

Assam talks adjourned

Accord on steps to check infiltration

From Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Jan. 20.

The tripartite talks on the Assam foreigners issue ended for the time being tonight on an optimistic note with a commonly accepted agreement on measures to prevent future infiltration from across the international border.

Before the talks were put off until February 8 efforts were made to reconcile the views of the Government and the All-Assam Students' Union and the All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad on the principles of detecting aliens. There was no agreement on this crucial question as opinions were at variance on the interpretation of "relevant public documents".

The AASU and the AAGSP have from the beginning been urging that the National Register of Citizens of 1951 and the electoral rolls of 1952 together with the Constitution and other enactments should be the basis on which the citizenship question should be determined.

The Government has, however, till all along held that a variety of other documents like birth certificates, school records, bank accounts and ration cards, could also be cited as evidence to establish one's claim to citizenship.

Package deal

An understanding on this vital question can help remove the main obstacle to what was officially described as a package deal on the vexed issue of aliens which has defied solution for two years.

In the course of the discussion there was a determined effort on all sides to remove apprehensions on the part of AASU and AAGSP but still a final understanding eluded the conference. It was officially stated that the discussion on working out the detection formula was fruitful, but AASU and AAGSP spokesmen said there was no complete agreement on this question.

The understanding on strengthening border security measures provides for the construction of a road 'all along the international border' but it does not specify whether it would cover the entire length of the Indo-Bangladesh boundary or only the Assam sector.

The most significant part of the agreement is that the territory between the border road and the boundary line 'would be kept free

from human habitation wherever possible'. This was one of the major demands of AASU and AAGSP because they fear that people living along the boundary line tend to harbour infiltrators.

It was also agreed that physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles would be built at 'appropriate places'.

The agreement also stipulates that patrolling along the border will be intensified and an adequate number of checkposts would be set up. "All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border", it says.

Significant step

Some of the participants in the talks viewed the understanding on border security arrangements as a significant step towards a package deal with the agitation leaders. The official spokesman, however, declined to comment on the trend of the talks.

When the talks resume on February 8, the three parties will bend their energies to work out a mutually acceptable formula for the detection of foreigners.

The talks had begun on Monday, and the government side was led by the Union Home Minister, Mr. Zail Singh. Several other Union Ministers were with him.

The Opposition participants included Mr. A. B. Vajpayee (BJP), Mr. H. S. Surjeet (CPI-M), Mr. Indrajit Gupta (CPI), Mr. Ravindra Varma (Janata) and Mr. Bhola Paswan Shastri (Congress-S). At today's talks, however, Mr. Vajpayee was replaced by Mr. Jaswant Singh, MP.

Constructive role

The decision to adjourn the talks was taken by mutual consent. Informed sources said the Opposition leaders had played a constructive role in the discussions.

Earlier today, representatives of the All-Assam Minority Students' Union and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, Assam, placed their views before the Government and Opposition leaders.

They maintained that the cut-off date for purposes of identifying foreigners should be March 25, 1971.

Meanwhile, it was understood that the Union Government has directed the Assam Government to intensify steps to weed out post-1971 aliens and to deport them from the country.

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