

# Banglish ban and our dangerous obsession with force



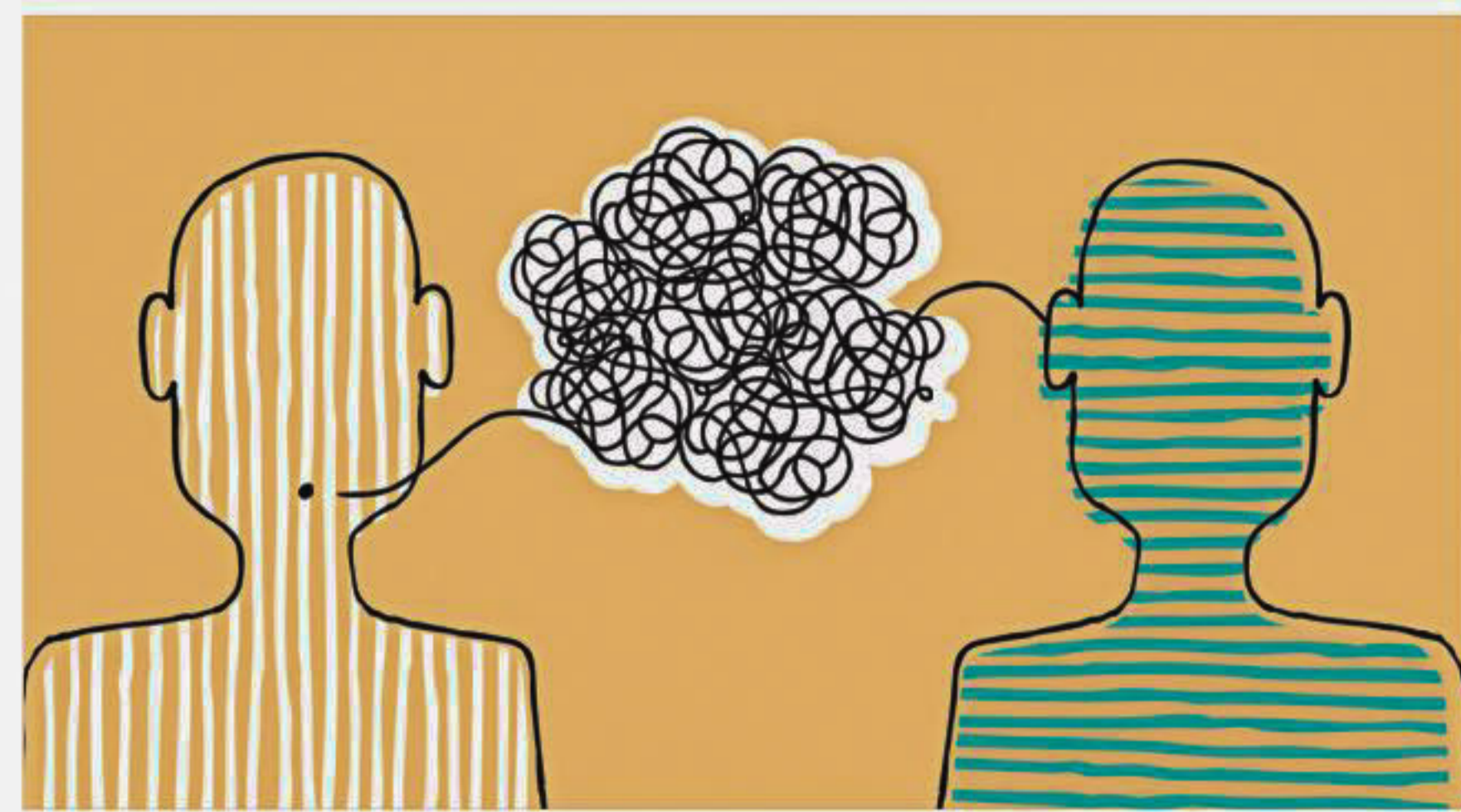
BADIUZZAMAN BAY

**I**T felt like déjà vu when State Minister for Information Tarana Halim, just days into joining the ministry, delivered her "Banglish" judgment.

