

O HERALDO

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Amit Shah's war on English is dangerous for an emergent India

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statement that "those who speak English in this country will soon feel ashamed" is not merely provocative – it is irresponsible, divisive, and dangerous for India's future. Coming from the second most powerful man in the central government, his remark is not just a cultural opinion. It is an ideological signal with potentially damaging consequences for national unity, educational opportunity, and India's position in the global economy.

Let's be clear: India's linguistic richness is one of its greatest assets. With 22 constitutionally recognised languages and over 19,000 dialects, this country thrives in its diversity. But in that complexity, English has emerged as a bridge – not a colonial relic, but an empowering medium that allows Indians across regions to communicate, compete, and collaborate. To vilify English as a symbol of "shame" is not just a misreading of history. It is a direct attack on aspiration, progress, and India's global standing.

Contrary to Shah's assertion, English is not a "half-baked foreign language" but a language that Indians have made their own. Today, it is the language of opportunity and upward mobility, especially for millions of young Indians from modest backgrounds. In urban slums and rural villages alike, parents send their children to English-medium schools not because they are ashamed of their mother tongues, but because they understand that English is a passport to better jobs, higher education, and economic security.

Shah's rhetoric mocks the dreams of families who believe that English proficiency can transform their lives. It undermines decades of hard-won progress in making education more inclusive and aspirational. And it casts

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a shadow over the hopes of a new generation that wants to succeed not just in India, but on the world stage. Shah's remarks also fan the flames of linguistic chauvinism at a time when the country needs healing, not division. His comment aligns with a deeper pattern in BJP politics: what critics have rightly called the "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" ideology. It is no coincidence that his statement comes amid heated opposition from non-Hindi speaking states like Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, who have long resisted the imposition of Hindi through the National Education Policy's three-language formula.

By painting English as shameful and foreign, Shah is not defending regional languages. He is eroding the common ground that English provides in a multilingual democracy. His comments are also an act of economic self-sabotage. India's rise as an information technology and services giant has been driven in large part by its vast, English-proficient workforce. Our competitive edge over countries like China has often rested on our comfort with English in software development, customer service, legal process outsourcing, academia, and scientific research.

To delegitimize English now is to send a chilling message to global investors and academic collaborators: that India is turning inward, rejecting the very tools that made it globally relevant. This will not only hurt the economy, it will damage India's image as a cosmopolitan, forward-looking nation.

The argument that Indian languages are central to Indian identity is not wrong. What is wrong is pitting Indian languages against English, as if the two cannot coexist. Luminaries of the freedom struggle, who were also icons of Indian thought, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Maulana Azad were all advocates of Indian languages, yet none of them ever saw English as a threat to Indian culture.

Shah's framing of English as a source of national shame is not accidental. It fits within a broader ideological project to redefine Indian nationalism in narrow, exclusionary terms. It reflects a desire to rewrite history and marginalise pluralism, and in effect impose an identity that privileges certain languages, religions, and ways of life over others.

The real shame is not that Indians speak English. It is that a senior leader of the world's largest democracy would seek to make citizens ashamed of any language they speak, especially one that has become a vital part of India's success story.

India's future depends on embracing its full linguistic spectrum – cherishing our regional tongues, promoting multilingual education, and yes, preserving and expanding access to English. In today's world, being rooted in your culture and fluent in global languages is not contradictory – it is essential.

Amit Shah must be reminded: English is not a chain. It is a bridge. It is not shameful. It is empowering. And in India, there is no place for shame in the pursuit of knowledge, opportunity, or expression. No matter what language it comes in.



ROBIN ROY

Knowing English can open the floodgates of information and knowledge. Most scientific research, academic journals, and online content is published in English, which means that English speakers have access to a wealth of knowledge



Before we plunge into the political brouhaha... let's have a bigger picture of English and its economic impact, its thrust on sectors like corporate, higher education and how non-English speaking countries too have shown interest in learning the language.

Billions of people around the world are desperately trying to learn English—not only for self-improvement, but as a necessity for economic reasons.

Even as the interaction between English proficiency and gross national income per capita is a wholesome cycle, on

"You see the whole country of this system is just a position by the hemoglobin in the atmosphere because you are a sophisticated rhetorician intoxicated by the exuberance of your own verbosity..."

(Courtesy monologue from Amar Akbar Anthony)

Is this how you speak English... Well... whenever it comes to issues of linguistics and mother tongue and which language one should speak... the atmosphere becomes surcharged especially in a diverse country like ours.

Will you feel ashamed for speaking English? The matter recently took a political turn as Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi had a huge talkathon on it. Shah kick-started the controversy when he said that time is not far when English-speaking people would themselves feel ashamed.

