

Govt. apathetic, feel N-E region faces Assam stir leaders problem of running projects

NEW DELHI, July 12 (UNI).

THE Assam agitation leaders today expressed indignation over the sudden postponement of a scheduled meeting with senior officials and doubted the sincerity of the government in resolving the foreigners' issue.

The All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) president, Mr. Profulla Uumar Mahanta, said frequent postponements of meetings showed the government's apathy in solving the issue early.

Mr. Mahanta said the government

was adopting "delaying tactics" and valuable time was being wasted.

The All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) conveners, Mr. Atul Bora and Mr. Biraj Sarma, said, "This was not the way to solve what everybody had admitted was a national problem."

The talks scheduled for today afternoon will, however, be resumed tomorrow after a day's break today.

AAGSP and AASU leaders said a "broad consensus" had emerged in the mini-committee meeting yesterday on a detection formula on 'foreigners' and allied measures, reports PTI.

Mr. Bora expressed the hope that "something concrete" would emerge in the resumed talks, failing which the Assam movement leaders might have to reconsider their continued stay in the capital.

NO NEW FORMULA

Spokesmen for both the AASU and the AAGSP described as "incorrect" a news agency (not UNI) report that some new formula had emerged at the discussions yesterday. Mr. Mahanta said, "Nothing was evolved, not to speak of a new formula."

Mr. Atul Bora, Mr. Sarma and another AAGSP convener, Mr. Jatin Goswami, denied any new proposal had been put forward by the agitating organisations.

"What was discussed yesterday was our October, 1980 proposal on the principles of detection and deletion. We reiterated our stand yesterday," explained Mr. Nibarun Bora, AAGSP leader.

Mr. Jatin Goswami, who did not think the government was interested in evolving a fair solution to the problem, said it was treating it as a refugee problem. "It has not been able to tell us who is a foreigner. Officials always speak of the people whom they mean refugees'.

The government had put forward its formula but did not want it considered within the parameters of existing laws and the constitution, he said, adding nothing had been achieved so far.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, July 12: Starved of industries, the north-eastern region's problem is not merely of starting new industrial projects for exploiting its vast storehouse of raw material, but of making those already set up to work.

Although the centre is now making a special effort to start development projects in the region, to tackle the economic cause of the agitations and insurgency showing up in different forms in different areas, it is obvious that making headway in this regard will be difficult unless the problem of working the projects is solved.

An example of this is the pulp and paper unit, set up in Nagaland, which has been lying idle since its inauguration 12 years ago. The project has cost Rs. 70 crores and yet not a sheet of paper has been produced. Another is the sugar mill set up in the same state. It is limping along.

Basically, it is a problem of trained personnel. The Nagas are perhaps learning to their cost that being hypersensitive over the influx of "foreigners" does not help solve the problem of development. The pulp and paper mill could not be commissioned because it has not been able to get about 100 engineers and technicians needed to make the mill run.

A few lakhs of rupees has been spent by the state government in advertising the posts for the technical personnel without getting adequate response. The shortage of trained people is obviously going to be an important factor retarding development in the region.

The sophisticated machinery and equipment acquired for the pulp and paper mill, capable of producing paper worth Rs. 10 lakhs a day, have so far not been utilised thus depriving the state government of an important source of income. Besides, the state exchequer is being strained in maintaining the huge idle staff of 800 officers and men for the mill.

The huge Central grants, which are being pumped into the region in the name of development are ironically said to be another factor hindering the progress of the region. The development funds are being diverted to non-development purposes and are working as a disincentive for any purposive investment which could increase the income of the state governments. Their dependence on Central "doles" is, in fact, increasing.

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