

Hope on Assam talks

NEW DELHI, January 16 (PTI).

HOPE is centred on the tripartite talks on Assam opening here on Monday to thrash out a solution to the vexed foreign nationals issue with participation widened to include representatives of opposition parties in parliament.

Talks spanning several months between the movement leaders and the Centre failed to resolve the problem. This is the first time that the leaders of the opposition parties — CPM, CPI, BJP, Janata and Congress (S) — will join representatives of the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All-Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and of the Union government in the search for a solution.

The Lok Dal, whose leader, Mr. Charan Singh, was invited for the talks, withdrew participation. In a statement today, Mr. Charan Singh said this was in protest against what he called the attitude of Prime Minister,

Mrs. Indira Gandhi, towards the opposition parties which were coming closer to one another.

The movement leaders are expected to arrive tomorrow for the talks and government has indicated that it will take into account views also of the various other interested parties in evolving a solution to the foreign nationals problem.

AASU DELEGATION

An 18-member delegation — eight from the AASU and ten from the AAGSP — will participate in the talks.

Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, president, Mr. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, general secretary, Mr. Nurul Hassan, vice-president, Mr. Laminath Borgohain, Mr. Lalit Rajkhowa, Mr. Nagen Sarma, Mr. Digen Bora and Mr. Arun Sarma will represent the AASU.

The AAGSP delegation includes Mr. Nibaroti Bora, chairman of the Purbanchaliam Lok Parishad, Mr. Khanin Barua, president of the Yuvak Samaj, Mr. Atul Bora and Mr. Biraj Sarma, convenors of the parishad.

While five members — two of AASU and three of the parishad — left for Delhi this afternoon, the remaining will leave Gauhati tomorrow.

The AASU leaders said that they would insist that the basis for the talks for solving the issue should be the 17-point draft proposals submitted to the government by the Assam movement leaders at the last round of official level talks.

The Citizen's Right Preservation Committee of Assam today threatened to launch a counter movement, if the government reached any settlement with the agitation leaders on the foreign nationals issue, which was not acceptable to all sections of people in the state.

A three-member delegation of the

committee demanded at a press conference here that the government must also hold discussion with representatives of the committee and other bodies of religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities in Assam before arriving at any settlement.

The delegation came to Delhi to meet the government representatives and leaders of opposition parties before the proposed talks on January 18. Its members are: Mr. Sadhan Ranjan Sarkar, former minister of Assam and patron of the committee, Mr. Nripati Ranjan Choudhury, former MP and committee vice-president, and Mr. Naresh Chandra Das, Jt. secretary of the committee.

The delegation has already met Mr. Charan Singh, Mr. Biju Patnaik (both Lok Dal), Mr. A. B. Vajpayee (BJP), Mr. Ravindra Verma (Janata), Mr. H. K. Singh Surjeet (CPM) and Mr. Bho'a Paswan Shastri (Cong.-S).

The impression it gained from talks with them was that the opposition would try to present a united stand at the talks.

Asked about the reaction of Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Das said the BJP leader felt that those who had settled in Assam could not be disturbed ("jo bas gaya, so bas gaya"). However, he wanted the border to be sealed to stop future infiltration from Bangladesh, Mr. Das said.

The delegation members said they were opposed to resettlement of so-called foreigners outside Assam or bifurcation of the belt inhabited by them from the state. Neither of these would solve the problem, they said.

The delegation said that March 25, 1971, should be the cut-off date for identification of foreigners as those who had migrated before that date were protected by the "Indira-Mujib pact of 1972".

Besides, according to a 1969 resolution of the Assam government, deportation of infiltrators was complete and there was "little scope for infiltration during 1961-71 due to hostile attitude of the administration and the people", the delegation pointed out.

It said that East Pakistan refugees were not foreigners and they were protected by National Commitments and Immigration (expulsion from Assam) Act, 1959. Besides, the principle for conferring citizenship on them should be the same as that for refugees from West Pakistan. Sindh refugees, who had migrated to India after 1971, had been granted citizenship in 1978, it pointed out.

The delegation said the Assam agitation was supported by only 15 per cent people belonging to "high caste Hindus". It also alleged an international plan to "dismember" the north-eastern region from India and said Assam was a test case.

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