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International



Global hotspots of endangered languages

WASHINGTON: From rural Australia to Siberia to the U.S. State of Oklahoma, languages that embody the history and traditions of people are dying, researchers have found.

While there are an estimated 7,000 languages spoken around the world, one of them dies out every two weeks, according to linguistic experts.

Five hotspots where languages are most endangered were listed in a briefing by the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages and the National Geographic Society.

Losing languages means losing knowledge, says K. David Harrison, an Assistant Professor of linguistics at Swarthmore College.

As many as half of the current languages have never been written down, he estimated. That means, if the last speaker of many of these vanished tomorrow, the language would be lost because there is no dictionary, no literature, no text of any kind, he said.

Mr. Harrison and Gregory D.S. Anderson, director of the Living Tongues Institute analysed the top regions for disappearing languages. Mr. Anderson said languages become endangered when a community decides that its language is an impediment. The key to getting a language revitalised, he said, is getting a new generation of speakers. The institute works with local communities and tries to help by developing teaching materials and by recording the language.

Mr. Harrison said the 83 most widely spoken languages account for about 80 per cent of the world's population while the 3,500 smallest languages account for just 0.2 per cent of the world's people. Languages are more endangered than plant and animal species, he said. — AP

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