

## **Message from Foreign Secretary on the Day of Languages Celebrated by Mayo College, Ajmer and Goethe Institute**

October 26, 2020

**Namaste!**

I want to begin by thanking the Director of Mayo College Lt. Gen. Surendra Kulkarni for inviting me to deliver the closing address of the celebrations of the Day of Languages organized by Mayo College in association with Goethe Institute.

2. The most defining feature of the human civilisation is undoubtedly our ability to communicate through languages. A key element that intertwines Europe and India is, in fact, languages.

3. Way back in the 18th century, when William Jones who established the Asiatic Society of Bengal, was one of the first to explicitly discover this link, calling this family with many similar attributes, as the Indo-European family of languages. Ours is the largest family of languages spoken in the world and establishes us as civilisational co-travellers.

4. As is being increasingly researched and written about, the Proto Indo-European language which is considered to be the ancestor of the languages today spoken across India and Europe, bears testimony to this.

5. Another striking element of our linguistic bonds was the path-breaking work done by the Sanskrit grammarian Panini over 2500 years ago, who established the basic principles on which all languages are founded. Even today, modern day linguists marvel at his work and he can easily be considered the father of linguistics.

6. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Max Müller and other European scholars started a seamless flow of knowledge exchange between languages, through their study and translation of great Indian literary and philosophical texts.

7. India and Europe are both linguistically diverse lands. India alone has 22 scheduled languages in its Constitution and over a thousand mother tongues. India is home to various language families. Besides the Indo-European language family, the Dravidian, Austric and Tibeto-Burman languages, among others, also call India their home.

8. The European Union for its part has 24 official languages and numerous other languages and dialects.

9. In fact, this diversity is also found in sign languages, representing the truly inclusive nature of the spoken word.

10. On the other hand, ancient Indian literary traditions have sparked much interest beyond India's borders in recent times, and we see greater interest in establishing departments and chairs for Sanskrit and other major Indian languages in foreign universities.

11. Today, as the Indian Diaspora goes around the world, they are creating the demand for learning Indian languages in foreign educational institutions.

12. Now knowing a language is not just a means of communication, but has become a skill and an important part of the toolkit for globalisation. This explains the interest among Indian students to diversify their linguistic repertoire.

13. Linguistic trends are becoming more complex with the spread of foreign languages to remote corners of India and international content being localised in multiple Indian languages. Even technology has begun to adapt to the diversity of Indian languages.

14. Perhaps you are aware that the New Education Policy recently introduced by the Govt. of India gives impetus to the learning of foreign languages, half of which are European languages, that is, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese. The future for exchanges between India and Europe, therefore, is brighter than ever.

15. In diplomacy, every word matters and language acquires a special role. My training as a diplomat, especially the experience of negotiating texts at the United Nations and elsewhere, gave me valuable opportunity to have immersive experiences in diverse linguistic traditions.

16. I, therefore, attach particular importance to events like these that celebrate linguistic diversity and promote the ability to speak new languages.

17. I convey my very best wishes to all participants of this event and wish them well in the successful pursuit of their hopes and aspirations for the future.

**New Delhi**

**October 26, 2020**

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