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Language Policy as an Instrument for Nation Building and Minority Representation: Supporting Cases from South Asia

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Abstract**—**Nation-building has been a key consideration in ethno-linguistically diverse post-colonial 'artificial states', where ethnic tensions, religious differences and the risk of persecution of minorities are common. Language policy can help with nation-building, but it can also hinder the process. An important challenge is in recognising which language policy to adopt. This article proposes that the designation of a widely used *lingua franca* as a national language (in an official capacity or otherwise) - in a culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse post-colonial state - assists its nation-building efforts in the long run. To demonstrate, this paper looks at the cases of Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India: three young nations which together emerged out of the Second World War with comparable colonial experiences, but subsequently adopted different language policies to different effects. Insights presented underscore the significance of inclusive language policy in sustainable nation-building in states with comparable post-colonial experiences.

Keywords**—**Language policy, South Asia, nation building, Artificial states.

I. Introduction

LANGUAGE policy can be a very useful tool to assist with nation-building. But it can also backfire. A likely unintended consequence of a policy, which simply favours the majority ethnic group in ethnically and linguistically diverse artificial states like the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka, is to challenge the integrity of the new nation state. But the same policy in homogenous, well-established states like China or South Korea is more likely to have a positive effect on nation-building efforts.

The difficulty with choosing which language policy to implement is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Various attributes of the new nation-state must be taken into consideration. These include its colonial past, pre-colonial history and above all, the degree to which the largest ethnic group dominates its society. This article proposes that the designation of a widely used *lingua franca* as a national language (*de facto* or officially) in an ethnically diverse post-colonial artificial state (i.e. where 'minority' groups make up significant parts of the population) positively contributes to its nation-building efforts. Additionally, it also provides opportunities for ethnic minorities to participate in the political-economic life of the nation. Such inclusive policies are critical in developing a sustainable post-colonial state.

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This article compares three young and ethno-linguistically diverse South Asian states, which adopted different language policies and consequently had different experiences in their nation-building programmes. Indonesia adopted as its national language, a widely-utilised *lingua franca* native to only a small percentage of its population. This contributed to the development of a strong national identity. In the mid-1950s, Sri Lanka designated as its sole national language, the native tongue of its majority ethnic group, which alienated parts of its population and - in turn - threatened the legitimacy of the newly-independent Sri Lankan state. India never adopted a single national language. Despite the broad usage of Hindustani in the densely populated north and northwest, Dravidian languages are still used as formal media of communication in the South. And its nation-building success post-colonisation lies somewhere in between Indonesia's and Sri Lanka's.

Insights from this paper highlight the importance of adopting a language policy that is inclusive and non-exclusionary when it comes to sustaining nation-building efforts in culturally diverse young nations like those in South and Southeast Asia, as well as Africa and the Middle East.

II. Nation Building in Artificial States

The term 'artificial state' was first coined by Alesina et al. [1] to refer to a post-colonial state, "in which political borders do not coincide with a division of nationalities desired by the people on the ground". Borders surrounding these states have more to do with the former colonial boundaries of Western powers than the geographical divisions of land among the native populations. The result is that "ethnic, religious or linguistic groups were thrown together or separated without any respect for those groups' aspirations", which poses a significant challenge to the legitimacy of the emerging post-colonial states. Without legitimacy, the proper functioning of government cannot be carried out [2], [3], and without a functioning government, institutions necessary for economic development cannot be sustained [2]-[4]. Moreover, instances of violence on innocent civilians are rampant in parts of the world devoid of a legitimate state, where warlords vie to fill the power vacuum created by the absence of a functioning government with a monopoly on the use of force [5]. Successful nation-building in these artificial states, therefore, is essential for their survival and the welfare of their people.

Miguel [6] highlighted the importance of nation-building in post-colonial Africa by contrasting Tanzania against Kenya.

The former invested in nation-building projects through its education system among others, while the latter neglected to do so (also see [7]). The result is that political violence attributed to ethnic tensions is lower in Tanzania than Kenya. The former also enjoys higher economic growth, and quality of governance and infrastructure as a result of its nation-building efforts. For countries like Singapore in the 1960s, nation-building was even more critical. It was central to its survival and position in the geopolitical landscape [8]. The riot that occurred between Singapore's ethnic groups in 1965 shook the very core of its society and threatened to tear the island apart. Right next door in Indonesia, nationalist sentiments were significantly important in repelling Dutch colonial powers, which sought to come back and reassert its authority on the archipelago at the culmination of the War in the Pacific.

