

Breakdown of Assam talks averted

From Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, July 14.

Although no instant solution of the foreigners' issue emerged from a two-hour meeting between the Home Minister, Mr. Zail Singh, and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad and the All-Assam Students' Union this evening, it succeeded at least in preventing a complete breakdown of the talks.

The AAGSP and AASU delegations agreed once again to meet at the committee level with senior Government officials tomorrow to make yet another attempt to evolve an acceptable formula.

Mr. Nibarani Bora, one of the AAGSP leaders, said the delegations would leave Delhi for Gauhati on Thursday.

It seems therefore that in case nothing concrete materialises even at tomorrow's committee discussions, the talks would be adjourned for the time being to give the Assam delegations a breather.

The Home Minister emerged from today's talks with a smiling face and gave the impression that the Assam

leaders would accept the proposals made by the Government side.

Even though the members of the delegation who turned up in full strength for today's deliberations were not happy with the outcome of their efforts, there was no trace of belligerence in their remarks.

AASU leader's claim

Mr. Debakumar Bora, one of the AASU leaders, claimed that the Home Minister had agreed in principle with seven main points made by them but had declined to give a written commitment.

He listed the seven points as: Detection of all foreigners, deletion of their names from the electoral rolls, steps to prevent the enrolment of foreigners as voters, issue of identity cards with photographs to all electors in Assam, vesting of the authority to grant citizenship certificates only in the Centre, full protection of the border from infiltration and protection of Assam's indigenous culture.

It may be recalled that the Government has given very unequivocal assurances from the beginning on all these points,

and special measures to prevent fresh infiltration from Bangladesh have been taken.

The Assam delegation members did not describe the outcome of today's meeting as a failure. On the other hand, one of them said the Home Minister had described the proceedings as neither a success nor a breakdown.

An official spokesman said a fresh effort would be made to hammer out a formula at tomorrow's meeting. He indicated that if nothing came out of it, a decision might be taken to hold further talks at a later date.

UNH reports:

The agitation leaders have confronted the Home Ministry with a 1963 Central Government document which rejects possession of a ration card by an immigrant or his having voted in an election as evidence of being an Indian national.

The document was prepared by the External Affairs Ministry to counter the Pakistani propaganda that India was pushing its own nationals into the then East Pakistan.

The document was shown to the Home Ministry by AASU representatives when officials stated that holders of ration cards or school certificates could not be considered foreigners in Assam.

THE HINDU

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