

Sunday Times  
23/04/06

Great Wall | Indian businessmen, painfully aware that few in China understand English, are studying its complex language. **Bella Jaisinghani** reports

# for Mandarin

**A**lmost every month, Vicky Punjabi visits China. He is an importer of the delightfully cheap Chinese goods. Now everybody knows that few in China understand English, leave alone speak it. "It is still okay to have dealings in Shanghai where people speak a smattering of English, but once you travel to the interiors, you are lost without an interpreter," he says. Punjabi is now going to learn Mandarin. Smart move.

Increasingly businessmen, students and professionals dealing with Chinese are taking lessons in Mandarin. Demand for courses is so high that some management schools have included the language in their curriculum.

Sagar Lalka, who works with a consultancy named Spice.org in Pune coordinates student visits to China, is one such aspirant. "I have put up a list of frequently used Chinese words on my desk, but I could do with formal training in Mandarin, given that I regularly communicate with Chinese educators." He could consider signing up with the Symbiosis Centre for Foreign Languages in his hometown.

Pradeep Singh recently started Xinhua Language Solutions in New Delhi to fill the gap. "Trade between India and China is increasing steadily and corporates with business interests in China are training their executives in Chinese. In fact, even schools in New Delhi are beginning to consider Mandarin."

The scattered community of translators wishes there were more institutes offering a structured course in Mandarin. BPO executive Nauzer Kuka advocates a certified course in Mandarin, like Alliance Francaise has for French, to cater to its growing popularity within the call centre industry. "The BPO sector is targeting China as the next big market, so I would definitely gain an edge if I spoke Mandarin. But I have still to find a suitable language programme," says Kuka.

Top management institutes too say that finding teachers is difficult.

Few institutes in Mumbai teach Mandarin. People turn to individual trainers like Rajkumar Bhatia. Although he is a qualified instructor in Japanese, Bhatia was quick to see the potential of Chinese. "I impart basic lessons in grammar and conversational Chinese, and give a list of relevant business vocabulary."

Rare skills do not come cheap, and Bhatia charges Rs 10,000 for a 30-hour course. He divides his time between individual lessons and classes for MBA students and busi-



ness executives. A marketing professional who expects to be deputed to China shortly has started lessons. "Career advancement is the only reason I am learning Chinese. I have heard it is a tough language to pick up, so I think I will stick to spoken Mandarin rather than learning the script."

Singh though dispels the myth that Chinese is too difficult. He believes it is a scientific language. "It is said that one uses both hemispheres of the brain to learn Chinese, which is not the case with other languages. It is true that the concept of the alphabet is absent. A Chinese character is the equivalent of a word," says Singh. "If one merely has to get by, it is enough to know 3,000-5,000 characters."

Because spoken Chinese is not the same as the written language, Singh suggests that students use the Pinyin method where they learn to speak Chinese using the English alphabet.

Singh is not joking when he says that an Indian who can communicate in three important languages, English, Hindi and Chinese is empowered to communicate with 75% of the world's population. TNN

**IT IS SAID THAT ONE USES BOTH HEMISPHERES OF THE BRAIN TO LEARN CHINESE. BESIDES, A CHINESE CHARACTER IS THE EQUIVALENT OF ONE WORD**