



The BJP's polarisation politics takes a new turn

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On 3 August, the *Indian Express* carried a report headlined, 'Fear grips Bengali-speaking migrants in Noida amid police checks in Delhi-NCR'. In a follow-up dated 7 August, interviewees said they had sent their families back home—to Jharkhand or Kolkata. After what happened in Gurgaon, where Bengali-speaking daily-wage workers were detained during police checks despite presenting valid IDs, they can't take a risk.

For Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee, the crackdown on Bengali-speaking migrant workers—mostly Muslims—in BJP-ruled states is an attack on the Bengali language and culture. This, she announced at a Shaheed Divas rally on 21 July, must be countered through a sustained struggle on the streets—right until state assembly elections in early 2026.

Incidents reported from Delhi-NCR, Gurgaon, Haryana, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh feature prominently in both media and public discourse in Bengal. The BJP continues to claim that detainees are illegal migrants from Bangladesh who have no business being in India; the TMC insists they are migrant workers from different districts, targeted only because they speak Bengali.

What sharpened the divide further was a letter and a tweet. Writing to the officer in charge of New Delhi's Banga Bhawan in late July, an inspector with the Lodhi Colony police station in Delhi sought assistance for the translation of documents pertaining to a case involving the arrest of eight persons 'strongly suspected to be Bangladeshi nationals residing in India without any valid passport or visa'. The officer requested

the West Bengal government to provide 'an official translator/ interpreter proficient in Bangladeshi language...'

There was outrage. Identifying 'Bangladeshi' as a language was worse than idiotic—it was a giveaway of the BJP's mindset, its antagonism towards Indians that don't quite fit its cultural paradigm. On 3 August, Amit Malviya, BJP IT cell chief and Bengal minder, posted his defence of the Delhi Police on X: 'The official language of Bangladesh is not only phonologically different, but also includes dialects like Sylheti that are nearly incomprehensible to Indian Bengalis. There is, in fact, no language called "Bengali" that neatly covers all these variants. "Bengali" denotes ethnicity, not linguistic uniformity. So, when the Delhi Police uses "Bangladeshi language", it is shorthand for the linguistic markers used to profile illegal immigrants from Bangladesh—not a commentary on Bengali as spoken in West Bengal.'

Malviya's tweet, particularly his reference to Sylheti, spread the conflagration to the North-East, angering leaders in Assam's Barak Valley, home to a large Sylheti-speaking population. Murmurs of annoyance were heard from Tripura and Meghalaya as well.

According to TMC Rajya Sabha member Sushmita Dev, "It has become clear that the BJP's top leadership has no clue about the history of the Bengali and Sylheti languages spoken by millions of Indians." She also said Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's remark—that identifying Bangladeshis would be easier if people declared Bengali as their mother tongue—was "racial profiling aimed at upcoming elections in Assam and West Bengal".

A defensive BJP argued that Malviya's



Chief minister Mamata Banerjee leads a protest march in Jhargram against anti-Bengali policies targeting Bengali-speaking people in BJP-ruled states, 6 August 2025

The BJP's gameplan may well loosen the tightly knit and fiercely defended social fabric that Bengalis call their culture

remark was misinterpreted as anti-Bengali. Our goal is to deport'. Bangladesh does not mean we are en masse in Bangladesh bank," said BJP Rajya Sabha member Sushmita Dev. She dismissed the possibility of working in favour of elections, and said Banerjee to ensure candidate even in a Bengali-dominated state.

While politicians in their respective parties are vertical