

LANGUAGE NO BAR: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON AMIT SHAH'S STATEMENT ON HINDI

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights & Welfare of Minorities Incl. Linguistic Minorities - Schemes & their performance; Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions & Bodies

Union Home Minister [Amit Shah's statement on making Hindi the language of communication for people of non-Hindi speaking areas or States](#) was absolutely unnecessary. As the chairman of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee, he is duty bound to promote the spread of the Hindi language. But, the impression his speech generated at the 37th meeting of the panel in New Delhi last week is that he wanted to impose the language. Calling for the use of an Indian language among people who spoke languages other than Hindi, Mr. Shah said Hindi should be accepted as an alternative to English and not to local languages. It is up to the people of any two non-Hindi speaking areas or States to decide what their language of communication should be. If they are comfortable with English, which is also a global language, the Centre has no business in advising them to abandon English and take to any other language or Hindi, as done in this case. Mr. Shah's observations presuppose the position that English is not an Indian language. What he seems to have overlooked is that English has been recognised as an Indian language as much as Tamil or Telugu or Hindi have. This recognition is also due to the Sahitya Akademi, a central institution working for literary dialogue in the country. The Akademi, under the control of the Ministry of Culture, has, among others, been giving away annual awards for the best works of English, of course authored by Indians. Besides, the advantage that English gives to India has to be kept in mind. As pointed out by the president of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, D.K. Shivakumar, Bengaluru became India's IT capital because of English. It would be befitting for a person holding the office of Union Home Minister to shed any aversion to English, which has been a unifying force in a vast and diverse society such as India.

Expectedly, Mr. Shah's statement has been condemned politically, especially by the non-BJP Opposition parties. Even the AIADMK, a party that has been friendly to the BJP, has issued a statement through its coordinator and former Chief Minister, O. Panneerselvam, who expressed his disapproval of any move to "impose Hindi." But, most significantly, it is Tamil Nadu Chief Minister [M.K. Stalin who rightly lashed out at Mr. Shah](#) for seeking to create a "single identity," which, Mr. Stalin has pointed out, will not create unity. It is nobody's case that Indian languages, let alone Hindi, should not be nurtured and promoted. They all deserve the support of the state. Those in power should also follow up their words with substantive measures towards this direction. But, at the same time, no room should be given for any perception that the promotion drive will be at the cost of English. Respect for multiculturalism and a pluralistic identity is a quality that the political class, particularly those in power, should imbibe. Mr. Shah would do very well if he demonstrates, through words and actions, that he has that quality in abundance.

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