

Assam Leaders

18 NOV

Firm On

Statesman

Resuming Stir

GAUHATI, Nov. 17.—The Assam movement leaders said here today that there was "no question" of their reviewing the decision to resume the agitation on the foreigners' issue, reports PTI. Meanwhile the Army was alerted today to help the civil authorities maintain law and order, and, if necessary, run essential services.

Asked about their reaction to the Union Home Secretary's plea made in his letter to the movement leaders today, Mr Bhagu Kumar Phukan, AASU general secretary, and Mr Atul Bora, AAGSP covener, told reporters it was the Government's action which had "forced" them to plan resumption of the agitation. They were referring to the refusal by the Government for permission to hold a mass rally here on November 10.

The Home Secretary had in his letter asked the Assam leaders to reconsider their decision to resume the agitation.

Mr Phukan and Mr Bora, however, added that they had not received the Home Secretary's letter till 8 in the evening.

The decision to alert the Army was taken after a high-level conference, presided over by the Governor, Mr Prakash Mehrotra, was held here today in the wake of a call given by AASU and the Ganasangram Parishad for a 36-hour "Assam bandh" on November 19.

The Assam Chief Secretary, Mr Ramesh Chandra, said tonight the Government had taken all measures to run the State and Central Government offices, banks and other establishments during the bandh.

The Government had warned its employees that those staying away from work during the bandh would be liable to have their pay cut. He did not rule out under the possibility of such employees being suspended or arrested the essential Services Maintenance Act.

The Chief Secretary said the Government would provide adequate security and arrange for transport, with armed escorts, for its employees.

Fair price and ration shops would have to be kept open failing which legal action would be taken against them.

The Assam Government today brought all services connected with the production supply and distribution of electricity under the Essential Services Maintenance (Assam) Act, 1980.

The Government by another notification prohibited strikes in all services connected with the production, supply and distribution of electricity.

Our Special Representative in New Delhi adds: The Centre has rejected the demand of the Assam agitation that Gauhati be the venue of the next round of talks on the foreign nationals' issue.

The Union Home Secretary, Mr T. N. Chaturvedi, offered to fix a new date for the talks if November 19 did not suit the agitation leaders.

Mr Chaturvedi told the agitation leaders that it would not be convenient for him to hold talks in Gauhati on November 21 (the date and venue were suggested by the agitation leaders). However, Mr Chaturvedi said he could visit Gauhati some time later if it was felt necessary.

A Staff Reporter adds: Indian Airlines will operate a combined Boeing 737 flight on Thursday in view of the proposed Assam bandh. The flight, which will leave Calcutta airport at 6-15 a.m., will touch Gauhati, Jorhat, Dibrugarh,

and Imphal. It will return to Calcutta the same day. The airline will operate a Fokker-27 service from Calcutta to Dimapur via Agartala.

CPI-M, Janata May Not Join Assam Ministry

From Our Special Representative

SHILLONG, Nov. 17.—The political situation in Gauhati is rather intriguing following the attempt by the alliance of non-Congress (I) "Left and Democratic" forces to form a ministry in Assam. Although Mr Sarat Sinha (Congress-S), who was chosen leader of the alliance, had submitted a list of the names of 64 legislators to the Governor. It is reliably learnt that the Janata and the Marxists are not willing to join the Ministry, if formed. They would, however, extend active support.

Mr Sarat Sinha has a progressive socialist image and has been close to the Leftists. But this does not mean that the Leftists, particularly the Marxists, will not exercise their options as they had done in the past upsetting the Janata Ministry led by Mr Golap Borbor and later Mrs Anwara Taimur's Congress (I) Ministry. They are committed to a 12-point programme, which again

does not establish the crucial oneness.

The Governor may examine this aspect in gauging what observers refer to as the "continuing mandate". In other words, a mandate that promises stability. Nevertheless, if the alliance can muster 64 MLAs fulfilling the requirement for physical verification, the Governor may have to accept the logic of numbers. Some Congress leaders would welcome an invitation to join the alliance to form a Ministry, since it could be suicidal for them in the present context of threats to revive the agitation by the students and the Parishad.

On the other hand, Opposition leaders may want to exploit a situation resulting from the Governor rejecting the alliance's credentials. The leading Congress (I) claimants, Mrs Taimur, Mr Keshub Gogoi and Mr Hiteswar Saikia, are in Delhi to press their claims and evolve a strategy once the leadership question is sorted out, which again would depend upon Mrs Gandhi accepting the need for a popular Ministry in Assam.

Mrs Taimur is still the ACP leader. If by-passed, her support for either of the remaining contenders will be important unless the Congress (I) high command decides on a new face.

PTI adds: Mrs Taimur today disputed the non-Congress (I) alliance's list of 64 MLAs.

In a statement here she said the Congress (I) had a strength of 51 members in the House of 119 effective members and that the PTCA (4) and some other groups in the Assembly had expressed support to the party. Therefore, the alliance's claim was "untenable and misleading".

UNI adds: The Assam Governor, Mr Prakash Mehrotra, is said to have told Mrs Taimur that he would examine her claim of being in a position to form a Ministry in the State.

Meanwhile, the right of possession of the Congress Bhavan, headquarters of the Assam unit of the erstwhile Congress (U)—now Congress (S)—was today restored to that party by an order of the executive magistrate, Gauhati.

*18-November-1981
The Statesman.*

THE STATES