

Accord on sealing

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Bangla border

Wall and road to be built

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20—The leaders of the Assam agitation and Government representatives reached an agreement here today at the combined meeting on the foreigners issue on securing the Assam-Bangladesh border against future infiltration.

According to the agreement, physical barriers including masonry walls, barbed-wire fencing and other obstacles will be erected all along the international border. A road will be constructed parallel to the border and the land between the border and the road will be treated as a zone "free of human habitation".

Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes along the international border will be intensified and the number of checkpoints increased.

After the agreement the talks were adjourned till Feb. 8 without making any progress on the basic formula for detection of "foreign nationals" reported to be inside Assam.

Considerable significance attaches to today's discussions as it is for the first time that the Government and the leaders of the agitation have come to a formal agreement on an important aspect of the foreign nationals issue. Both sides hoped that other aspects, including the cut-off date would also be sorted out at future negotiations.

An official spokesman, however, told newsmen that the points agreed to at today's meeting in the presence of leaders from the Opposition parties could only form part of a package deal.

The spokesman said the draft formula on identifying foreigners would be "finalised" at the next meeting.

After the border accord, the meeting discussed the criteria for identifying a foreigner in the State.

The Assam leaders have proposed that this should be done within the framework of the Constitution and existing laws. Relevant documents like the Passport Act, Citizenship Act and Foreigners' Act as well as the 1951 National Register of Citizens and the 1952 electoral rolls should also be taken into consideration while detecting a foreign national.

The Government side, however, insisted that land records and birth and death certificates should be made use of in determining a foreigner, according to AASU general secretary Bhriku Kumar Phukan.

This would have the effect of granting citizenship to all those whom the agitators describe as foreigners and want shifted to other States, that is, those who entered the State during 1961-71.

The current exercise relates to finding a solution to 1961-71 entrants as the agitators have already agreed to let the 1951-61 migrants remain in Assam if those of 1961-71 are moved out of the State. The Government has already assured that post-1971 en-

trants will be deported.

The official draft proposal on detection reads: "All foreigners shall be detected on the basis of the Constitution and the relevant laws as exist today including the Citizenship Act, 1955, Foreigners' Act, 1946 and Passports Act, 1967. In doing so all relevant documents would be utilised, including the National Register of 1951, electoral rolls, including those of 1952, and land records maintained under Assam Land and Revenue Regulation."

The agitation leaders told the Government that they would convey their response to the formula after considering it in the executive committees of their organisations.

Mr P. K. Mahanta, president of All-Assam Students Union, said the continued talks had advanced to the extent of the Government agreeing to the use of the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC), the 1952 electoral rolls, the Citizenship Act, the Passport Act and the Foreigners Act for detecting foreign nationals in Assam.

The Assam movement could not agree to the Government's insistence on using all documents permitted under Section 74 of the Evidence Act for determining the citizenship claims of disputed persons, Mr Mahanta said.

The movement, however, was agreeable to the use of land records—pattas and zamabandi proceedings—for settling citizenship claims, Mr L. C. Rajkhowa, Adviser to AASU said.

Mr Mahanta said the real issue at the talks was detection, detention and deportation of foreign nationals in Assam.

Mr Rajkhowa said the Government had not also agreed to the withdrawal of "repressive measures" against those agitating for a solution to the foreign nationals issue.

Mr Mahanta said the tripartite talks had been adjourned because

some Opposition leaders had some other engagements in the next few days. The good offices of Opposition leaders was essential for a settlement.

Mr Bhola Paswan Shastri, Congress-S leader, said the tripartite meeting had made progress toward a consensus on who the "foreigner" was. He had a feeling that some settlement would emerge.

Mr Jaswant Singh replaced Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee for the Bharatiya Janata Party at the talks. Other Opposition leaders present were: Mr L. K. Surjeet (CPLM), Mr Ravindra Varma (Janata) and Mr Bhola Paswan Shastri (Congress-S). Those from the Government side included Mr Zail Singh, Home Minister and his two Ministers of State, Mr N. R. Laskar and P. Venkatasubbiah, Mr Bhisma Narain Singh, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Mr Jagannath Kaushal, Law Minister and Mr Shiv Shankar, Petroleum Minister, who had earlier been associated with the talks as Law Minister.

Earlier, the Ministers and the Opposition leaders met representatives of the All Assam Minority Students Union and the Jamait-Ulema-Hind. They argued that they also should be represented at the talks because they represented a sizable section of the population and the State was likely to be affected as a result of any agreement between the Government and the Assam leaders. They also cautioned the Government against coming to any agreement which would harm the interest of the minorities in the State.

Following is the draft agreement on strengthening the border with Bangladesh to prevent infiltration into Assam:

"The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places. Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes all along the international border shall be adequately intensified. In order to further strengthen the security arrangement, to prevent effectively future infiltration, an adequate number of check posts shall be set up.

"Besides the arrangements mentioned above and keeping in view security considerations, a road all along the international border shall be constructed so as to facilitate patrolling by security forces. Land between border and the road would be kept free of human habitation, wherever possible. Riverine patrolling along the international border would be intensified. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border."

Three-tier Ministry in Assam soon

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20—Following discussions here between Assam Chief Minister Keshab Chandra Gogoi and the Central leaders, it was indicated today that a three-tier Ministry will be sworn in at Gauhati in a couple of days.

Mr Gogoi had detailed discussions on this subject with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Industry Minister N. B. Tiwari, who has been acting as the High Command observer for the State, as also Mrs Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, AICC general secretary.

The Ministry will be expanded in stages and will give representation to all the regions and linguistic groups in the State.

The first batch of Ministers is expected to include about 15 of the Cabinet rank and the rest will be Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers.

Mr Gogoi has been advised that he should carry all sections of the party with him and also those who have promised support to ensure stability of the Government.

In the course of his talks, Mr Gogoi has assured the Central leaders that the Ministry enjoyed majority support in the Assembly and would be able to survive a trial of strength. According to his estimates, he has the support of 62 MLAs in the Assembly.

Gogoi call to withdraw stir

Hindustan Times Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20 — Assam Chief Minister Keshab Chandra Gogoi today appealed to the leaders of the Assam agitation to withdraw their call for "Assam curfew" on January 26 as the talks on the foreign nationals issue were on.

Mr Gogoi, who has had discussions with the Central Ministers on Ministry-making in Assam, expressed the hope that the movement leaders would heed his appeal and restore normalcy in the State.

He was hopeful of a solution of the foreigners issue being found across the negotiating table and wanted all agitational methods to be given up.

Mr Gogoi had separate meetings with Defence Minister R. Venkataraman and Union Cabinet Secretary Krishnaswami Rao Saheb today. He also met Mr Rajiv Gandhi, MP.

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