According to media reports, the minister has directed radio stations to avoid using "Bangreji" or "Banglish," a reference to the modern-day practice of speaking a mix of Bangla and English, with sometimes anglicised pronunciations of the Bangla alphabets. She also reportedly instructed the stations to use "correct" Bangla.

Just weeks ago, a similar announcement came from the man who would be put in charge of her former office, the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology. Mustafa Jabbar said he wouldn't entertain any letter written in English at his ministry. It has to be in Bangla.

Normally, statements like these are usually orchestrated to please populist sentiments: They excite the crowd for a while, the speaker is showered with praise for saying the "right" thing, but eventually nothing happens. Halim's was also greeted with cheers. It was in part a response to concerns among academics and linguists about the increasing tendency to speak a distorted form of Bangla by radio jockeys and



others. In February last year, while inaugurating an event observing the International Mother Language Day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also expressed her concern about Banglish. She made an impassioned appeal to the youth to avoid the tendency, which she likened to an "epidemic," and urged the educationalists to find a way to prevent it.

The debate over Banglish goes back nearly a decade. It started after the proliferation of private television and radio stations and the rise of social media when people's distinct linguistic choices became more apparent. There seems to be a general consensus that Bangla and English should not be mixed. That understanding, however, hasn't translated into action especially in quarters deemed particularly responsible for promoting the mix. But coming up with a ministerial directive

to stop it, or imposing Bangla over English for that matter, is unprecedented and marks a radical shift in policy responses to our fast-changing linguistic pattern.

As the authority for the private television and radio stations in Bangladesh, part of the responsibility of the information ministry is to see if the guideline for the establishment and management of privately owned FM stations (2010) is being followed. The guideline basically outlines what can and cannot be broadcast, among other things. A quick inspection will, however, reveal that there is no directive on the kind of language that can be used, which means the over-two-dozen FM radio stations in the country are actually free to choose how they communicate as long as they are not in violation of the content policy or other terms of engagement.

So despite the popular anti-Banglish sentiment that played a key role in the instruction, the ministry's move seems like an unnecessary intervention in a matter that should have been left to the academics, as the prime minister had suggested.

Some online commentators talked about our "linguistic integrity" to justify the move. They have a point—but linguistic integrity is itself a debatable issue as no language is immune to changes. And much as we love the form of Bangla that we have inherited, it is bound to evolve with time. Addition, alteration and distortion are but ways through which a language evolves.

Speaking of changes, when Bankim Chandra Chatterjee brought about his own, combining several words to form a single, larger one, and Kazi Nazrul Islam offered a unique blend of languages in *Bidrohi*, initially they were looked upon suspiciously. I am not trying to make a comparison between those changes and this new phenomenon called Banglish, but the fact remains that some changes and trends are inevitable, and only time can decide whether or not they are going to stick around. Bangla Academy's own troubled experience with the non-establishment writers and linguists has shown that any attempt at imposition is bound to fail.

Ironically, Bangla has historically been dependent on other languages for its development. A majority of Bangla words came from other languages including modified, unmodified and corrupted forms of Sanskrit words, as

well as loanwords from various other sources. Language, like culture, is ever-evolving, and with globalisation allowing languages and cultures to mingle at a scale never seen before, the pace of evolution will only quicken, whether we like it or not.

So how to deal with Banglish? Should it be through legislation or through education and advocacy? Which approach is most effective, which least restrictive of freedom of expression? The answer is pretty simple if we consider the Constitutional provision on people's freedom of speech, which means any restriction on it, legal or otherwise, would be unconstitutional.

