

## Bangladesh fears exodus of Bengalis from Assam

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.AFPAndrew Burton

The ongoing process of compiling the National Register of Citizens in Assam may trigger an exodus of Bengalis and create one more Rohingya-like refugee crisis for Bangladesh, senior officials of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government said here on Wednesday.

Addressing visiting Indian journalists, they said the process in Assam is threatening India-Bangladesh ties and will be exploited by anti-India elements and Islamic fundamentalists who are challenging the Awami League rule.

"Citizenship issue will be another disappointment after the setback on the sharing of water of the river Teesta. We believe India should think of its friendship with Bangladesh before going ahead with the full implementation of the citizens register in Assam.

"If the process leads to deportation of a section of the Bengali population of Assam, it will trigger another Rohingya-like refugee crisis," said Iqbal Shobhan Chowdhury, media adviser to Prime Minister Hasina.

Bangladeshi policymakers are unanimous that the failure to conclude the Teesta water sharing agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka has been disappointing and the ongoing process in Assam will complicate the situation further.

Prime Minister Hasina reflected this sentiment on Tuesday and said, "It's sad that 'Didimoni' (West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee) does not want to give the share of Teesta's water that belongs to us." These observations have gained significance as a section of the ruling Awami League believes that India has not reciprocated Ms. Hasina's support on counter-insurgency steps in the northeastern states.

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