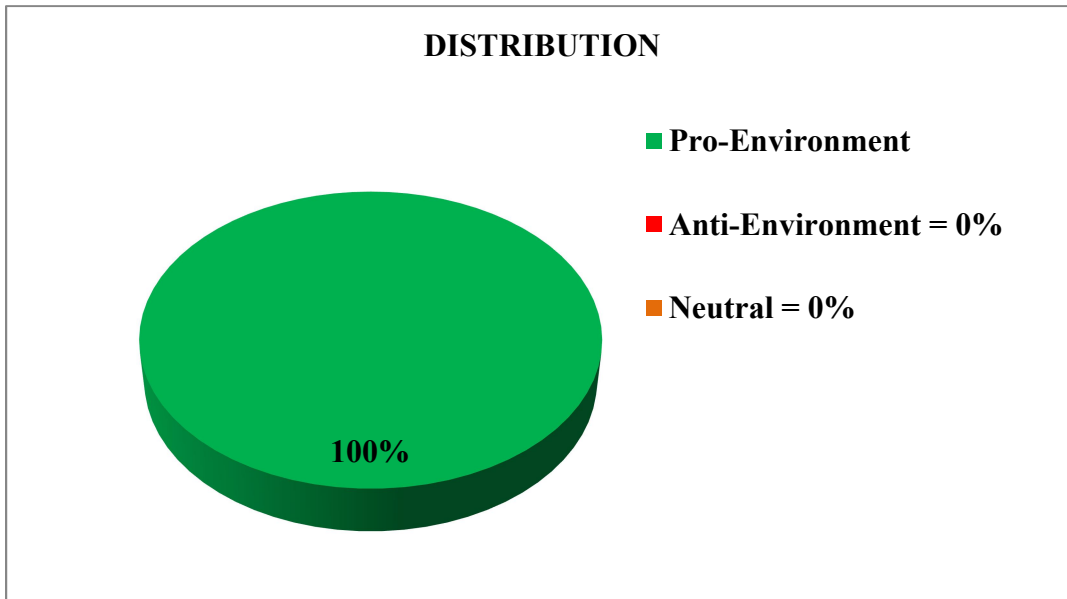
Anti-Environment: An article titled ‘Arunachal is answer to Modi’s dream of power connectivity:Pul reported 140 hydro power project allotted to various PSU and private power companies in the State. The CM urged the need to have single window clearance for the project to be fast tracked. According to the article, hydropower project at Siang is touted to generate between 10,000 to 12,000 MW of power. Another article reported that all the stagnated hydro projects of the state would be fast tracked under NITI aayog.

According to a report, Associated Chambers of Commerce of India (ASSOCHAM) in a meeting held in New Delhi requested Govt. of Arunachal to provide incentive to the hydropower developers in the form of tax exemption like VAT, Entry Tax and Service Tax etc. to accelerate the development of hydro-project in the state.

Graph 9: Category wise distribution of news reports published in The Arunachal Times for April 2020