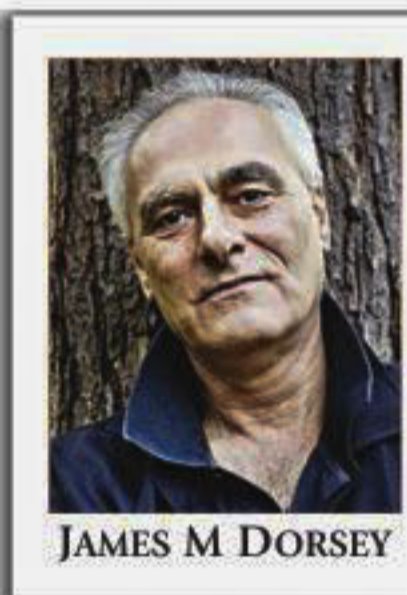
In any case, there is a legitimate fear that an administrative action to combat linguistic changes/distortions will set a dangerous precedent for how future cases in matters of language and culture are to be settled. What we need to understand here is that the way to fight ideas and thoughts is not through force but through counter-activism.

Since Banglish has proved to have a disturbing influence on the younger generation, there may be some kind of a bulwark against it—a social movement, to be specific, involving the parents, teachers and the media to slowly wean the youth off this habit. In the end, any change that is expected should be spontaneous, from a change of heart, not of circumstances.

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# Regional rivalries threaten to fuel the fire in Syria and Iran



JAMES M DORSEY

**T**URKISH allegations of Saudi, Emirati and Egyptian support for the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) threaten to turn Turkey's mili-

tary offensive against Syrian Kurds aligned with the PKK into a regional imbroglio.

The threat is magnified by Iranian assertions that low intensity warfare is heating up in areas of the Islamic republic populated by ethnic minorities, including the Kurds in the northwest and the Baloch on the border with Pakistan.

Taken together, the two developments raise the spectre of a potentially debilitating escalation of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as an aggravation of the eight-month-old Gulf crisis that has pitted Saudi Arabia and its allies against Qatar, which has forged close ties to Turkey.

The United Arab Emirates and Egypt rather than Saudi Arabia have taken the lead in criticising Turkey's incursion into Syria designed to remove US-backed Kurds from the countries' border and create a 30-kilometre-deep buffer zone.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said the incursion by a non-Arab state signalled that Arab states would be marginalised if they failed to develop a national security strategy.

Egypt, for its part, condemned the incursion as a "fresh violation of

Syrian sovereignty" that was intended to "undermine the existing efforts for political solutions and counter-terrorism efforts in Syria."

Despite Saudi silence, *Yeni Safak*, a newspaper closely aligned with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), charged that a USD 1 billion Saudi contribution to the reconstruction of Raqqa, the now Syrian Kurdish-controlled former capital of the Islamic State, was evidence of the kingdom's involvement in what it termed a "dirty game."

Analysts suggest that Saudi Arabia may have opted to refrain from comment in the hope that it could exploit the fact that Iran, a main backer of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, has refused to support the incursion.

Nevertheless, Saudi, UAE and Egyptian support for the Syrian Kurds would stroke with suggestions that the Gulf states are looking at ways of undermining regimes in Tehran and Damascus by stirring unrest among their ethnic minorities.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry said it had recently seized two large caches of weapons and explosives in separate operations in Kurdish areas in the west of the country and a Baloch region on the eastern border with Pakistan. It said the Kurdish cache seized in the town of Marivan included bomb-making material, electronic detonators, and rocket propelled grenades while the one in the east contained two dozen remote-controlled bombs.

The ministry accused Saudi Arabia of providing the weapons but offered no evidence to back up its claim. The ministry has blamed the kingdom for



2016 file photo of Turkish army tanks driving towards the Turkish-Syrian border. REUTERS/UMIT BEKTAS/FILE PHOTO

a number of weapons seizures in the past year.

The Revolutionary Guards said earlier this month that it had captured explosives and suicide vests in the south-eastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan that had been smuggled in by a jihadist group that operates out of the neighbouring Pakistan region of Balochistan.

Separately, a Guard commander said that three Guards and three Islamic State militants had been killed in a clash in western Iran.

Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince Mohammed bin Salman vowed last year that the battle

between his kingdom and the Islamic republic would be fought "inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia." Former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Britain and the United States, Prince Turki al-Faisal, told a rally of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, a controversial Iranian opposition group that "I, too, want the fall of the regime."