"Mark my words, there is no crisis. In the coming years, such an Indian society is soon going to become a reality in which English-speaking people would themselves feel ashamed." Stressing Hindi's role as a factor in uniting the country, Shah went on to say half-baked knowledge acquired through foreign languages cannot lead to a complete understanding of Indian culture, history and religion.

a micro-level, better English skills allow individuals to apply for better jobs and raise their standards of living.

Even as over 1.5 billion people across the world speak in English, either as their first or second language, the fact underscores the language's universal appeal. And the language's universality has played a critical role in facilitating cross-cultural communication and crumbling language barriers in various sectors.

English has been the spine of international trade, finance, and technology and is often a requirement for many jobs and career opportunities. The ability to communicate effectively in English is crucial for individuals and countries which seek to gain a competitive edge in the global market.

For decades, several countries have been emphasising on learning English.

Knowing English can open the floodgates of information and knowledge. Most scientific research, academic journals, and online content is published in English, which means that English speakers have access to a wealth of knowledge.

English provides numerous educational opportunities, including access to top universities, academic programs, and research opportunities.

According to 2011 census, only 2, 59,000 Indians out of 1.21 billion documented English as their primary language. The India Human Development Survey Round II data published around this time, shows that only 6% of Indians stated they could speak English fluently.

For emerging economies like China, good English proficiency opens doors to greater opportunities and strengthens the nation's overall global competitiveness.

The 1990s saw a large number of Chinese students flocking to take tests such as the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) as well as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

During the 2000s, private language education brand New Oriental became an industry giant, indicating the growing popularity of English and the massive market for English language education in China.

In 2018, the number of TOEFL test takers reached 300,000, ranking first in the world, according to a China.org.cn article on December 28, 2019.

LEFT FRONT'S FAUX PAS?

In 1982, the then ruling Left Front government in West Bengal had abolished the teaching of English from its primary schools. The move led to a high-pitched controversy over the social importance of teaching English.

The main arguments in favour of the decision were to confront the elitism inherent in giving primacy to a "foreign" language and to promote higher enrolment and reduce dropout rates.

Twenty-five years later, in 2007, a new-look Left Front government sought to reverse the decision and re-introduce English into primary schools.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi advocated English as a means for the underprivileged to get jobs and move ahead in life, a remark that targets the BJP-RSS for what he calls their aversion to the colonial-era official language. Taking to social media platform X, he wrote in a post, "In today's world, English is as important as your mother tongue - because it will provide employment and boost your confidence."

"English is not a dam, it is a bridge. English is not a shame, it is power. English is not a chain - it is a tool to break the chains." Rahul Gandhi also slammed leaders from the BJP, whose own wards speak English and study abroad, while the latter dissuaded the masses in India from using English. The Gandhi scion said, "The BJP-RSS don't want poor kids of India to learn English - because they don't want you to ask questions, move ahead, and become equal. In today's world, English is as important as your mother tongue - because it will provide employment and boost your confidence."

"Every language of India has soul, culture, and knowledge. We have to cherish them, and at the same time, teach English to every child. This is the path to an India that competes with the world, that gives every child an equal opportunity," said LoP Rahul Gandhi.

Meanwhile, politicians will give a political twist to every topic... and we fall prey to political decisions... Let's hope we don't end up speaking in the following manner...

"You see such extenuating circumstances coerce me to preclude you from such extravaganza" (Courtesy monologue from Amar Akbar Anthony)

(Writer is Senior Journalist and Former Senior Associate Editor, O Herald, Goa)

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tival. The focus on commercial aspects can overshadow its cultural and spiritual significance. Sao Joao is celebrated not in the swimming pool of a resort but in the traditional manner by jumping into the wells just as the ancestors used to do. In spite of the onslaught of commercialization, Sao Joao traditions continue in several villages in Goa. There needs to be a balance between tradition and commercialisation. Encouraging tourists to participate in traditional activities and respect local customs can help preserve the festival's cultural heritage.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

English is no longer foreign language

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has yet again triggered a controversy on his inbred abhorrence for the English language, stating that "those who speak English in India will soon feel ashamed." Shaming a widely-used global communication of the English language only exposes his deep misunderstanding of India's diversity, aspirations, and global ambitions. English serves as a bridge language in a country

where people from different States may not understand each other's mother tongues. English is also the language of higher education, science, medicine, law, aviation, and international trade. It is often argued that English is a colonial imposition and therefore must be rejected. While it is true that the British brought English to India, over time, Indians have made the language their own. It has been shaped, adapted, and enriched by Indian voices — from R K Narayan to Arundhati Roy. English in India is no longer a foreign language; it is a functional, cultural, and intellectual tool. Amit Shah's statement is not only illogical, but also irresponsible. A country that takes pride in its diversity cannot afford to let political leaders weaponize language to score cultural points. English is not a threat to India's identity — the real threat lies in dividing Indians by the tongues they speak.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Ban constructions near heritage sites

This has reference to the report

'Yet another Heritage breach in Old Goa.....' (**O Herald**, June 23). It seems like we are hell bent on destroying our heritage, water bodies, forests, the environment in short, life itself. How else does one explain the unchecked destruction that goes on in several parts of the country? Trees are cut with impunity knowing well that they are our Lungs. The ongoing construction at the St Augustine Tower is yet another such instance. Really speaking, there should be no such thing as permission for such constructions. All constructions within the buffer zone of heritage sites should be banned. Infact, all activities that involve cutting of trees or destroying the environment including infrastructure projects, should be banned all across the country.