THE ARUNACHAL TIMES



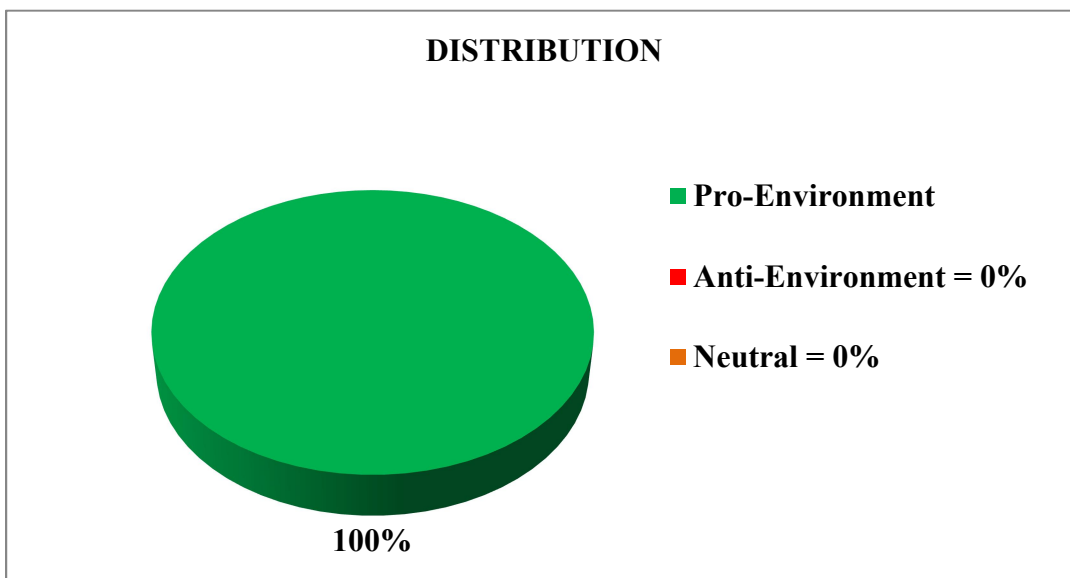
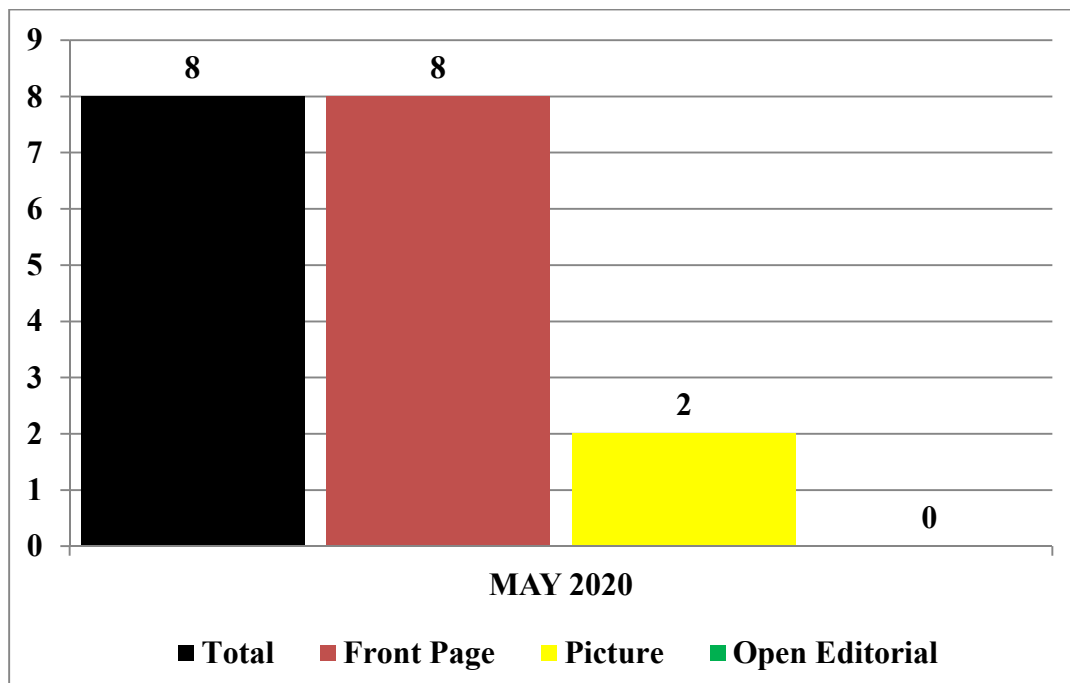


The above figure for the month of April 2020 reported an article that has been classified as Pro-Environment.

The article threw light in detail about the natural hazard at Dibang valley in general from geographical and scientific perspective. It warned that possible dangers and risks like seismic hazards, glacier hazards and landslide risk could be triggered due to the proposed Etalin Hydro power project at Mathu, Dri and Talo rivers in Dibang valley.