A Saudi think tank, the Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies (AGCIS), believed to be backed by Prince Mohammed, called in a study published last year for Saudi support for a low-level Baloch insurgency in Iran.

In the study, published by the

Riyadh-based the Arabian Gulf Centre for Iranian Studies, Mohammed Hassan Husseinbor, a Washington-based Baloch lawyer, researcher and activist, argued that the "Saudis could persuade Pakistan to soften its opposition to any potential Saudi support for the Iranian Baluch... The Arab-Baluch alliance is deeply rooted in the history of the Gulf region and their opposition to Persian domination," Husseinbor said.

Pointing to the vast expanses of Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province, Husseinbor went on to say that "it would be a formidable chal-

lenge, if not impossible, for the Iranian government to protect such long distances...in the face of widespread Baluch opposition, particularly if this opposition is supported by Iran's regional adversaries and world powers."

Washington's conservative Hudson Institute that prides itself on the Trump administration having adopted many of its policy recommendations, last year organised a seminar with speakers who were Baloch, Iranian Arab, Iranian Kurdish and Iranian Azerbaijani nationalists.

Pakistani militants have claimed that Saudi Arabia had in the last year stepped up funding of militant madrasas or religious seminaries in Balochistan that allegedly serve as havens for anti-Iranian fighters.

The spectre of ethnic proxy wars in Iran, Pakistan, and Syria threatens to further destabilise the greater Middle East and complicate Chinese plans to develop the Pakistani deep-sea port of Gwadar, a crown jewel of China's Belt and Road initiative.

Fuelling ethnic tensions further risks Iran responding in kind. Saudi Arabia has long accused Iran of instigating low-level violence and protests in its predominantly Shiite oil-rich Eastern Province as well as in Bahrain. It also risks aggravating war in Yemen, regionalising the Turkish-Kurdish confrontation in Syria, and pushing the Middle East ever closer to the brink.

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## A WORD A DAY

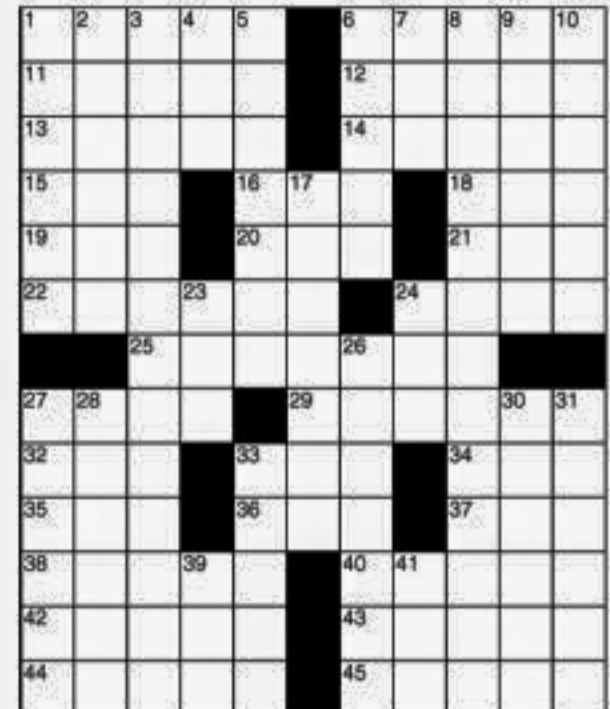


[R]EGALIA  
NOUN

*The emblems or insignia of royalty, especially the crown, sceptre, and other ornaments used at a coronation.*