III. Language Policy as a Tool for Nation Building

A very helpful tool in nation-building, in ethnically diverse parts of the world, is the imposition of a unifying language policy [7]. But language-policy is a double-edged sword. While it can certainly work to achieve national unity in emerging states like in Indonesia and the People's Republic of China [9], [10], controversial language policies in places like Sri Lanka and Ethiopia (during the Derg years), serve to create divisions among ethnic groups [11], [12]. The decision on which language to elevate as a national language to support state legitimacy is quite a simple one in states which population is ethno-linguistically homogenous – like China for example [10], [13]. The same goes for a new country, whose majority ethnic group happens to be the sole indigenous inhabitants of and have a legitimate hereditary claim over the land that falls within its territory, as in the case of Malaysia. The course of action in these examples is simply to elevate the status of the dominant language or dialect as national language. But in the context of an ethnically diverse artificial state with multiple indigenous claimants to the land that falls within its boundaries, consideration on such a critically important decision is a lot more complex. In the Philippines, for instance, indigenous tongues like Tagalog and Cebuano compete for prominence with Spanish and English, which were more widely dispersed among different ethnic groups [14]-[16]. In India, leaders of the independence movement had to choose between the pragmatic approach of keeping English, and the more ideologically palatable alternative of adopting an indigenous language (such as Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil or Hindustani) as the dominant medium of official government communication. The outcome of a language policy aimed at supporting nation-building is of critical importance in the aforementioned context, but there is a lack of clear guidance for decision-makers to follow.

Dardjowidjojo [9] argues that the eventual success of a unifying national language depends on a number of factors. These include: support from early nationalists, its relationship with the vernaculars and the language of the colonising Western power/s, and the state's support for the dispersion of the language post-adoption (or post-independence). His case study of *Bahasa Indonesia* downplayed its character as a bridging medium between different tribes and ethnic groups as key to its success. Conversely, this article argues that it is in fact this attribute of *Bahasa Indonesia* that makes it attractive to early nationalists, unthreatening to local vernaculars and viable for the new Indonesian state to spread across the archipelago pre and post-independence.

Gebresilassie [11] suggests that the international standing of candidates for a national language should be taken into primary consideration. This is perhaps because ease of communication in international trade may assist with economic development, which works to support state legitimacy. This notion has significant merit. But, in practice, since languages of international trade tend to be of European origin, the idea is quite often unpalatable to nationalist leaders seeking to establish a new national identity (e.g. see [17]). Additionally, should the chosen language or dialect prove to be alien to the native population, they are likely to feel disenfranchised – perhaps in favour of a small portion of the more educated elites. In turn, this policy carries the risk of dividing the country between the handful of Western educated elites and the rest of the population. This is not to say that non-indigenous languages should never be adopted as a national language to support nation-building in an artificial state. But should this occur the reason behind the adoption must not only rest on either international reputation or ease of international economic transactions. The language of choice, whether it is foreign or indigenous, must have had a long-standing history as a *lingua franca* in the area covered by the new state. This is because the designation of a widely used *lingua franca* as an official language in a new and ethnically diverse post-colonial state contributes positively to its nation-building efforts.

IV. Comparative Study of Three Artificial Post-Colonial States in South Asia

In support of the aforesaid assertion, this section presents a comparative case study [18], [19] of three South Asian countries, which adopted very different language policies upon gaining independence from Western colonial powers at the end of the Second World War. They are: India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.[1] The three countries are otherwise very similar in a lot of respects. They're all culturally, genetically and linguistically influenced by early civilisations on the Indian subcontinent. They declared independence around the same time. Each house multi-ethnic and religiously diverse indigenous populations and neither had ever been politically united for a significant period prior to colonisation. But by the

[1] Although Indonesia - through its membership in the Association of South East Asian Nations - is commonly referred to a 'South East' Asian nation (rather than 'South' Asian), it is indeed located South of the Asian continent. Moreover, Indonesia has a lot in common with South Asian states - often more so than with countries in South East Asia. These commonalities include, among others, linguistic and cultural influence from India cf. Vietnam, the Phillipines, geographical location in the Indian Ocean (cf. Thailand, Laos, Vietnam) and indigenous ethnic diversity (cf. e.g. Brunei).

