

BAD TO WORSE IN ASSAM

Mr Golap Borbora's attempt to solve the problems that confront Assam's disintegrating Janata Party appear to have precipitated an even more serious crisis. But to be fair to the Chief Minister, the counter-productive strategy was suggested by the Janata Central Parliamentary Board which recommended on June 22 that all Ministers should resign, thereby enabling Mr Borbora to avoid a no-confidence motion and yet appease dissidents with an unjustifiably bulky reconstituted Government. It should have been obvious that this evasive flanking strategy—foreshadowing the Centre's own response to a similar threat of collapse—would only excite further resentment. Three Janata MLAs from the 32-member dissident faction under Mr T. M. Barua, which was—and probably still is—demanding a legislative showdown, pointedly stayed away from the swearing-in; their example being emulated by a nominee from the four-member Plains Tribal Council whose support gave the Government its knife-edge majority in the Assembly. If the PTC has now revised its views to the extent of not wishing to be identified with the Janata régime, it can only be because the Ministry's fate seems even more uncertain than it was. As much was revealed on Monday when the resignation of one of the newly-appointed Ministers, Mr Keshab Chandra Gogoi, seemed likely to prompt a further exodus.

To some extent, this instability is a spin-off of the problems that afflict Janata in New Delhi. Adherents of the Jana Sangh have for some time been accusing the Chief Min-

ister of abetting illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Mr Borbora was obliged to drop two Ministers, Mr Zehirul Islam and Mr Golam Osmani, in order to placate them. Such moves have not strengthened communal harmony and it is hardly surprising that Mr Islam, Mr Osmani and several Janata MLAs have now rallied round Mr Charan Singh's ostensibly secular standard. Nor could the Chief Minister ever be sanguine about the loyalty of legislators who belonged to Janata's Congress, Socialist and Congress (D) factions. Their future course of action will be guided at least partly by the manner in which rival claims are resolved at the national level; but the personal and collective ambitions that provoked the local crisis are bound to continue beyond a settlement in New Delhi unless the Centre, though paralysed by its own political problems, realizes the imprudence of propping up a minority régime. The point is that Mr Borbora enjoys the support of a maximum of only 61 out of 126 MLAs. He managed to retain power only with the help of PTC, CPI(M) and Congress legislators. That the most numerous of these groups, the Congress, has withdrawn support is evident from Mr Sarat Chandra Sinha's demand for the Chief Minister's resignation or a trial of strength in the House. This being also the demand of a large number of Janata dissidents, Mr Borbora has little hope of survival. Meanwhile, his continued defiance of the logic of numbers poses grave security and law and order problems that New Delhi cannot afford to overlook.

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