

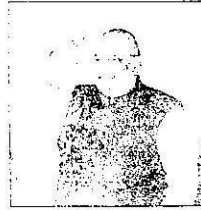


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Kannada gothilla federal spirit gothilla

At a time when strong momentum is building up against 'Hindi imposition,' especially in the southern states, the neglect of Kannada at two official functions attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Karnataka has led to widespread outrage. The backdrop at the inauguration of the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) in Bengaluru was entirely in English, with the official language of the state, Kannada, completely missing. But what really incensed activists was the prominence given to Hindi, while Kannada was totally blacked out at Bhadravathi in Shivamogga district where Shah laid the foundation stone for the Rapid Action Force (RAF) centre. While the backdrop was only in Hindi, the plaques unveiled by Shah were in English and Hindi. Former Chief



Unity cannot
be built by
imposing
uniformity

Minister H. D. Kumaraswamy, who has pledged to revive the Janata Dal (Secular) as a strong regional outfit representing local aspirations, was quick to seize the opportunity to accuse the Centre of imposing Hindi on the state and insulting Kannada. The spark ignited by him spread across social media, with netizens hauling up both the central and state governments over the coals.

Contrary to a false narrative sought to be built by some, India does not have a national language. The Constitution recognises both

Hindi and English as official languages of the Union government. Kannada is one of the languages under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Thus, Hindi enjoys no superior status over other languages, and it is an established practice that the local language is given primacy at all official events in the state. This is at the core of Indian federalism. The three-language formula also dictates that the official language of the state gets precedence, followed by English and Hindi. This being the case, such blatant disregard for Kannada, that too at a government function, only gives credence to the oft-repeated charge that the Centre is hell-bent on pushing its one-country-one-language agenda, at the cost of regional languages. Interestingly, when Shah participated at a recent event in Tamil Nadu, where language activism is at its peak, the backdrop was only in Tamil, and English and Hindi found no place, prompting Kannadigas to ask if they are paying the price for being docile.

The Centre's Hindi bias has also led to non-Hindi speaking people facing a disadvantage in securing central government jobs. This is because a person whose mother tongue is Hindi can write most examinations in his own language, while no such comfort is afforded to regional languages. Patience is wearing thin on the issue, and it is high time the Centre realised that constantly meddling with an emotive issue like language is unlikely to unite the country. Rather, it will lead to permanent resentment.