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

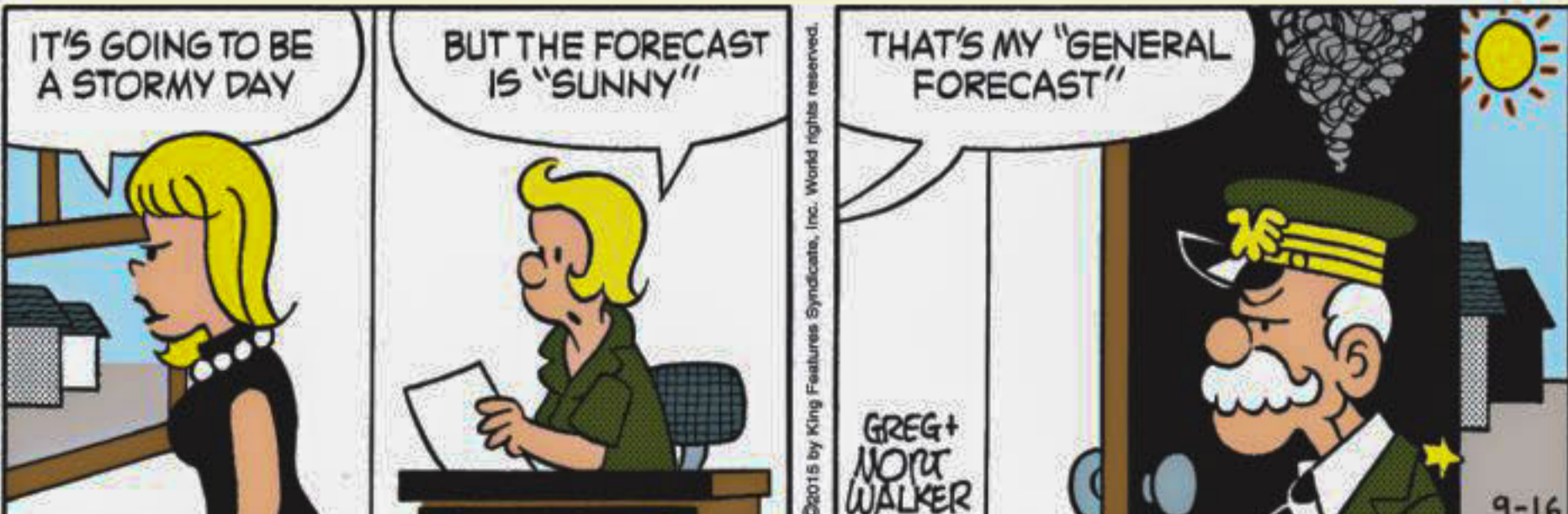
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|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>       | 29 Phone beeps      | 3 Entrance with an axis |
| 1 The fifth element | 32 Work unit        | 4 Count start           |
| 6 Slalom course     | 33 Pipe bend        | 5 Tell tales            |
| features            | 34 Pharaoh's symbol | 6 Social blunder        |
| 11 Sports spot      | 35 Blue             | 7 "I - Rock"            |
| 12 Tickle           | 36 Ring legend      | 8 U-turn measure        |
| 13 Bile producer    | 37 Essen article    | 9 Chaperone             |
| 14 Broad comedy     | 38 In the area      | 10 Handled              |
| 15 Old card game    | 40 Hotel option     | 17 Look over            |
| 16 Field worker     | 42 Exact copy       | 23 Halloween mo.        |
| 18 Dijon denial     | 43 Practical        | 24 Vein yield           |
| 19 Maximum          | 44 Wading bird      | 26 Writer Ralph         |
| amount              | 45 Attendance count | 27 Passover             |
| 20 Pro vote         |                     | 28 Fit for farming      |
| 21 NYC subway line  |                     | 30 Deadly fly           |
| 22 Dedicate         |                     | 31 Benders              |
| 24 Savvy about      | <b>DOWN</b>         | 33 Devoured             |
| 25 Titanic sinker   | 1 Minstrel's song   | 39 4-Down, to Juan      |
| 27 Gasp for air     | 2 Colorful bird     | 41 Sky sighting         |



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

PARMA BAKED  
AYEAR OLIVE  
REGIS ALDEN  
UNEASY  
ALL NEUT MIA  
GOATIT FURS  
ARTICULATES  
TEEN MARINE  
ENS ANT LET  
PESETA  
TILES ROTOR  
ALITO ADELE  
BLEEP LOSES

## BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



## BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

