

CLARIFICATIONS ON ASSAM REJECTED

NEW DELHI, July 7.—The Assam agitation leaders today rejected the Government's definition of a foreigner as it would make all Hindu refugees in Assam citizens of India, reports UNI. This was conveyed to senior Government officials by the All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad delegations at a joint meeting.

Communicating their objections to the Government's clarifications given to them yesterday, the two delegations said the Constitution and laws alone could determine whether an individual was a citizen or a foreigner. Discussions would, however, continue tomorrow.

Our Special Representative adds: The movement leaders told the meeting that what the Government had now proposed through the "clarifications" virtually amounted to the same formula of 1971 being accepted at the cut-off year for detection and deportation of foreign nationals from the State.

The "clarifications" given are still being kept secret by both the Government and the Assam movement leaders, but obviously the latter are not satisfied with them. They feel that even after nearly a year-and-a-half of negotiations, the Government is making the same offer over again.

During these negotiations, the Assam leaders had agreed to the "regularization" of the 1951-1960 entrants into the State provided the Government agreed to detect and move out of the State the "unauthorized" entrants from Bangladesh. During the latest series of talks on the 1961-1971 entrants, the Union Home Minister, Mr Zail

Singh, suggested a three-point formula whereby the "unauthorized" foreigners would be rehabilitated outside Assam with attractive incentives. The exercise was on who the "unauthorized" foreigners are.

At today's meeting, the movement leaders felt that the acceptance of yesterday's clarifications would mean the acceptance of 1971 as the cut-off year for detection and deportation of foreigners.

Mr Bhriugu Kumar Phukan, general secretary of the All Assam Students Union, said that there appeared to be virtually no change in the Government's definition of "unauthorized foreigners" in Assam.

While the movement leaders would like the term "unauthorized

foreigner" to be interpreted within the "framework of the Constitution", the Government side maintains that its scope would be determined in terms of policy instructions issued from time to time.

Mr P. B. Venkatasubramaniam, Law Secretary, joined today's talks. The other officers present were Mr S. M. H. Burney, Home Secretary, Mr M. L. Kampani, Additional Secretary, Mr K. M. L. Chhabra, Joint Home Secretary and Mr B. S. Sekhon, Joint Law Secretary.

Reporting the progress of the negotiations with the Assam leaders, the Union Home Minister, Mr Zail Singh, told a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee attached to his Ministry that any solution of the foreigners problem in Assam should be consistent with the secular character of India and its national commitments. According to an official briefing of the meeting, members of the committee endorsed Mr Zail Singh's views.

It was stated on behalf of the Government that "the cases of those who came to seek shelter in a difficult situation and were allowed to remain, or were allotted land, will have to be considered and the terms authorized or unauthorized are to be defined not in mere legal terms, but keeping in view human problems and national and international commitments".

A note circulated at the Consultative Committee meeting said, about 114,000 infiltrators had been detected in Assam and 109,000 of them sent back from 1971 to May this year. It said the progress of identifying infiltrators had been hampered due to the law and order situation arising out of the movement on the foreigners issue. However, preventive measures taken by the Government had resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of Bangladesh nationals attempting to enter India clandestinely, the note said.

The Consultative Committee devoted its morning session almost entirely to the Assam issue. Mr Niren Ghosh (CPI-M) and other M.P.s from West Bengal pleaded the case of Bengal-sneaking foreigners who entered Assam from erstwhile East Pakistan.

Mr Nagen Sarma, adviser to AASU, said here today that the India-Bangladesh border compared to the India-Pakistan border appeared like some inter-State boundary, adds PTI.

He said the five-member AASU-AAGSP team found not only natural barriers like forests separating the populations on either side of the India-Pakistan border, but the entire stretch was brightly lit. The team returned here early today from their visit to the Wagah border.

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