

Assam rally blocked; 80 youths held

GAUHATI, Nov 10 (UNI)—The stage was set for a revival of the State-wide foreigners issue agitation following the failure of the All-Assam Students Union and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad to hold a mass rally at the Judges Field here today.

By arresting over 80 active AASU workers, including student leader Bhriku Kumar Phukan and youth leader Prabin Gogoi, and by intensive deployment of security forces all over Gauhati and on its approach roads, the State Government prevented anyone from going anywhere near the Judges Field, which the CRP had converted into a camping ground.

The AASU and AAGSP agitators, however, held a number of small rallies in educational institutions in the city.

It was at these rallies that the leaders announced that the agitation would be revived and called upon the people of the trouble State to be ready for it.

Official sources, meanwhile, said there was no untoward incident anywhere in the State today.

Though troops had been on a standby alert, no occasion arose to move them to any scene. The agitation leaders had been till yesterday pleading with the authorities to permit them to hold their proposed mammoth rally on the Judges Field, but were refused "in the public interest".

The declared purpose of the AASU and AAGSP leaders in seeking to hold the mass show was to explain to the public the outcome of the protracted 14 rounds of talks they had so far held with the Centre on the thorny foreigners issue.

In an incident last night, a police patrol intercepted a car carrying six armed miscreants at the Dihing Bridge near Naharkatiya town in upper Assam. The men were arrested.

The police claimed to have seized from them two grenades, two pieces of live fuse, two hand-made revolvers, one gun, 17 cartridges and ammunitions.

An official source said here today that there was an exchange of fire between the police patrol and the miscreants. There was no casualty.

The car was seized, but a seventh member of the gang escaped under cover of darkness.

Officials here said that people trying to go to Gauhati for the

rally without tickets were arrested at the Patilada railway station.

While officials claimed that attendance in Government office was normal, knowledgeable sources here said that in most offices it was thin.

The AASU executive is likely to meet tomorrow and, the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad on Thursday to discuss the invitation for talks at Delhi on Nov. 19.

Meanwhile, the report of a bomb explosion at Nehru Park, near Judges Field, was found wrong.

Assam Chief Secretary Ramesh Chandra on receipt of the reports asked the police to investigate. Police sources later said that it was not a bomb, but "a bundle of papers".

A late night report said, 13 agitation leaders, including Mr Bhriku Kumar Phukan, AASU adviser Lalit Rajkhowa, Assistant General Secretary Bharat Narah and All-Assam Tribal Students Union leader Durga Das Boro, who were arrested this morning, were released on personal bonds in the evening, according to the police.

In a statement AASU president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta demanded immediate and unconditional release of the arrested agitation leaders and criticised the Government for "letting loose police repression" on the people who gathered to take part in the central rally here.

Jnanpith Award winner Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya said that the Government used all force at its disposal to deny the people in and around Gauhati their elementary right to hold a public rally.

In a statement, Dr Bhattacharyya said. "It is sure to affect the negotiation and perhaps the mood of the people. This denial of an elementary right is not only anti-democratic but a violation of human rights."

Professor Ajit Sarma, a member of the Rajya Sabha, said the large-scale deployment of armed police by the Government to prevent the peaceful mass rally showed the "panic in Government quarters at the sight of people's power of mass satyagraha."

In a statement, Mr Sarma condemned the line of confrontation adopted by the Government and said such measures were a "distinct proof of the final defeat of the Government on the one hand and the tremendous sustained power of the people on the other."

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