

# Assam Situation

Normally, the proposed tripartite talks on the foreigners issue of Assam slated for January 18 should have generated a good deal of public interest, if not hope, for more reasons than one. Since the agitation launched by the AASU-AAGSP two years ago for identification and deportation of foreign nationals illegally staying in Assam for about three decades, the Government, the AASU-AAGSP representatives and a few leaders from the Opposition parties are going to meet for the first time across a table in a bid to find out a solution to the problem. Since the issue is acknowledged as a national one, the proposed talks have been rightly arranged at the national level and, as such, have national importance. Moreover, the Prime Minister is expected to participate in the proposed conference.

Unfortunately, certain developments in the last few weeks have marred, rather than brightened, the prospect of the projected talks, and that too is for more reasons than one. Instead of creating a congenial atmosphere for a meaningful discussion the Government have enforced repressive measures more vigorously than ever before. Nor have the Government spokesmen even indirectly indicated that the Centre is going to the conference table with an open mind; on the contrary, the Government have, as we said earlier, prejudiced the prospect of the talks. Similarly, the spokesmen of the CPM have not given up the party's anti-Assam stand. From the AASU-AAGSP side too the stand remains rigid, perhaps more rigid, in the sense that their leaders have decided to carry on the agitation simultaneously with the decision to join the talks. Apparently they feel that if the Government can enforce repressive measures while talking of negotiations why they cannot resume agitation while joining the tripartite talks?

Whatever that be, the prevailing situation is really disquieting and it would be unrealistic to hope that the tripartite talks are going to be fruitful unless some miracle can save the New Delhi discussions from a failure. Indeed, the loss of human lives in the police firings at two places in Nowgong and at Tezpur and in-

juries to many in these incidents besides in Biawanathi Chariali during the two-day Path Bandh have made the pre-talk situation more disquieting. Even if one takes the worse view of what is officially called stone-throwing by demonstrators and blockade of Government transport buses and running of trains at one or two places, the Government cannot be said to have acted with restraint. That as many as seven youngmen have been killed in police firing is itself a serious reflection on a democratic Government which seems to have drawn no lesson from the alien rule whose repressive measures had ultimately to yield to popular upsurge. When the Government talk glibly of human consideration in respect of foreign nationals, it does not seem to have any compunction in resorting to police firings.

However, there is still time for both sides—the Government as well as the AASU-AAGSP leadership—to give fresh thoughts to the entire situation visavis the forthcoming New Delhi talks on the foreigners issue. The agitation leaders have reportedly offered to suspend the movement provided the Government withdraw its repressive policy. The AASU-AAGSP's offer is definitely sensible and should be positively responded to by the Government without delay. As the situation stands now, there is every danger of violence taking the upper hand if the Government as well as the sponsors of the movement do not see the writing on the wall. The present situation calls for immediate intervention by the Prime Minister herself. The Assam problem has assumed over the last two years and more a dimension which is obviously beyond the capacity of her aides even to evolve a right approach to its solution. If the efforts she had initiated a year ago to find out a solution of the problem were sustained by herself it is just possible that the situation would have been different and possibly a solution could well be round the corner. With a tripartite conference scheduled to take place within a fortnight the Prime Minister should no longer hesitate to intervene personally and bring to an end an issue that has defied solution so far.

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