turn of the new millennium, the outcomes of their nation-building efforts were remarkably different. By then, Indonesia had successfully developed a unique national identity [20], [15] while Sri Lanka was engulfed in a civil war that threatened its very existence. India, for its part, still struggles with the question of national identity to this day - although there has been no serious demand for or conversation about cessation by ethnic or religious groups since the creation of Pakistan. By comparing the link between these phenomena and their contrasting language policies, and taking into consideration the impacts of these policies on minority ethnic groups, we get a better understanding of why the designation of a widely used lingua franca as an official language, in the present context, contributes positively to nation-building efforts.

A. Sri Lanka

Among former colonies of Western powers in Asia, Sri Lanka is unique in that its independence was a peaceful and largely uneventful affair. Set against the backdrop of bloodbaths in countries like India, Indonesia and Burma, "[t]he transfer of power in Sri Lanka was smooth and peaceful; little was seen of the divisions and bitterness which were tearing at the recent independence of the new nations of South Asia" [21]. By the time it gained dominion status from Britain in 1948,[2] Ceylon[3] had enjoyed universal suffrage for almost two decades. It was one of the wealthiest countries in Asia [22], thanks to the Allies' war efforts in the Pacific during the Second World War [21]; its people were well educated; and its bureaucratic institutions were efficient. Lee Kuan Yew even regarded Ceylon as a classic model of gradual evolution to independence, to which Singapore looked up [23].

The different ethnic groups that have co-existed on the island were each represented by at least a political faction in the legislature. But around the time of independence, they came together under the leadership of Don Stephen Senanayake[4] to form the United National Party (UNP). The leader of the ethnic Tamil[5] political faction at the time, Ganapathipillai Gangaser Ponnambalam, decided to join Senanayake in government because he "acknowledg[ed] that the prime minister's sensitivity to minority interests was genuine" [21]. This unity, however, did not last and Ceylon's nation-building effort, which began years prior to independence, would become unravelled within less than a decade.

In 1951, the Buddhist nationalist faction of the UNP split from the party when its leader, Solomon Ridgeway Dias (SWRD) Bandaranaike, crossed the floor of parliament in an act of defiance against the party's establishment elites. Bandaranaike subsequently formed an opposition party, the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), and adopted ethnic policies targeted to gain the support of Sinhalese Buddhist voters [24], [25]. The SLFP campaigned on a populist platform during the 1956 national election and benefited from the public's perception that the working class of Ceylon was disenfranchised by Westernised elites, who wielded real economic and political power in the country to the detriment of the majority of its population. The campaign was successful and Bandaranaike became Ceylon's Prime Minister in April of the same year.

One of the first and most notable acts of the Bandaranaike government was the enactment of the *Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956*. Known as the 'Sinhala Only Act', the legislation replaced English as the country's official language with Sinhala, the native tongue of Ceylon's majority ethnic population. The enforcement of this soon followed in educational institutions, government offices, bureaucratic and political establishments, and workplaces among other places, impacting on the day-to-day life of the citizenry especially in ethnically-diverse areas of the country. Prior to this, English enjoyed an official status in Ceylon as the language of business, colonial administration and *lingua franca* among the various ethnic groups. The adoption of Sinhala as the only official language in the country is widely regarded as an act to alienate minorities (i.e. Tamils, Moors and Burghers) to most of whom Sinhala was foreign [26], [22].

Brown and Ganguly [27] noted:

> The passage of the Sinhala Only Act of 1956 was a turning point in Sinhalese-Tamil relations. Tamil grievances subsequently grew because, in Sri Lanka as elsewhere, language policies had wide-ranging implications for educational and economic opportunities. By the 1970s many Tamil youth had become both radicalized and militarized…

The case of *AG v Kodeeswaran*[6] sought to challenge the constitutionality of the Sinhala Only Act. But by the time the case reached the Privy Council, which referred it back to the Supreme Court, Sinhala's status as the only official national language was already embedded in the new constitution.[7]

One of the outcomes of the imposition of Sinhala as the only official national language was widespread discontent by the Tamil population (the largest minority ethnic group in Sri Lanka). Prime Minister Bandaranaike conceded somewhat to political pressure and passed the *Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958*, which permitted 'reasonable' use of Tamil in government administration. But this was inadequate to address the demands of the aforementioned group, which called for: the autonomy for the Northern and Eastern Provinces[8] of Ceylon (guaranteed under a federal constitution), a parity status for Tamil and Sinhala languages under the constitution, and the permanent settlement of Indian

[2] i.e. when it became an independent state under the Crown.

