

Little hope of Assam solution

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Oct. 28—There is little hope of a solution of the "foreigners" issue emerging from the next round of talks with the Assam leaders who arrived here tonight, unless there is a basic change in their attitude.

Informed sources point out that the 15-point proposal of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP) does not mark any advance from the position as stated by them during the last round, which ended on Aug. 23 last in a stalemate.

It is stated that the basic issue concerns the fate of the "foreigners" who entered Assam between January 1961 and January 1971. Their deportation is being opposed by the Union Government. It has been made clear to the Assam leaders that the Centre is committed to detecting and deporting only those "foreigners" who entered India after 1971.

The five-member team comprises Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Mr Shrigu Kumar Phukan, president and general secretary, respectively, of AASU, and its adviser Mr Nagen Sarma, and Mr Nibaron Bora and Mr Atul Bora, chairman and general secretary, respectively, of the Purbanchallya Loka Parishad (PLP), representing the AAGSP.

According to Gauhati reports, Mr Girin Baruah, president of the Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal, who was also included in the three-member AAGSP group, backed out at the last moment. When contacted, Mr Baruah said he had decided not to accompany the team owing to some "technical difficulties."

To begin with, the Assam leaders will have discussions—most probably tomorrow—with a team of Central Government officials headed by the Union Cabinet Secretary Mr Krishnaswamy Rao Sahab and including Home Secretary T. N. Chaturvedi. Thereafter they may also meet Union Home Minister Zail Singh.

As the Centre does not accept the demand that those who entered Assam between January 1961 and January 1971 should be deported, the question of their names being deleted from the electoral rolls and their being sent out of Assam within six months from the date of detection does not arise.

It has been repeatedly pointed out to the AASU and AAGSP lea-

ders that the National Register of Citizens of 1951 and the electoral rolls of 1952 cannot form the basis for the detection of "foreigners". Similarly the provisions of the Foreigners' Act, the Citizenship Act and the Passport Act are not strictly applicable to such persons, who had entered India as refugees and had not bothered to acquire the necessary citizenship papers. Deportation of such refugees cannot be contemplated under any circumstances.

As regards the remaining demands about ensuring that no further infiltration of "foreigners" into Assam takes place, and expediting the deportation of "foreigners" who, after having been expelled had re-entered Assam, these can be discussed. At the same time, no arbitrary criteria can be applied, because cases have come to the Centre's notice that on the basis of the reports of the district authorities, deportation orders had been passed against some persons who had entered Assam from former East-Pakistan as refugees.

Asked about the prospect of a settlement, Mr Nibaron Bora told PTI before his departure for Delhi that the entire matter depended on the Government. The agitation leaders by "constructively working

on the draft with alterations and amendments", had "helped" the Government to come to a solution.

The amendments made by the agitation leaders on the draft submitted by the Government "were strictly in conformity with the discussions we have had with them so far," he said.

Mr Bora said they were still "serious" about a settlement within the framework of the Constitution" and added that in fact considering the present situation in the north-eastern region, the Assamese had remained patient and kept the movement within constitutional limits.

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