

Govt tells states to collect biometrics of Rohingyas

DATA CHECK Home minister Rajnath Singh says states have been told to send data on Rohingya refugees to Centre as part of efforts to crack down on illegal immigrants

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KOLKATA: The Union government has asked states to identify Rohingyas, take their biometric details and send them to it, Union home minister Rajnath Singh said in Kolkata during his visit to the city to attend the 23rd meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council on Monday, describing efforts to crack down on illegal immigrants.

“Advisories have been issued to states. They need to identify the Rohingyas, take their biometrics and send us a report. The Centre will initiate action through diplomatic channels with Myanmar and get it resolved,” Singh added.

Singh has previously described the Rohingyas as illegal immigrants and asked other parties not to politicise the government’s efforts to identify them. He told BJP workers last week that the Rohingyas had ended up as far as Kerala.

New Delhi has refused to recognise the Rohingyas from Myanmar as refugees and wants to crack down on their presence and spread across India. West Bengal’s Trinamool Congress government has welcomed them though. Last year, West Bengal chief minister Mamta Banerjee said she supported the United Nation’s request of helping the Rohingyas. Last month, the then Border Security Force Director General KK Sharma had said West Bengal was “slightly friendly” to the Rohingyas.

The BSF has refused to speak on the biometric initiative as it has to be implemented by the state governments.

Interestingly, Banerjee was present at the meeting with Singh at the state secretariat. Others present were Jharkhand chief minister Raghubar Das, Bihar’s deputy chief minister Sushil Kumar Modi and Odisha finance minister Sashi Bhusan Behera.

On September 14, Mamata Banerjee expressed support for the Rohingyas and had tweeted: “We do support the @UN appeal to help the Rohingya people. We believe that all commoners are not terrorists. We are really concerned.”

Senior lawyer Colin Gonsalves, who is representing one of the Rohingya groups that have



■ (From left) Jharkhand chief minister Raghubar Das, Union home minister Rajnath Singh, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and Bihar deputy CM Sushil Modi during the 23rd Eastern Zonal Council Meeting in Bengal’s Howrah on Monday.

SAMIR JANAT/HT

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RAJNATH SINGH, home minister

moved the Supreme Court against the government’s deportation plans, criticised Singh’s announcement. “The government is treating Rohingyas, who are victims of genocide according to the United Nations, as if they are criminals. It is making plans to return them at a time when the UN has strongly criticised the premature attempts to send them back since it is neither safe nor is there enough land to rehabilitate them in Myanmar,” he said.

Ranjit Sur, vice president of Association for Protection of Democratic Rights, Bengal’s largest human rights organisation, said: “The Centre’s approach is inhuman. This may lead to arbitrary collection of biometric data from Muslims. Also, sending back Rohingyas to Myanmar is likely to endanger their lives. They left their country because they felt insecure. We will oppose such initiatives.”