[3] As Sri Lanka was known as the time.

[4] The first Prime Minister of Ceylon.

[5] i.e. the largest minority ethnic group in Ceylon/Sri Lanka and the second largest ethnic and linguistic group on the island after the Sinhalese. Tamils are predominantly Hindus while Sinhalese are predominantly Theravada Buddhists. Other minority groups are Moors (who are predominantly Muslims) and Burghers (i.e. partly descended from Western colonialists). A significant minority of Sinhalese and Tamils have also converted to Christianity. All Sri Lankan Prime Ministers and Presidents have so far been Sinhalese.

[6] 70 NLR 121 (SC).

[7] s7 of the *Constitution of Sri Lanka (1972)*.

[8] These are areas of the island with majority Tamil populations.

Tamil plantation workers[9] on the island. Disillusionment with unsatisfactory government responses resulted in the emergence of Tamil separatist movements including the terrorist syndicate, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE per [21], [22]). To these radical groups, federal autonomy was no longer satisfactory - and their goal was nothing short of the independence of Tamil-majority parts of the country. Many commentators believed that by then, “the existence of Sri Lanka as we know it, was under the threat of separatism” [28].

SWRD Bandaranaike was assassinated in 1959 and succeeded as Prime Minister by his wife, Sirimavo. In office, Sirimavo Bandaranaike continued her late husband’s policies including the execution of state businesses in Sinhala (as opposed to English) and repatriation of plantation Tamils back to India [21], [22]. Indeed it was under her government, that the official status of Sinhala as Sri Lanka’s only national language became entrenched in the constitution.

Feeling disenfranchised, many individuals from Tamil populated areas sought refuge in the LTTE and in doing so, fuelled the morale and added to the legitimacy of the group. Tamil separatist movements, led by the LTTE grew from strength to strength as Tamil minorities felt increasingly marginalised by Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese dominated government [26]. Sympathisers from across the globe helped to finance its operation [22]. Eventually and inevitably, Sri Lanka became engulfed in a civil war that tore the country apart for almost three decades.

To pacify the conflict and in accordance with the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord, President Junius Richard Jayawardene enacted the *Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution*, which included a section recognising Tamil as one of the country’s official languages on par with Sinhala [29], [30]. But by 1987, much of the damage to ethnic relations in Sri Lanka had been done. It wouldn’t be until 2009 that the country again becomes re-united through military conquest of LTTE controlled areas. Ethnic reconciliation in Sri Lanka is only now taking place. Champions of reconciliation argue that consideration regarding Sri Lanka’s language policy is critical to the reconciliation process because after all, language policy was the root of the civil war [31]. Indeed; the Sri Lankan civil war happened, and the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan state was threatened, to a significant degree because a well-functioning *lingua franca* was replaced as a sole official state language in favour of the native tongue of the majority ethnic group in an ethnically diverse state.

B. Indonesia

When Indonesia declared independence in 1945, its leaders inherited a vast archipelago populated by ethnically and linguistically diverse people. They were united by nothing more than a common former colonial overlord and consequently had no sense of national identity. Furthermore, unlike the British in Sri Lanka, the Dutch did not intend to let go of their former colony so easily. Up until 1949, they employed a divide and conquer strategy to undermine the authority of the Indonesian national government. But in spite of these challenges, Indonesia continued to develop a strong national identity anyhow.

The imposition of a dialect of Malay, which was later dubbed *Bahasa Indonesia*, was a critical element in Indonesia’s successful nation-building venture [20]. The reason lies in Malay’s key attributes in the context of 19th and 20th Century Dutch East Indies,[10] which were the opposite of those of Sinhala in Ceylon at around the same time. Malay was native to only about 5% of Indonesia’s indigenous population [20], [15]. But it was widely used as *lingua franca* across the archipelago – and it had been the case for over a millennium.

