

Assam stir on despite ban

TIMES OF INDIA

By Our Special Correspondent

SHILLONG, November 18.

THE Assam agitation leaders tonight spurned a fresh appeal of the Union home minister, Mr. Zail Singh, to return to the negotiation table, and decided to go ahead with their agitation, which begins at 5 a.m. tomorrow with a 36-hour bandh.

The Assam government retaliated by arresting several agitation leaders all over the state. The administration also moved troops into vulnerable areas to maintain postal and telecommunication services and the flow of petroleum products outside the state.

The army was tonight put in readiness to come to the assistance of the civil administration at short notice, for the maintenance of law and order.

The Central government had earlier in the evening announced a ban on strikes in the railways, airlines and the posts and telegraphs departments, and other essential services like banks and public-sector industries.

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The state government has also warned its employees that absence from duty during the bandh would make them liable to a pay cut, break in service, suspension and even arrest under the Maintenance of Essential Services Act.

According to the chief secretary of Assam, Mr. Ramesh Chandra, picketing would not be allowed in front of government offices. The government would provide transport with armed escorts to the employees, he said.

The agitation programme has been revived by the All-Assam Students Union and the All-Assam Gana Saugram Parishad, following the government's refusal to give permission to them to hold a mass rally in Gauhati on November 10, to apprise people of the progress of the talks with the Central government.

In the second phase of their agitation, beginning on November 21, the AASU and AAGSP will organise mass rallies at the sub-divisional and block levels. The third phase of the agitation will culminate in a "rasta roko" on November 30.

Meanwhile, the AASU president,

Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mohanta, and its general secretary, Mr. Bhirgu Kumar Phukan, have appealed to the people of Assam to remain peaceful during the bandh.

PTI adds:

A strike ban ordered last August, on the eve of the Independence-day bandh, has not expired but the new order has been issued to cover the coal, power, steel and fertiliser industries left out by the Essential Services Maintenance Ordinance but brought in by the parliamentary enactment of the monsoon session, according to home ministry sources.

Today's order under ESMA supersedes the August order.

The new ban is confined to strikes, although under ESMA the government has power to ban lock-outs and layoffs as well.

It is regarded in political circles as a dramatic move to deal with the 36-bandh beginning at dawn tomorrow.

Other services covered by the ban order are those affecting customs, the armed forces, defence production, and foodgrain distribution, as well as coal, power, steel, and fertiliser production.

Strikes in the private sector industry are also banned if the affected sections endanger the safety of undertakings scheduled in the Industries (development and regulation) Act.

An omnibus clause of the order seeks to protect Union government services in Assam.

DIG's detention upheld

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, November 18: The supreme court today dismissed the appeal of Mr. Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharya, a dismissed Assam DIG, challenging the order and judgment of the Gauhati high court upholding his detention under the National Security Act.

By their brief order disposing of the appeal on conclusion of the hearing, Mr. Justice A. D. Koshal, Mr. Justice V. B. Emdad and Mr. Justice R. B. Mishra upheld the detention and revoked the parole granted to Mr. Bhattacharya.

Mr. Bhattacharya was released on November 16, following the grant of parole to him by the court.

He was detained under the National Security Act, for his alleged involvement in the agitation on the foreign nationals issue in Assam.

Zail pleads

for
'good sense'

NEW DELHI, November 18

(UND).

ON the eve of the 36-hour bandh in Assam the Centre tonight made an appeal to the leaders of the agitation to return to the negotiation table and help find a solution to the vexed issue of foreign nationals.

Speaking at the meeting of the consultative committee attached to his ministry, the Home minister, Mr. Zail Singh, hoped that good sense would prevail on the leaders and they would see reason in continuing the talks, in the "national interest."

He deplored the threat to resume the agitation, when negotiations between the government and the Assam leaders were in progress.

"HARDENED ATTITUDE"

Mr. Zail Singh said the agitation would unnecessarily create complications and spoil the atmosphere necessary for carrying on a meaningful dialogue.

The home minister regretted what he called the "hardening in the attitude" of the Assam agitation leaders at the last round of discussions in Delhi recently.

Mr. Singh reiterated the government's resolve to find a satisfactory solution to the Assam tangle, keeping "fully in view the national and international commitments and also humanitarian considerations."

The home minister, who was replying to questions pertaining to the Assam issue raised by the members, however, said the government was fully prepared to maintain peace in Assam.

He briefed the committee members on the progress of the negotiations and also the hardening of the attitude of the agitation leaders, as "manifest" in their latest proposals.

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