

# Assam Talks Heading For Another Crisis

From Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, July 8.—The talks between the Assam movement leaders and the Government are again heading towards a crisis. At the end of the committee-level negotiations today, the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad leaders said: "The Government wants not only to grant citizenship to all Bengali Hindus who entered Assam from East Pakistan between 1961 and 1971, but also to retain them in the State. This is not acceptable to us".

At the end of the three days of talks with the Union Home and the Law Ministry officials, Mr Jatin Goswami, convenor of the AAGSP, said: "We made it clear from the beginning that Assam would be prepared to regularize the stream of entrants between 1951 and 1960, provided the Government made an unreserved matching offer to take out the 1961-1971 entrants. This the Government,

it seems, is not prepared to do. So our offer is also off".

He said that from the "clarifications" it had given, it was evident that the Government wanted all Bengali Hindus who had entered Assam during 1961-1971 to be given citizenship certification and retained in Assam. "In the Government's opinion, they are all authorized entrants in terms of national and international commitments. What we want is that all authorized and unauthorized entrants during 1961-1971 must be moved out of Assam. This is the condition on which we agreed to the regularization as citizens of all entrants between 1951 and 1960".

However, it seemed from today's negotiations that the categorical opinion expressed today was only that of the AAGSP.

The All Assam Students Union did not express itself in such a direct manner. In fact the AASU refrained from expressing any opinion today. Only one of its representatives attended today's meeting—Mr Bhriku Kumar Phukan, the general secretary of the AASU.

It remains to be seen whether the Assam movement leaders have begun thinking on different lines in their approach to the problem and its solution, or in the strategy that is to be adopted in the negotiations with the Government.

Mr Nibarun Bora, an AAGSP leader, was not as outspoken as Mr Jatin Goswami, but said that both the Government side and the Assam leaders had concluded their arguments, at today's committee-level talks. "Now we go back to the forum that we came from, that is to talk with the Union Home Minister, Mr Zail Singh.

The officials obviously wanted the talks to continue at the committee level but the AAGSP leaders insisted on talking with Mr Zail Singh directly.

Whether a meeting between the Union Home Minister and the Assam leaders would be fixed for tomorrow is not known, but it seems that Mr Zail Singh is preoccupied tomorrow and in all likelihood, the AASU leader would be invited for talks at the official level tomorrow.

The Government side issued a statement saying that at today's talks, the Home Secretary, Mr S. M. H. Burney, the law secretary, Mr Venkatasubramaniam, Mr M. L. Kampani, additional secretary and Mr K. M. L. Chhabra, joint home secretary, were present. It said the delegates had raised purely legal questions today and these were further discussed and elucidations given. The officials explained at length the complexity of the problem, historical facts, national commitments and the Government policy towards finding a satisfactory solution.

The officials reiterated that "the small committee set up by the Union Home Minister should continue its endeavour as it would be more businesslike and helpful".

The agitation leaders, however, did not consider further meetings of the small committee to be necessary. The talks will continue.

The Assam movement leaders today demanded at the meeting with officials that the Assam Rifles should replace the Border Security Force on the border with Bangladesh.

THE STATEMENT

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