One of the attractions of the dialect of Malay that came to be adopted as *Bahasa Indonesia,* is that it is very easy to learn, especially compared to other languages that are spoken in the Indonesian archipelago – e.g. Javanese and Sundanese. For this reason, by the end of the first millennium AD, Malay had become the language of trade and cultural exchange in the region (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.). Moreover, it was the medium of choice for the spread of Buddhism, Hinduism and later Islam throughout the archipelago. Nonetheless, Malay never replaced languages native to the various inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago. Because it was perceived as being no threat to the many other existing indigenous languages in the new nation, Malay was widely embraced upon its adoption as the language of the independence movement and subsequently, the national language of the independent Indonesian state [32]. But Malay was not the only candidate. By far, the most widely spoken indigenous language in the Dutch East Indies in the early 20th Century was Javanese. Javanese is the native tongue of the Javanese ethnic group, which makes up around 40% of Indonesia’s population. It was widely spoken throughout the archipelago’s indigenous kingdoms prior to the advent of European colonisation, and has a sophisticated written form. Malay, on the other hand, utilises the Latin alphabet of European languages and was rarely spoken as a mother tongue. But Indonesia in 1945 was not just made up of the former territories of the Javanese-speaking realm. Leaders of the independent movement anticipated that should Javanese be promoted as Indonesia’s national language, the perceived privileged status of the Javanese people would have caused resentment among other ethnic groups [32], [15]. Additionally, Javanese language is infused with the idiosyncrasies of the Javanese caste system [32]. For instance, a person of noble lineage would use a certain vocabulary to address a commoner, which is different from what they would use to address another member of the nobility. Instinctively, this would create awkwardness when used among non-Javanese, who are foreign to Javanese social institutions.

Another alternative was to adopt Dutch as the national language of the newly independent state. Dutch was already used to administer the political and legal systems of East Indies. But adopting Dutch was impractical because very few

[9] Plantation workers brought to Ceylon by the British from Tamil Nadu in South India.

[10] The name by which Indonesia was known prior to independence.

indigenous people of East Indies knew the language. There was also a deep resentment between them and Dutch colonialists [15]. The relationship between the indigenous population of East Indies and Dutch colonial institutions was remarkably different to that between the Ceylonese people and the British. Notably, only a very small percentage of the indigenous population of Dutch East Indies had the opportunity to learn Dutch. Additionally, the use of Dutch was discouraged (and in many instances, prohibited) during Japan's occupation of the Indonesian archipelago during the Second World War [33].

Ultimately, the choice of *Bahasa Indonesia* was also motivated by the intention of Indonesia's founding fathers to put national unity at the forefront of the independence movement. So it would have been counter-intuitive to either select a regional language or that of a foreign colonial power. Today, *Bahasa Indonesia* is spoken throughout the archipelago (still, mostly, as a second language) and its role in developing Indonesia's national consciousness is indisputable. We argue that the reason as to why it had been such a successful tool for nation-building in Indonesia is precisely because it was a *lingua franca* between diverse ethnic and linguistic groups that make up this artificial state.

C. India

Discussions regarding India's language policy around the time of independence were dominated by the desire to replace English as the language of public administration with an indigenous language – like Hindustani, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Assamese and so on [34]. This was because leaders of the independence movement saw English as a vestige of British colonial rule, against which they devoted their lives to fight. But the task of choosing a national indigenous language, which could unite people from all corners of the Indian subcontinent proved to be extremely difficult. India is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse countries on earth. Its population speaks 1,600 different languages, many of which are entirely unintelligible from one another [35], [36].

Prior to British colonisation, the whole of India had never been united under a single political entity. Two dynasties came close to uniting the whole of the subcontinent, namely the Mauryas in the 3rd Century BC and the Mughals in the 16th and 17th Centuries AD. But for the overwhelming majority of its history, the subcontinent consisted of a multitude of politically, culturally, ethnically, linguistically and genetically distinct peoples and civilisations. The idea of an 'India' as a nation is a recent concept, brought about as a result of British colonial integration in South Asia.

