

Assam leaders call off talks

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NEW DELHI, July 8.

The Assam agitation leaders decided once again today to call off their negotiations with the Committee of Union Government officials, asserting that any further meetings would have to be with the Home Minister himself.

This is the second time that current round of talks on the foreigners issue has reached such an impasse.

Last time Mr. Zail Singh had stepped in and sweet-talked the agitators into continuing their discussions with the officials committee. It was not known till tonight if he would be meeting them tomorrow as his schedule for the day is tight.

A spokesman of the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, stomping out angrily after a two-and-half hour meeting with the officials committee, said the talks were back to the October 1980 position.

The spokesman, Mr. Girin Baruah, made it clear that the Parishad had returned to its original refrain—that all those who came into Assam between 1961 and 1971 should be moved out. It was only on this condition that the two Assam delegations had agreed to the retention of those who came in between 1951 and 1961.

Mr. Baruah said the Government wanted to treat as authorised, Hindu Bengalis, all those who migrated to Assam between 1961 and 1971. "We say call them what you like, authorised or unauthorised, even give them citizenship certificates but move them out of Assam as to us they are foreigners."

Mr. Baruah and Mr. Nibaran Bora said the officials led by Mr. S. M. H. Burney, Home Secretary, had said they would have to consult Home Minister Zail Singh. Mr. Baruah said they had informed the Committee that in future they would meet only the Home Minister, no one else.

A spokesman of the Home Ministry told newsmen after the meet-

ing that the talks would continue tomorrow "at a different level".

He said the Government team had reiterated that the talks should continue at the Committee level but the agitation leaders did not consider further meetings with the Committee necessary.

The official spokesman said today's long meeting was devoted mainly to answering legal questions raised by the agitators. The officials had explained at length "the complexity of the problem, historical facts, national commitments and Government policies" on the foreigners question.

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