

# Centre Issues Clarification On Foreigners

From Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, July 6.—The Centre today finally came up with the "clarification" as to who it considers to be foreigners in Assam during the 1961-1971 period. The issue has held up the talks with the Assam movement leaders since May when Mr Zail Singh, the Union Home Minister, formulated a three-point plan to move "unauthorized foreigners" out of the State and rehabilitate them elsewhere with attractive incentives.

At a 75-minute official-level meeting, the Additional Law Secretary and senior Home Ministry officials spelt out their definition of the "authorized" and "unauthorized" foreigner. Representatives of the All Assam Students Union and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad wrote down verbatim what the officials told them.

There had been a week-long stalemate because the Assam delegations had demanded that the Government give them the "clarification" in black and white. The Government side declined to do so, pointing out that no written clarifications were provided in such negotiations. The Assam leaders eventually relented, agreeing to put down in writing the definition given, lest a dispute should arise at a future date.

The Government side also furnished the "clarification" on three other points that the Assam movement leaders had asked for: (1) on whom the Government wanted to grant citizenship certificates under Section 5(1)A of the Citizenship Act; (2) on whether or not the incentives for rehabilitation would be given at new sites; and (3) on the validity of resettlement of refugees from Bangladesh in the tribal areas.

Asked whether the "clarification" now given in any way from those given before, Mr Prafulla Mohanta and Mr Bhriku Phukan said that "clarifications" had not been given by the Government before. Asked if that meant an advance in the talks, they said: "We feel we are now getting something concrete on which we can proceed to ask questions."

Mr Mohanta and Mr Phukan said they would tell the Government side their reaction to the definitions at a meeting to be held tomorrow.

The AASU and AAGSP leaders will have a joint meeting late tonight to make an assessment of the situation on the basis of clarifications given and formulate their response.

An official spokesman said later

that clarifications, points and their meanings were discussed in a cordial and friendly atmosphere.

The Government has consistently maintained that it could not throw out of the State Hindu refugees who entered the State in the wake of 1965 India-Pakistan war. They had a right to stay since policy instructions had been issued at the time permitting their entry as it was a national commitment, he said.

The agitation leaders have insisted that there was no documentary evidence of such instructions having been given. And if it was a national commitment, the entire nation should bear the burden. Assam had already sheltered 12,000 families in terms of the quotas fixed for the States at that time.

Mr Mohanta and Mr Phukan today issued a statement contending that the cordiality of the talks should not be marred by the Government "unleashing a reign of terror and repression on the people in Sibsagar, Tezpur, Barpeta and other places"

The statement said AASU had kept its movement in abeyance during the pendency of the talks "in good faith" But if the Assam Government "indulges in vitiating this atmosphere, it would only result in queering the pitch for the negotiations". It alleged that "police brutalities" were taking place

in Barpeta and Tezpur. Mr Rupam Kakati, an AASU executive member, and Mr Romu Chaliha, a student leader, had been detained and were being harassed. Another AASU member, Mr Bapdhan Koch of Tezpur, was being "hounded and chased by the police". The Superintendents of Police of Barpeta, Darrang and Lakhimpur districts were harassing and torturing the AASU workers.

UNI adds: Sources in the two delegations said that the Government had only reiterated its position that the Hindu refugees entering the State between 1961 and 1971 could not be disturbed in view of the national commitment towards them, international obligations, the Citizenship Act and the Passport Act. This would amount to the agitating organizations agreeing that the 1.3 million refugees entering Assam, according to the 1971 census, would remain in the State.

Only about 24,000 illegal entrants, again according to the census report, would have to be moved out in terms of the Government proposal to settle outside Assam "unauthorized foreigners" on which the agitation leaders had sought four clarifications.

The agitation leaders said the Government clearly wanted them to accept 1971 as the "cut-off-year" "through the back door"—a position "we will never accept."

THE STATEMENT.

7 - JULY - 1981.