From a practical standpoint, there was a strong case in support of adopting English as India's national language [17], as was the case in Ceylon. Public administration records and documents were written predominantly in English, and it was already becoming entrenched as the *de facto lingua franca* among the different ethnic populations. Modern India's founding fathers, however, found this idea to be philosophically unpalatable – though they were aware of the importance of adopting an inclusive language policy. The decision to simply elevate the most widely spoken local tongue to the status of national language would have been perceived as marginalising ethnic minorities and potentially sowing division [34], [36]. Aside from this, the two dominant religious groups in the populous Northern part of the country (i.e. Hindus and Muslims) are separated somewhat along ethno-linguistic lines.

For India's post-colonial nation-building project to succeed, therefore, it is imperative that harmony is maintained between Hindus and Muslims. Its language policy needed to be supportive of this aspiration. Consequently, Modern Hindi (a dialect of Hindustani) emerged as the most favoured alternative because it is widely spoken by Hindus in the populous north while – at the same time – being closely related to Urdu, the Hindustani dialect used by Muslim regions in the North-West. As a *lingua franca* of Northern India, Hindi and its variants were already known to a large number of Indians and easily the most widely spoken language in the colony besides English [35]. But for practical reasons, English needed to be maintained in public administration, at least temporarily. So, India adopted both Hindi and English as its official languages. In addition, its national government recognises the rights of individual states to conduct official matters in their own regional languages and dialects, and made the decision to not name a single 'national' language (as opposed to 'official' languages; see Part XVII of the *Constitution of India*).

In spite of all this effort, predominantly Muslim regions did not end up joining the Union of India and the Partition of India led to the establishment of the Dominion of Pakistan, which covered India's former Muslim regions in the Northeast and Northwest. On the other end of the subcontinent, non-Hindi speaking groups from the South fought against the idea of English being removed from its official status thus elevating Hindi as a *de facto* national language [35]. Indians from the South felt that should this happen, there is a risk that they will be marginalised in discussions regarding issues, over which the national government has jurisdiction. So, the use of both English and Hindi as India's two official languages continued up to the present day.

India's language policy failed to aid its nation building efforts to the extent seen in Indonesia. Today, the country's brand of nationalism is largely based on religious affiliation, namely to faiths which can collectively be labelled: Hinduism. To an extent, therefore, nationalism acts to marginalise India's religious minorities, of which there are many (e.g. Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, etc.). In contrast, national sentiments in such countries as Indonesia and Singapore are inclusive and independent of religious affiliations. But because India's founding fathers recognised the importance of inclusive language policies in nation-building and opted to adopt two common *lingua francas* as official (and *de facto* national) languages, it avoided the sort of violent reactions to its language policies that would have threatened the integrity of its nation state.

Today, English is increasingly becoming a national medium of communication throughout India and the "colonial origins

[of English are] now forgotten or irrelevant" [37] cf. [17]. Consequently, there is a significant incentive, in India, for non-native speakers to take on English over the likes of Hindi as a second language. The elevation of English as the sole *de jure* national language of India can serve as a useful tool to further India's national unification and nation-building.

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The cases of Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India support the notion that the designation of a widely used *lingua franca* as an official language in a new and ethnically diverse post-colonial artificial state makes a positive contribution to its nation-building efforts. The reason is because it serves as a unifying tool, around which all the different ethnic and linguistic groups can gather, without the sense that any particular group is at an advantage over the rest on the matter. Furthermore, the imposition of a widely used lingua franca as an official language does not immediately threaten the status of local vernaculars. Therefore, it is a strategy that policy makers, who are seeking to engage in a nation-building project in ethno-linguistically different parts of the world, should consider adopting.

Language policy is by no means the only factor that contributes to nation-building. Indonesia's success and Sri Lanka's failure in their nation-building projects, for instance, are also the products of the different political climates that existed in the two countries. The implementation of various facets of nation-building, such as infusing national consciousness in and the dissemination of a national language through the education system, is easier to do under authoritarian rule – like one that became entrenched in Indonesia up until the turn of the millennium – than in a democracy, like Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, language policy does make a significant contribution as well, and a divisive language policy could have a detrimental impact on the development of nationhood in an ethno-linguistically diverse country. For this reason, the choice of a national language is critical in a nation-building project. Decision makers must have as its primary driver, the ultimate aim of choosing such a national language. Should the aim be to advance a country's nation-building programme in an ethno-linguistically diverse post-colonial artificial state, then the best choice is to elevate a widely used lingua franca to prominence.

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