

**'Respect regional languages': Pro-Hindi speakers must heed President's Kovind's advice**

Coercion is not always the best path if you want to convince people to do something that they are averse to.

President Ram Nath Kovind seems to understand that well.

Addressing a function on the occasion of 'Hindi Divas' in Delhi last week, he asked Hindi-speaking people to give more respect and space to regional languages and their speakers in a bid to make the language more popular across the country.

He added that Hindi continued to face opposition in some parts of the country even though it became an official language many decades ago. Mr Kovind suggested that those who speak Hindi should greet a Tamilian with a 'vanakkam', a Sikh with 'Sat Sri Akal' and a Muslim with an 'Adaab'—words of greeting in Tamil, among Sikhs and in Urdu respectively. They should use the word 'Garu' (sir) while addressing a Telugu-speaking person. Home minister Rajnath Singh, who was also present at the function organised by his ministry, said in his address that Hindi could be enriched further if its speakers also used words from other languages.

Language tensions are not new in India, it started from Independence.

Even today, in many parts of India, Hindi is still a foreign language. In fact, many communities feel cornered when languages spoken by the majority of the state try to push them through.

Take for example, what happened recently in West Bengal. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had to revoke her decision of making Bengali a compulsory subject in schools in the hill district Darjeeling after protests by Gorkhas.

Coming back to Hindi-regional language rivalry, last month, activists in Karnataka blackened sign boards displayed in Hindi on the walls of a metro station. In March, Tamil Nadu saw a spate of protests when it replaced English with Hindi on its road signs.

The pro-Hindi lobby must understand that a language is not just about words; it carries with it culture, traditional knowledge, and works as comfort zone for its speakers.

Instead of ramming down a language down the throats of the unwilling, it will be a much better to give regional languages their due and let a thousand languages bloom.

**END**

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