

Assam: Zail bid fails

Express News Service
NEW DELHI, July 14.

A two-hour meeting between the Home Minister Mr. Zail Singh and the Assam agitation leaders today evening failed to bridge their seemingly irreconcilable stands on the knotty foreigners issue. The two sides appeared to have talked around the issue without reaching agreement on the basic question of "who is to be treated as a foreign national."

Mr. Zail Singh did however, succeed in pacifying the two delegations to the extent that they did not threaten to take the issue back to the streets, as they have done twice in the past when the negotiations appeared to be collapsing.

The Home Minister told newsmen after the meeting that the All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad leaders had agreed to sit again tomorrow with the Officials Committee which they boycotted some days back.

But the AASU president Mr. Prafullah Mohanta said they would deliberate tonight whether to attend the committee meeting. He said the Home Minister had been informed that unless some positive proposal was forthcoming from the Government tomorrow, the two teams would return to Gauhati on Thursday.

Mr. Zail Singh said he had assured the agitation leaders again that the Government had accepted in principle their eight point charter. Only the modalities of deportation and the date from which deportation would begin had to be worked out. Mr. Zail Singh said he had chided the Assam delegation for letting "small points" hold up discussions.

He then admitted that one of the small points was the very definition of the word foreigner. Mr. Zail Singh said the agitation leaders had got it into their minds that "all Bengalis should be thrown out," and they were refusing to accept the validity of Government's policy instructions under which these Bengalis had been allowed to seek refuge in India. He had made it clear to them that the Government had to

honour its policy instructions. "How can we repudiate a national commitment?" he asked.

The points on which Home Minister said the Government and the Assam delegations had reached agreement in principle at the earlier rounds of talks, were the detection of foreign nationals, deletion of their names from electoral rolls, issuance of identity cards to all voters, keeping all names of all foreigners off the electoral rolls in future, tightening up the Bangladesh border, protecting the cultural identity of the Assamese people and taking away the authority of the State to grant citizenship and vesting it in the Centre alone.

Mr. Zail Singh said the Government had agreed to disperse from Assam all persons who could technically be labelled foreigners. It was, however, on the question of who was to be considered a foreigner that the talks have run aground more than once.

The AASU advisor Mr. Lalit Rajkhowa asserted "deportation of foreign nationals admits no compromises." Reading a prepared statement he said if the Government was convinced the foreigners' problem in Assam was a national problem, then why was the foreigners burden not being shared by the nation as a whole, instead of being imposed only on Assam.

He said if the Government failed to deport foreigners who entered Assam between 1961 and 1971, then AASU would go back to its original demand that all foreigners who came in from 1951 onwards should be deported. Assam, he said, would bear the burden of the 1951-1961 entrants only if all those who came in between 1961 and 1971 were deported.

(Govt. document: Page 9)

Govt. document backs Assam leaders' stand

NEW DELHI, July 14 (UNI)

The Assam agitation leaders have confronted the Union Home Ministry with a 1963 Central Government document which rejects possession of a ration card by an immigrant or his having voted in an election as evidence of being an Indian national.

The document was prepared by the External Affairs Ministry to counter the Pakistani propaganda that India was pushing its own nationals into East Pakistan.

The document was shown to the Home Ministry by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) representatives when the officials stated that holders of ration cards or school certificates could not be considered foreigners in Assam.

The document says that "a mother's grave, a patch of land, a rent receipt, a school certificate is no evidence of nationality. Nationality is based on more substantial and fundamental considerations."

Rights of citizenship and nationality are governed by India's Constitution and the Citizenship Act. Articles 5, 6 and 7 of the Constitution and sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Citizenship Act clearly define and prescribe who an Indian citizen is.

"The immigrants on whom notices to quit India had been served were not able to produce any evidence that they satisfied any of the provisions of the Constitution or the Citizenship Act in regard to citizenship."

The document says Pakistani propaganda then sought to make much of the fact that the name of a few of the illegal immigrants were to be found on Indian electoral rolls. "The fact is that enlistment of foreigners in the voters'

lists has at times taken place at the instance of politically interested persons or parties. Political parties have been known to take dubious steps to inflate the number of their supporters at election time and some undoubtedly used the illegal settlers from Pakistan towards this end."

It goes on: "But all this has no relevance to the question of establishing a person's name. Being, rightly or wrongly, inscribed on the voters' list does not prove or confer Indian nationality or citizenship. This legal position has been confirmed by decisions of the Supreme Court of India."

It continues: "Many Pakistani nationals who left Tripura themselves stated on return that they had helped, worked and voted for candidates of a political party. These foreigners were no doubt assisted, through questionable practices, to have their names put on the voters' list."

The document concludes by stating that hunger for land brought them to Tripura and Assam. To satisfy their hunger, they misled innocent tribesmen, forged documents and invented the so-called "evidence" of Indian nationality.

Indian Express.

15 - July - 1981.