

International Mother Language Day

Bangladesh Embassy

Stockholm

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REMARKS

Ambassador Tanmaya Lal

Ambassador Mehdi Hasan

Excellencies, Diplomatic colleagues

Distinguished guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Namaskar

I would like to thank Ambassador Hasan for inviting me here to the celebration of UN International Mother Language Day.

I have had the honour of joining our Bangladesh friends to commemorate this day in some of my previous stations.

All of us are also aware of the **great significance of the Martyrs' Day in the history of Bangladesh**, especially for the **struggle for the national identity** of their peoples.

Our shared linguistic heritage of Bengali language is so unique that the **national anthems** of both our countries, India and Bangladesh, are **literary creations** of a single person, the great Nobel Laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore. And I recall joining Ambassador Hasan when he hosted Tagore choir from Lund some months back.

25 years ago, it was the initiative of Bangladesh that led the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation UNESCO **recognizing the importance of our respective mother languages in sustaining our diverse cultures**. UNESCO designated 21 February as the International Mother Language Day. This was later also endorsed by **UN General Assembly**.

Languages **of different societies** evolve in **specific geographies, habitats, time and place, and their historical contexts**.

Our mother tongues are described as **our oral inheritance**.

They carry our **collective cultural memories and history** in the form of **stories, songs, legends and sayings**.

They allow **transmission of shared traditional knowledge, ideas, values and faiths through generations overcoming the distance of time and geographies**.

They remind us of our **collective struggles, challenges and achievements** and also provide us **guidance**.

Our mother tongue defines **an important aspect of our identities** and provides **continuity to societies**. It provides us with a **sense of our place and roots in a fast-changing world**.

At the same time, **most of us speak more than one language**. **Each language that we speak is also said to change our personality and behavior in subtle ways**. Language changes our sense of **humour** or even our **body language** and the **way we perceive** our surroundings.

In India there is a **bewildering linguistic diversity**.

Recognizing this diversity and the **close linkages between language and identity** as defined by **cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems**, **India's constitution recognizes 22 major languages**. It also provides for protection of linguistic minorities.

Today, we sometimes see the younger generation being less conversant in their mother tongue.

At the same time, there is keenness to transmit values and cultural heritage to the next generation, including in **Diaspora communities** abroad. This is becoming easier as their number has grown.

Here in Sweden, thanks to progressive policies, it is relatively easier to be able to pursue a wide range of languages in schools.

Another positive development relates to technology. **Digital technology is transforming how we work or play or learn**.

The Indian Government has come out with **innovative smartphone apps**. These are becoming popular.

One such app is about language skills. The app is called **Bhasha Sangam**.

This interesting app **facilitates online language learning**, allowing user to learn several languages simultaneously.

The Bhasha Sangam app can **help start learning to speak one's mother tongue**. It can also help bring us closer.

While rapid globalization is leading to predominance of certain languages, there is also **ever-growing requirement for translation and interpretation**, for instance here in Europe.

Multi-lingual skills will continue to grow in importance for workplace opportunities across the world.

This also has relevance in the context of this year's theme for the Mother Language Day celebrations '**Multilingual education - a pillar of intergenerational learning**'.

In this context, a recent example of a **new technology platform is Bhashini**, which is **AI-driven language translation system** to facilitate conversation between speakers of different languages.

Indian Government is also making efforts to **enhance internet accessibility and digital services in Indian languages** incorporating **voice command functions** and promoting **content creation** in these languages.

Even as Globalisation, migration & mobility, communication & digital technologies and artificial intelligence are transforming our world, **our mother languages continue to be an important marker of our identity and heritage.**

It is, therefore, **important to invest effort in providing access to mother tongues** which are **repositories of such heritage and traditional wisdom** to the next generations, especially through early education.

In conclusion, may I again thank Ambassador of Bangladesh for this initiative and for inviting me here today.
