

Assam talks take up modalities

By Our Special Correspondent

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AFTER a two-week-long doggedly persevering effort to find an acceptable meaning of the term "foreigner," the Assam talks today branched off to evolving the modalities for the detection of the aliens who had entered the state between 1961 and 1971.

This could be a hopeful sign. It may indicate that, though no agreement has yet been reached on who are the persons who would be covered by the deportation and dispersal scheme, some unwritten and unspoken understanding has been arrived at on this basic question.

The key figure appears to be 300,000. The government has made it known that dispersal and deportation of all the 967,000 Hindu refugees who migrated to Assam during the decade under discussion should be ruled out.

But it could perhaps consider the case of those migrants who did not fall in the category of the 214,000 "authorised" settlers or among the 400,000 refugees who came to Assam from other Indian states. Their number is around 300,000.

The agitating leaders have said that all the 967,000 refugees, whom they term as "foreigners", should be sent away from Assam with appropriate incentives for settling elsewhere. But it is obvious that they are prepared to bargain on this demand, having responded with "sweet reasonableness" to Mr. Zail Singh's persuasions to continue the talks when there appeared to be no meeting ground between the two sides. They had postponed their threatened date of departure at least twice.

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