

Delhi, Assam leaders keen on accord

By Our Special Correspondent

SHILLONG, September 7.

AN accord between the Union government and leaders of the Assam agitation on the vexed "foreign nationals" problem, if all goes well, is likely to be reached before the current session of Parliament concludes on September 21.

The government as well as the agitation leaders, according to knowledgeable sources, are keen to clinch the issue without any further delay.

The two sides, which are in constant touch with each other through unofficial mediators and official machinery at Gauhati, according to these sources, have thrashed out their differences on all but four points and are hopeful of reaching an understanding on these four remaining issues in a spirit of give and take at the "informal" round of talks at the official level at New Delhi this week-end.

After ironing out their differences at the informal discussions, the agitation leaders are likely to meet the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, to formally strike the deal.

Simultaneously, Mrs. Gandhi will meet the opposition leaders to obtain their views on the various proposals to resolve the foreigners' tangle.

A formal announcement of the understanding arrived at with the agitation leaders is expected to be made

during the current session of Parliament.

The executives of the All-Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), the co-sponsors of the two-year-old agitation, in the meantime, met at Gauhati today to decide the composition of their respective delegations to participate in the forthcoming talks in New Delhi and also to chalk out the strategy to be adopted during the negotiations.

According to well-informed sources, the representatives of the Union government and the agitation leaders, during the last two rounds of talks at Shillong and New Delhi last month, reached a broad understanding on the future of migrants from erstwhile East Pakistan, presently Bangladesh.

The two sides are understood to have agreed that the 1.1 million odd officially-estimated immigrants, the bulk of whom were Muslims, who entered Assam before 1961 will continue to stay in the state and will be automatically granted citizenship.

QUALIFYING PERIOD

The 934,000 immigrants, of whom as many as 907,000 were Bengali-speaking Hindus, who entered the state during 1961-71, would be disenfranchised and dispersed and rehabilitated in other states outside Assam.

All those who came to Assam after emergence of Bangladesh as an independent country in 1971, it was agreed, would be deported.

Some differences still persist on the qualifying period of permanent residence outside Assam of those persons who entered the state during 1961-71 to earn the right of citizenship.

While the government would like to confer citizenship on all those persons who will be resettled outside Assam after five years of their rehabilitation at such places, the agitation leader want this period to be extended to ten years.

Observers here are hopeful that the two sides would accommodate each other's views on the subject and agree on adopting a middle of the road course.

The government, it is understood, has assured the agitation leaders that steps will be taken to effectively police the India-Bangladesh border to prevent entry of immigrants in future.

IDENTITY CARDS

It has been agreed to henceforth issue identity cards to voters with their photograph affixed.

An understanding has been reached that citizenship certificates will in future be issued by the authorities of the Central government. A household register will be prepared and it will be ensured that birth and death registers are maintained properly.

The government has also agreed to strictly enforce measures to prevent encroachment of government lands. However, some differences exist on the norms for detection of foreigners and composition of tribunals. But the two sides do not think that these differences cannot be composed.

The agitation leaders want the government to rehabilitate all government and semi-government employees penalised for their participation in the agitation. The government, while willing to review individual cases sympathetically, has made it clear that the issue was not negotiable.

Gauhati strike over teacher's arrest

By Our Correspondent

GAUHATI, September 7: Students of greater Gauhati stayed away from their classes today in protest against the arrest of Mr. D. D. Barkataki, a chemistry teacher of the local B. Barooah College.

Mr. Barkataki, who is also superintendent of the college hostel, was taken into custody on Friday in connection with a case under the Indian explosives Act.

Various organisations of students, youth and teachers have condemned the arrest and the alleged police atrocities on innocent people.

A 16-hour hunger-strike by students of the college, in protest against the arrest, ended at 5.30 p.m. today.

8-September-1981

The Times of India.