

NEP DROPS 'CHINESE' FROM LANGUAGE LIST

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

The National Education Policy (NEP) has dropped Mandarin (Chinese) from its list of foreign languages that can be taught in schools. The language was included in the draft policy released in May 2019, but is missing from the final document approved by the Cabinet this week.

Senior officials told *The Hindu* that over the past year, consultations had been held between the Ministries of Human Resource Development and External Affairs, due to security concerns over teaching Mandarin to Indian students.

“A choice of foreign language(s) (e.g. French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese) would be offered and available to interested students to choose as elective(s) during secondary school,” said the draft Policy document. Mandarin is the language most commonly spoken in China.

Over the course of a year of rising India-China tensions, that sentence was changed. “In addition to high quality offerings in Indian languages and English, foreign languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, will also be offered at the secondary level...,” says the final version.

Higher Education Secretary Amit Khare played down the change, pointing out that it is only a set of examples, not an exhaustive list of allowed languages. Schools are free to offer other languages, he said.

Mandarin is not on the list of foreign languages offered at the Class X or Class XII level by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), which currently includes Tibetan, Thai, and Japanese, along with European languages such as Russian, Spanish, French and German. Other languages may be offered by schools as a third language option in Classes VI to VIII.

The MEA did not respond to a query on whether it had initiated any move to drop Mandarin from the CBSE curriculum. However, an official aware of the conversations on the subject told *The Hindu* that the MHRD has had discussions with the MEA and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations over the past year and sought inputs on which languages were most important to retain in the curriculum. According to another official, there have been security concerns involving Mandarin language instruction in Indian institutions.

Exchange programme

The plan for teaching Mandarin in Indian schools and Hindi language instruction in Chinese schools was part of an Education Exchange Programme signed by both countries in 2006, which was renewed by Prime Minister Modi during his visit to China in 2015. The plan included a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2012 by the then Indian Ambassador to Beijing (current External Affairs Minister) S. Jaishankar with Hanban, the official Chinese organisation that oversees Mandarin studies abroad. In 2014, the CBSE then introduced Mandarin in some schools, but the plan floundered due to unavailability of Chinese language teachers.

“Since 2017, the government has systematically curbed annual scholarship programmes with China as well,” said Jawaharlal Nehru University Professor Hemant Adlakha. “All countries which consider relations with China crucial and/or important have learning of Mandarin at all levels,” he added, citing examples of the U.S., Australia, Japan and South Korea that offer Chinese at school level.

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Hemant Adlakha,

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