

Assam Press panel to be recast

From Our Staff
Correspondent

GAUHATI, SEPT. 27.—The Governor of Assam and Meghalaya, Mr Prakash Mehrotra, has decided to reconstitute the Assam Press Consultative Committee immediately to establish a rapport between the state government and the journalists.

To be headed by one of the advisers to the Governor, the new committee will include proprietors, editors and working journalists of important dailies and weeklies, which are published locally or have considerable circulations in Assam. The national news agencies operating in the state will also be represented in the committee, which will have, besides, the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Director of Information and Public Relations of the government as members.

During an informal chat at the Raj Bhavan here, the governor told this correspondent that such a committee, he felt, would be of use to improve relations between the press and the government, which appeared to have been estranged during the recent past.

He said that he was convinced of the imperative need to reconstitute the committee when a group of local press people met him recently in a deputation.

A state press consultative committee for Assam had been constituted by the Governor in September 1971 in accordance with Rule 3(3) of the Press Consultative Committee Rules 1969 "for the purpose of consultation by the state government to dispose of the matter, codifying or rescinding the order issued by them." Those rules were framed under the Criminal and Election Laws Amendment Act of 1969 "to prohibit the printing or publication of any document or any clauses of documents relating to a particular subject for a specific period or in a particular issue or issues of a newspaper or periodical."

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The consultative committee constituted in 1971 became defunct since the days of the Janata rule in the state, when the state administration allegedly indulged in favouritism in respect especially of releasing advertisements to newspapers. While such favouritism is alleged to be still continuing, the Congress(D) government early this year even imposed 'pre-censorship' on some local newspapers ignoring the consultative committee altogether. Under the current presidential rule, the editors of two newspapers and the publisher of one of them were arrested last month — though on certain specific charges.

The local journalists in their deputation represented all these grievances to Mr Prakash Mehrotra, who assured them that he would look into these matters immediately and take necessary action.

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