

Assam: foreigners' tribunals the hitch

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Technicalities on the constitution of foreigners' tribunals now remain the most formidable of the obstacles, on the way to a solution to the foreign nationals problem, if reports of deliberations in the agitation circles over the last few days are any indication.

When the agitation leaders and central officials meet for yet another round of talks next week, the burden of the discussions will be this issue.

The other, relatively lesser obstacles, will be the question of the exact extent of constitutional safeguards to Assam against foreign infiltration and the intensity of the "efforts" the Government would make to disperse to the other States refugees, who will not be deported.

The agitation leaders have been repeatedly consulting senior constitutional lawyers at Gauhati over the past week and much of the time at their meetings is taken up in discussing various suggestions put forward by these experts.

If things go as expected at the moment the next round of talks may begin on September 14 and before that the agitation leaders would like to be sure as to what would be the safest way from their point of view, to constitute the tribunals.

In the unofficial draft solution presented at the Shillong talks in first week of August, and which forms the basis of the present negotiations, setting up of tribunals to decide the fate of suspected foreigners was the key point. But originally this seemed to provide to the suspected foreigner,

routine legal avenues of appeal. The agitators summarily rejected the suggestion.

While the agitation leaders accented the national register of citizens and electoral roll of 1952 they have been refusing to accept ration cards, driving licenses and other such Government documents as evidence of nationality. These differences remain.

Apparently it is difficult for both sides to make a compromise on this. While during the last few days reports have come from Delhi of the Government snubbing the so called minorities bodies from Assam, the Centre would be under considerable pressure from these groups, if it signs an accord, which does not give them normal rights of appeal.

At the same time there is weight in the agitators' contention that legal delays will make a mockery of the implementation of any such accord.

Assam issue 'intriguing'

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SHILLONG, Sept. 11.

The process of negotiation to find a compromise on the Assam problem continues to be in an intriguing stage with the agitation leaders still examining the various aspects of Government offers. They are also as yet to decide as to what specifically they want and the Government, is in an apparent hurry to clinch the issues, as soon as possible.

The agitators have not yet been able to make up their minds as the last few meetings of the AASU and AAGSP have seen differences of opinion coming to the fore. The agitation leaders are in no mood to make haste and antagonise its own rank and file.

Meanwhile speculation is gathering weight in official circles whether the Central Government is in the process of preparing a White Paper or just a detailed statement to be made in Parliament if talks do not proceed on an optimistic note. However, there is no confirmation of this.

As things stand, with the AAGSP meeting scheduled for September 14, the next round of talks can be expected to begin only around September 16.

Indication at present are this will again be informal. But this time a brief appearance by Home Minister Zail Singh at the talks is not ruled out.

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