

Assam stir leaders talk of change in strategy

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, July 7 — Prominent leaders of the Assam agitation, speaking at a group-discussion on "Why We Agitate?" said here today they might change their strategy of agitation, without taking recourse to violence though to find a solution to the foreigners issue.

The discussion was organised by the Delhi Study Group.

The participants were Mr Profulla Mahanta president of the All-Assam Students Union, Mr Atul Bora, Convenor, All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, and Mr Nibaran Bora, a member of the AAGSP and president of the Purvanchalya Loka Parishad.

"A non-violent movement, if the Government is autocratic, undemocratic, coward and uncivilised, is bound to take a different turn," warned Mr Atul Bora. It was national cause and not the cause of only the people of Assam, he added.

Throughout their prolonged agitation, he said, the Union Government had remained negligent, adamant and unwilling to take steps against the foreigners. It "has not budged an inch from its most irrelevant stand of a cut-off date—March 25, 1971. It had been offer-

ed by the Prime Minister of India on April 12, 1980," he said.

The people of Assam, he said, had rejected this dateline outright and continued with the agitation, sacrificing many invaluable lives and suffering much more.

The people of Assam, he said, had demanded that the deflection and deportation of foreigners must be on the basis of principles laid down by the Constitution and the law of the land. "This stand is unalterable and, at the same time, cannot be compromised. For this, the people are ready for anything," he added.

Mr Atul Bora, talking about the current debate being held in the country on the question of citizenship, said, "No country in the world allows the luxury of having a public debate on the definition of a foreigner. If such a debate is raised, this should be considered a distinct threat to the integrity and sovereignty of the country and the initiators of the same would be brought to book in no time.

Ironically, in India of today, such a debate has been initiated by the Government itself and has allowed it to be dragged on and on and on, creating in its trail lot of confusion, mistrust and unnecessary

waste of public energy. And all the time, the people of Assam and also of the entire North-East have had the suffering forced on them by the indecisive, inherently weak and hesitant rulers at New Delhi.

"Does it mean that the Indian Constitution, adopted on Jan 26, 1950, is no longer the sacred book by which India is ruled? Does it also mean that the laws relating to Indian citizenship and foreigners are no more sacrosanct to the rulers? The implication is very much obvious and, at the same time, disturbing, too."

The Government, he said, had stated that it could not take action against those foreigners who had entered Assam before March 25, 1971. "What is the significance of this date? Does it have the sanction of the Constitution and the law?"

"How can the Government grant blanket citizenship on all foreigners entering Assam before this date? These are pertinent questions the people of Assam have raised all the time during the agitation. The Government has not bothered to answer," he added.

Mr Mahanta said the problem of foreigners had become so alarming that the people of Assam had to take to the streets for solving it.

Politicians, he said, had shown a liberal attitude towards the influx of foreigners as they benefited from that.

He furnished a lot of statistics to show how the population of Assam had grown fast and far ahead than the average national growth rate of population in other areas of the country. He also showed photographs of the Indo-Bangladesh border where there was no adequate post of the Border Security Force.

Mr Nibaran Bora said, "Inside the non-violent armoury, we might take to some other course of action."

He said the Citizenship Act, the Foreigners Act and the Passport Act did not apply to Assam today, but, most certainly, the Indian Penal Code did.

Assam agitators' doubts over definition persist

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, July 7—Home Minister Zail Singh indicated to the members of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee today that he was hopeful of a solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam.

The Committee members expressed satisfaction over the manner in which the talks were progressing. They were of the view that the solution should be consistent with the country's secular character and commitments.

There appears to have been no change in the Government's definition of authorised and unauthorised "foreigners" in Assam. The Assam movement leaders today submitted elaborate reservations about the clarifications made yesterday.

It is understood that they are insisting that the term "unauthorised foreigner" be interpreted within the framework of the Constitution. The Government stand is that the scope of the phrase would be determined in terms of policy instructions issued from time to time.

The Assam leaders feel that the Government was not even prepared to divulge what those policy instructions are.

The Government's stand on the issue has been that those who came to seek shelter under difficult circumstances at different times and were allowed to stay or given land will have to be treated with consideration.

The official team at the talks today included the Secretary and Joint Secretary of the Law Ministry. The Assam delegations were present in full strength.

The Assam delegation felt they could accept the Government's view of such instructions only if they were in conformity with the rele-

vant laws and were uniform for the whole country.

The agitation leaders rejected the Government's definition of a foreigner as it would make all Hindu refugees in Assam citizens of India, add the agencies.

Discussions would, however, continue tomorrow. A "Berlin wall" is necessary to prevent infiltration into India from across the Indo-Bangladesh border.

This was stated here today by Mr Lalit Rajkhowa, convenor of the Border Observation Cell of the All-Assam Students Union, after his return from Wagah last night.

Mr Rajkhowa, who led a five-member team delegated by the Assam leaders to study anti-infiltration measures along the India-Pakistan border, said that India's western borders were virtually impregnable in comparison with the border with Bangladesh.

Mr Nagen Sarma, Adviser to the AASU and a member of the delegation, told PTI that the Indo-Pakistan border looked every inch an international border. Comparing it to the Indo-Bangladesh border, the latter would appear to be something like an inter-State border, he said.

Mr Sarma said that check-posts at the Indo-Pakistan border were at much closer proximity than at the Indo-Bangladesh border and there was electrification along the border in the western sector. Besides, natural barriers such as forests separated the population on the two sides of the Indo-Pakistan border.

HINDUSTAN TIMES.

8-JUNE-1981.