Graph 10: Category wise distribution of news reports published in The Arunachal Times for May 2020

THE ARUNACHAL TIMES

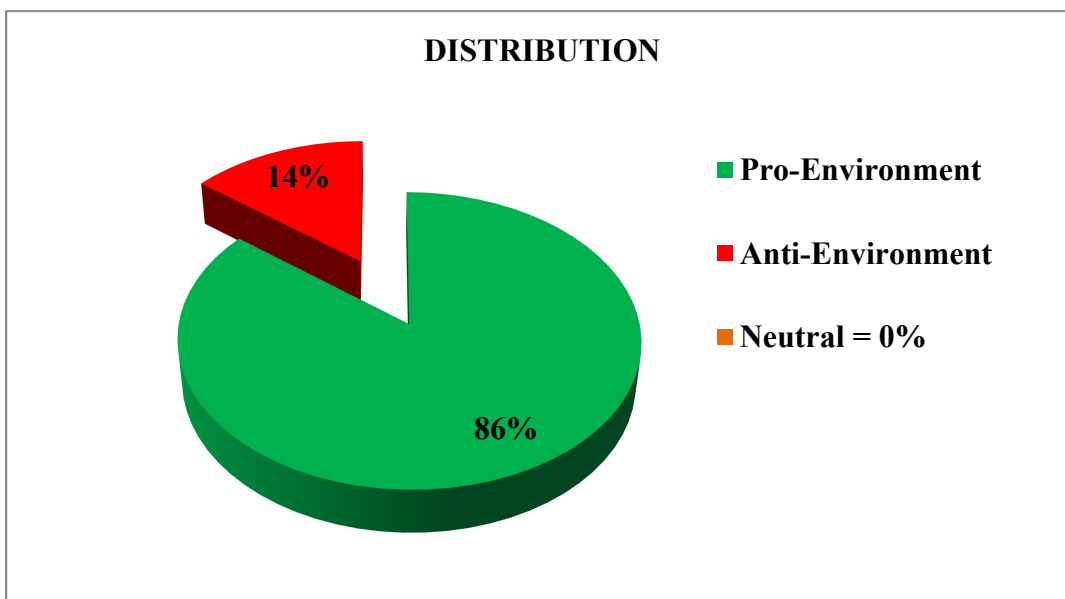
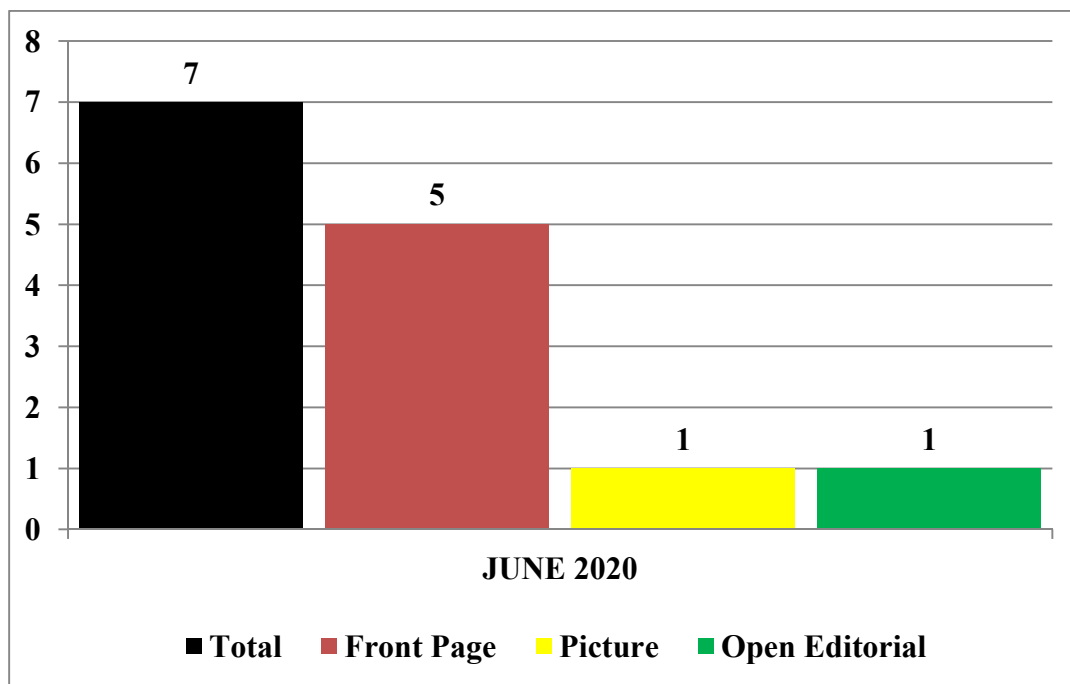


The above figure for the month of May 2020 reported 100% Pro-Environment articles.

