

Delhi blamed: Assam

By K. N. MALIK

NEW DELHI, December 29.

THE government of India is dragging its feet on the proposed combined meeting with opposition leaders and representatives of the All-Assam Students' Union and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, according to a delegation of the AASU and the AAGSP which is in the capital.

Mr. Bhriagu Phukan, general secretary of AASU, said here today that as soon after the government agreed to include a small group of opposition leaders in the proposed combined meeting, a government emissary approached him to convince him of the futility of such a meeting. He suggested that it would be better that the Assam agitation leaders meeting the cabinet secretary, Mr. Krishnaswamy Rao Saheb.

Another emissary approached them to say that a meeting with the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, could

be arranged if the AASU and the AAGSP agreed to the proposal. The proposal regarding meeting the cabinet secretary was made by a Chandigarh-based mediator who has been closely associated with the talks between the government and agitation leaders dur-

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ing the past one year. The proposal regarding a meeting with the Prime Minister was put across by a senior officer of the special branch of the Union home ministry.

When the AASU and the AAGSP spurned the proposal mainly with a view not to scuttle the proposed combined meeting, a raid was organised by the police at the meeting of the executive of the AAGSP. Mr. Phukan alleged that this was an attempt to convince the agitation leaders that no purpose will be served by a meeting which would be attended by opposition leaders.

The home ministry officials, however, say that there is no question of backtracking on the proposed meeting. The decision had been taken at a meeting presided over by the Prime Minister and the preparations for the meeting are on. Though no definite date has yet been fixed, the meeting is likely to take place in the second week of January.

Meanwhile, four opposition parties have already nominated their representatives for the proposed combined meeting. The Bharatiya Janata Party will be represented by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, while Mr. Bhola Paswan Shastri will represent the Congress (S). Mr. Ravindra Verma will represent the Janata Party and Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet will represent the CPM.

The ok Dal and the CPI has yet have not intimated the names of their representatives.

The Assam delegation also indicated that if the government was to withdraw all "repressive" measures in the state, the AASU and the AAGSP would give serious thought to suspend the agitation before the proposed combined meeting. The delegation, however, was of the view that the suspension of the agitation would not be a preparatory step for talks, but a response to the stoppage of "repressive" measures.

The delegation denied the government allegation that the agitation leaders who participated in the talks with the government went back on their commitments given at the negotiating table because of their failure to convince other members of the executive.

It denied that the AASU and AAGSP representatives ever accepted the government draft of August 23.

The fact was that the government representatives handed over the draft to the Assam agitation leaders who said that they would place it before the executives of the AASU and the AAGSP. A modified draft was later sent to the government on September 23.

Mr. Phukan described the Prime Minister's allegation against the agitation leaders that "they agreed to certain things during discussions and later changed their stand" was far from the truth. The agitation leaders had on several occasions asked the government to record the minutes of discussions, but it was never done. If these minutes were available, it could not have been possible for the government to make these allegations.

He challenged the government to disclose any secret documents or information it had to justify its accusation. He was in favour of the government publishing a "white paper" on the talks.

He contradicted the claim by the government that none of AASU supporters was detained under the National Security Act in Assam. Eight persons — four active members of the AASU and four government employees who actively associated themselves with the movement, had been arrested under the NSA, he claimed.

Army alerted in Assam

GAUHATI, December 29 (UNI): The Assam government has alerted the army and taken all precautions to maintain security and law and order during the 36-hour road blockade programme commencing from 5 a.m. on December 31 at the call of the Assam agitation leaders.

The state chief secretary, Mr. Ramesh Chandra, told UNI that all available forces were being deployed and the concerned authorities had been asked to keep all important highways and other roads free of any obstruction.

Mobile patrolling had been intensified and pickets set up on the strategic points of all important roads across the state, he said.

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