

To promote Marathi, Raj plans study tour to Gujarat, Karnataka

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MNS chief Raj Thackeray on Sunday contrasted Maharashtra with several other states in the way they promote local language and culture and said he would visit neighbouring Gujarat and Karnataka next month on a 'study tour'.

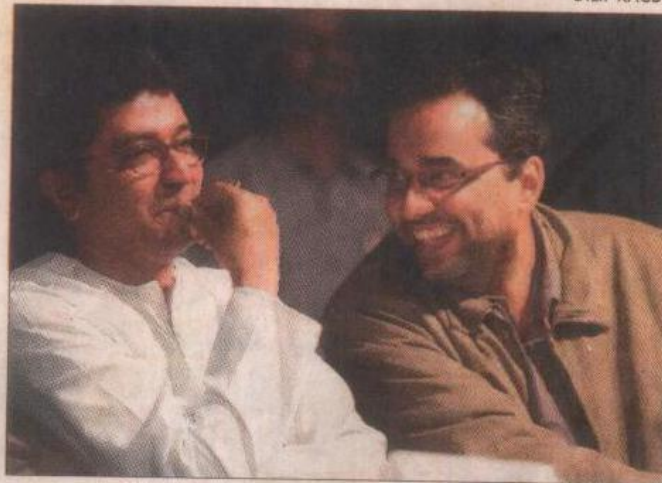
Speaking at a function to release three books by columnist Raju Parulekar here on Sunday, Thackeray was also all praise for the recent World Tamil Conference in Coimbatore.

He blamed the Maharashtra government and ruling party politicians for not doing as much for Marathi and said it was because of them that "Marathi was in danger."

"In none of the (other) states is mother tongue given secondary treatment. Everywhere, people do everything possible to promote their language. But here, when you utter the word Marathi, people have a stomach-ache and there is opposition. People here are least bothered."

Raj criticised NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Chief Minister Ashok Chavan for not doing enough to boost the local language. He said, "In Pune, there is a school named after Pawar, run by a Maharashtrian. But after Class IV, they do not teach Marathi. If our politicians reject the language, what should we accept from others?"

Praising the Tamil conference, he said. "It was a successful convention attended by many intellectuals and great minds including Oscar winner A R Rehman. Even Gujarat is doing a lot to promote its 'as-



MNS chief Raj Thackeray at the release of journalist Raju Parulekar's book at Rangasharda on Sunday.

mita' (pride)...," he said. In contrast, there are differences and disputes at any forum to promote Marathi, be it a theatre meet or a literary conference, Raj pointed out. "We should set differences aside, at least for the sake of our language."

Raj added that he would visit the BJP-run Karnataka and Gujarat in August to learn the 'system' adopted by them to promote their language.

Raj, however, said the efforts of MNS to promote Marathi were seeing "good results". "One good thing is that taxi-men do not argue now if you speak Marathi. Even mobile companies are giving information in Marathi...," Raj said.

He criticised the ruling Congress-NCP coalition and said the state was setting wrong examples by protecting those trying to run down Marathi. "The government protects people like Viren Shah (Federation of Retail Traders and Workers Association, president) who moved court against display of signages in Marathi. No other state can tolerate such behav-

our, but here, we support them."

Raj's new target, bookstores

MUMBAI: Raj Thackeray's latest diktat is targeted at bookshops, particularly in malls, not displaying Marathi books prominently. He said that in the coming days, it will be made sure that Marathi books buried in rear shelves are given prominent display.

Columnist Raju Parulekar, speaking at the function to release his books, said the Shiv Sena had been trying to suppress Raj and his father Shrikant Thackeray's identity and their contribution to the Sena. "But it should be kept in mind that like Balasaheb Thackeray, Shrikant Thackeray equally contributed to the Sena.... History will take revenge on those trying to suppress Raj's name," he added.

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