

# Assam Talks: BJP, Janata To Stay Away

NEW DELHI, Nov. 8.—Two major Opposition parties, Janata and the Bharatiya Janata Party, have announced that they will not attend tomorrow's Government-Opposition meeting on Assam, saying that they have not been taken into confidence on the issue—a charge rejected today by the Government, report PTI and UNI.

Janata followed the BJP in announcing that it would not participate in the meeting with the Home Minister, Mr Zail Singh, who will represent the Government, along with some other Union Ministers. It claimed that the meeting would be an "exercise in futility".

The Minister for Works, Housing and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr Bhisma Narain Singh, rejected the BJP allegation that it had not been taken into confidence, but urged it to reconsider its decision. Mr Singh wrote to the BJP president, Mr A. B. Vajpayee, urging him to attend the meeting.

The BJP response was not available, since neither Mr Vajpayee nor Mr L. K. Advani, general secretary, was in the Capital.

The Janata Party conveyed its decision in a letter to the Parliamentary Affairs Minister. The party's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr Ravindra Varma, and the party's deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha, Mr Era Sezhiyan, said in the letter that the move for the talks came from Prime Minister, but she would be away.

Hence, the party felt, discussions with the Home Minister would be an exercise in futility.

The two leaders said that during the year, the party had repeatedly reminded the Government of its commitment and demanded that it prove its earnestness to solve the Assam problem and seek the cooperation of the Opposition.

The Government held several rounds of discussions with the Assam leaders, but had never taken the Opposition into confidence or held tripartite talks to give the Opposition an opportunity to contribute to the evolution of a consensus on the issue.

After nearly a year, it had called the Opposition parties to meet the Home Minister. Such a discussion, in the absence of the Prime Minister, would not effectively contribute to the evolution of a consensus or the solution to the problem, the letter said.

Declining the invitation to the talks, the BJP had written to the Parliamentary Affairs Minister on Friday to say that discussions

on Assam "can be held in a worthwhile manner only if the Prime Minister is present".

In his reply, released at a Press conference today, Mr Singh told Mr Vajpayee that the Prime Minister was always willing to meet the Opposition leaders, singly or collectively.

Expressing surprise over the charge that the Government had not cared to take the Opposition into confidence on Assam, the Minister recalled several discussions that had been held on the subject with the Opposition parties since last year.

Mr Vajpayee had also said that he had written to the Prime Minister last week, seeking an early meeting of the Opposition parties to discuss the Punjab situation.

Mr Singh said in his reply that on Punjab, Mrs Gandhi had already met "people of different shades of opinion".

He reminded the BJP leader that in January last year, Mrs Gandhi held discussions with leaders of the Opposition parties and groups in Parliament, and the Assam situation did figure during these discussions.

Thereafter, two meetings were held with leaders of political parties and groups in Parliament in March and May last year.

At the meeting held in November last year, it was suggested that a combined meeting of the Government, Opposition leaders and agitation leaders be held. "But the response of the agitation leaders was not positive", Mr Singh said.

The subject had been discussed in detail in Parliament on several occasions, including at the time of approval of the Presidential Proclamation and the passing of the Assam Budget. The matter also figured during the monsoon session of Parliament, the letter said.

At the request of the Home Minister, Mr Vajpayee also met him (Mr Zail Singh) in February at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences to discuss the Assam situation.

The Home Minister had always briefed the Consultative Committee of Parliament for his Ministry on the progress of the Assam talks.

Mr Singh drew Mr Vajpayee's attention, in particular, to the deliberations of the meetings held on July 6 and 7 and September last year, and added that "I find it difficult, therefore, to understand the circumstances which have prompted you to make the charge...".

## Janata Rebuffs Cong-I Overtures

NEW DELHI, Nov. 8.—Two general secretaries of the Janata Party, in separate statements today, rebuffed Congress (I) overtures to form a coalition Government of the two parties in Assam, report UNI and PTI.

While Mr Ramakrishna Hegde said in Simla that under no circumstances would his party form a coalition with the Congress (I) in Assam, or in any other State, Mr Ravindra Varma issued a statement in New Delhi to the same effect.

Mr Varma said his party favoured the restoration of a popular Government in Assam, and had been trying, with the cooperation of some other parties, to persuade the Governor to give the Opposition a chance.

In his statement, Mr Varma explained that the Congress (I) move originated yesterday from the Union Home Minister, Mr Zail Singh, who broached the subject of a coalition during a talk over the telephone with Mr Chandra Shekhar, Janata Party president, yesterday.

Mr Chandra Shekhar immediately rejected the invitation, Mr Varma added.

The non-Congress (I) Opposition alliance parties in Assam will approach the Governor, Mr Prakash Mehrotra, for an appointment with him on November 10 to stake their claim for forming a Government in the State.

The parties, which were scheduled to meet the Governor today to submit their list of supporters, could not do so, as Mr Mehrotra is away in Delhi. He is likely to return to Gauhati tomorrow.

The Opposition parties will meet in Gauhati tomorrow to discuss their strategy on forming the Ministry, a spokesman of the alliance said today.

## St'r Leaders To Go Ahead With Rally

GAUHATI, NOV. 6.—The Assam agitation leaders are determined to hold their central rally at the Judges Field here on November 10, despite the Government's denial of permission, report UNI and PTI.

The president of the All Assam Students' Union, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, and general secretary, Mr Bhriju Kumar Phukan, in a joint statement today, reiterated their decision to hold the rally and appealed to the people to join it peacefully and conduct the proceedings "with supreme discipline" to give, what they called, a "fitting reply to the malicious propaganda of the mercenaries of democracy".

AASU and the Gana Sangram Parishad today urged the Union Home Secretary to permit them to hold their planned rally.

In a joint letter sent through the Chief Secretary to the Assam Government, the two organizations said that the Government's permission to hold the rally would prove its sincerity to solve the foreigners problems in the State. The Assam Government yesterday denied them permission to hold their rally on grounds of public interest.

The letter also acknowledged the receipt of the Centre's invitation for continuing the official-level talks in New Delhi on November 19.

The Assam unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party has extended full support to the proposed mass rally.