Melville X. D'Souza, Mumbai

Panjim market is a potential fire hazard

The insightful article about the lack of inspection of fire safety systems in Panaji's market was an eye-opener (**O Herald** June 17).

After a long-overdue inspec-

people's *edit*

ASSAGAO - A PARADISE LOST

PRADEEP V KAMAT

Four decades ago when I moved from my ancestral house (Vagator) to re-locate to Assagao for greener pastures (clinical practice), the village was sleepy, secluded, serene and silent. It was dusty, desolate and deserted.

Without any basic amenities like landline (even in mid eighties!), tap, transport, hot mix....it was a no -man's land. But it had its own charm. The land was pristine, palm fringed and peaceful.

Widely known as 'land of flowers' it was cradled amidst sloping hills cloaked in greenery with picturesque hillocks that defined its unique topography.

Serene, sleepy, and silent village with snaking lanes and flanked by sprawling paddy fields, coconut groves, interspersed with jackfruit, mango and cashew trees, village had its unique rustic charm and tranquility.

Fast forward: Assagao has undergone a sea change over the years. Much water has flown down Siolim-Chapora river since I came over. There is now heavy influx of real estate wallas, the drug lords, land sharks, celebrities (including Bollywood), kith and kin of politicians from across all states not to mention about their equally powerful 'babus', who have made Assagao their second home. It also has become much sought after destination for domestic and foreign tourists, expats, as well as creative professionals (eg artists, musicians, performers, fashion designers) entrepreneurs, digital nomads... list endless.

Though Assagao over the years has undergone total transformation and face-lift, the new face though concrete and artificially attractive, - if one has fallen in love and is obsessed to have it then he has to pay a premium- a very heavy price (Rs 1 lakh/ sq. m as against Rs 100 sq. m when I purchased !)..!!

Having said that, I am a silent witness to this metamorphosis. The thick areas of flora and fauna have slowly been depleted in front of my eyes and now dotted with innumerable villas high rise buildings and multi stories apartments. Hill cutting by land mafia is rampant and has changed the village topography. Yet I am a mute spectator by default!!

Gone are the days when I enjoyed the melodious, mellifluous sound of koel, whistle of a bulbul, the squawking parrots and chirping sparrows during my early morning walks. And that unmistakable mixed astringent, sweet smell of different flowers including parijatka, chameli,

Champa. Everything is missing. The ubiquitous intelligent crow population, a vital part of ecological balance also has dwindled. The commonly seen Hoopoe, kingfisher, Woodpecker are not sighted anymore. Along with them wildlife is also almost on the verge of extinction. Frequently sighted mongoose, peacocks, monitor lizards, pythonsare conspicuous by their absence.

Over the years, Assagao skyline has changed much to the dismay of the locals and to the delight of upmarket tourists and land mafia who have made their second home far away from their corporate and mundane lives. Most villages in Goa have followed suit and have gone Assagao way, surrendering their charm to the uncontrolled, relentless, reckless, rampant tide of tourism which means crimes, drugs, rapes, sex parlours list endless...

The need for tourism growth, and overall developments (Infrastructure, employments, economic boost et el) is understandable. But can it be at the cost of degradation of moral values, environmental disaster and ecological damage?

tion, personnel from the fire department and the Corporation of the City of Panaji (CCP) discovered non-functional water pump, out of service fire hydrants, non-working smoke extractors and damaged/missing rubber hoses. As per a senior fire brigade officer even during the last test in 2017 the fire hydrants were not working. It is eight years and nothing has changed with inaction by the CCP nor the market closed by the fire department till the rectifications were carried out.

The market daily witnesses footfall of thousands of people and hundreds of vendors. Lack of working fire safety equipment and water is a serious matter. A fire in the market would be catastrophic because a variety of shops (vegetables, fruits, groceries, flowers, clothes, stationery, plastic, electrical etc.) exist cheek-by-jowl.

Further, vehicles parked underground and the crowded fish and old markets will also be affected. The authorities are putting at risk the lives of people by a lackadaisical attitude despite having the financial and manpower resources to revive the long-dead firefighting system. Is Panjim market not an inherent and important entity of Smart City Mission?

Sridhar D'Iyer, Caranzalem