Eight Pro-Environmental news: All these news were focused on opposition raised to the Etalin HEP by the local population. The Researchers and Conservationists also questioned the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for submitting inaccurate multi seasonal study while the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate change (MoEFCC) didn't raise any objection to the Report for its apparent incomplete multi seasonal study.

Graph 11: Category wise distribution of news reports published in The Arunachal Times for June 2020

THE ARUNACHAL TIMES



The above figure for the month of June 2020 reported 14 % anti-environmental and 86 % pro-environmental news.

Pro-Environment articles: The Idu Mishmi group’s objection to the construction of Etalin Hydroelectric project in Dibang Valley was reported while an article reported concern about the East-west Industrial

corridor passing through Pakke Tiger Reserve. Another one was news reported World Environment Day celebration across the state. The month also had an editorial that discussed the importance of Ecological balance.

An anti-environment news article reported commissioning of 600MW Kameng HEP.

Discussion:

A significance difference between the two papers could be seen in the number of open editorials. The Arunachal Times published six open editorials whereas only one editorial was published in Echo of Arunachal during the 90 days time. The Arunachal Times was more vocal and opinionated in addition to reporting of facts.

Comparative Analysis of The Arunachal Times, 2016 and Echo of Arunachal, 2016

DATA	THE ARUNACHAL TIMES	ECHO OF ARUNACHAL
Total	65	41
Pro-Environment	10 (15%)	9 (22%)
Anti-Environment	11 (17%)	8 (20%)
Neutral	44 (68%)	24 (58%)
Editorial	6	1

Difference in perspective of reporting for both the paper was visible in the month of June. The Arunachal Times took a pro environmental stand, whereas, Echo of Arunachal reported no major news except for the World Environment Day celebration. The Arunachal Times reported article NITI AAYOG'S decision questioned where Adi Anong Autonomous Kebang opposed declaration of 100MW projects as small hydro power projects. The same news article went unreported in Echo of Arunachal. An editorial with the heading 'Save Environment' on WED was carried in The Arunachal Times, however no editorial on environment was found in Echo of Arunachal despite WED celebration.

Comparative Analysis of the The Arunachal Times, 2020 and Echo of Arunachal, 2020

Data	The Arunachal Times	Echo Of Arunachal
Total	16	3
Pro-Environment	15 (94%)	2(67%)
Anti-Environment	1 (6%)	1(33%)
Neutral	0	0
Editorial	5	0

The month of April, May and June 2020 reported very few environmental related articles. No new article on Environment was published for the month of April in Echo of Arunachal. The Arunachal Times has higher tally of article with 16 publications for 3 months while Echo of Arunachal reported 3 articles.

Interesting observation was found in those period. Although there were fewer articles, all the environment related articles were focused on hydro-power project of Arunachal. In addition to this barring one article in each paper all the reports were pro environmental in nature. The Arunachal Times reports delved in details on proposal of Etalin Hydro-power project. There were 6 articles following the go ahead given by MOEFCC and FAC to the conservation plan carried out by Wildlife Institute of India. According to the article of AT. WWI skips multi seasonal study on Etalin. All the 5 articles were focused on the support extended to and opposition raised to Etalin Hydro-project by local population and researchers. However, Echo of Arunachal report no articles on the above matters. There was just an article “Cry for Saving Dibang Valley and Dehing Patkai” in the midst of such hue and cry going on for Etalin Hydro-power project.

Conclusion

The overall percentage of article for both the paper was neutral with 44% and 24% for The Arunachal Times and Echo of Arunachal. May month reported the highest number of article related to anti-dam/environment related articles. However, both the paper showed lukewarm response to anti-dam movements or environmental concern.

The overall analysis of three months showed that in spite of go ahead given to Etalin Hydro power project by the FAC in the month of May both the paper reported few articles on it. Environmental activist, experts or public opinion on environment were lacking on both the papers.

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