

Indian managers seek greener Chinese pastures

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NEW DELHI: An Indian manager who went to work with computer company Lenovo in China six years ago says it is only now he has started to feel at home there. Earlier, he did not have many colleagues who were Indian. Despite rising to the top levels in many American companies, Indians had found nothing but the cold shoulder in China.

That has changed drastically. In the last one year, the flow of Indian managers to China has increased by 15 to 20% from about 5% in the

CHINA CALLING

Job market in doldrums

7.4%
China's GDP growth in 2014, lowest in 24 yrs

China's employment sub-index weakest in 3 months

SOURCE: HSBC/MARKIT PURCHASING MANAGERS' INDEX (PMI), ASSOCHAM, INDUSTRY

year before, according to several executive search firms. That despite the slowdown in the Chinese economy and its employment index moving downward. "They are still looking for Indian manag-

But still hot for Indian execs

China is world's No 1 merchandise trader with over \$4.16 trillion worth of trade

IMF in 2014 declared Chinese economy the world's largest

At \$17.6 trillion, it is a tad higher than US' \$17.4 trillion

China accounts for 21% of India's import bill

ers, which clearly signals the ability of Indian talent to sail through tough market conditions," says Ronesh Puri, managing director of executive search firm Executive Access.

Although the Lenovo manager still won't give out his name, he is now surrounded by other Indian executives. It is the same scenario in other large Chinese companies like Huawei, Xiaomi, Lenovo, ZTE Corporation, Fosun, Alibaba and Bright Food. Several non-Chinese multinationals, such as Cisco, General Motors and Nestle, are also filling their China offices with Indians.

As Chinese companies have grown to become multinationals, they have felt the need for managers with skills to handle complex market conditions.

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Indians are seen to be much better at that than Americans or Europeans, in part because they are used to situations typical to the developing world. "They have good soft skills and high emotional intelligence," says Gaurav Singh, director, global business development and strategic initiatives, Athena Executive Search.

And they are being persuaded to move to China with hefty salary increases – as much as 50% in several cases. That is enough to overcome the lack of vegetarian food in China.

"Indian managers are

known for their skills to handle complex market conditions," says Nicolas Dumoulin, regional director, Michael Page, a London-based professional staffing firm. "Your salary would move about 50% if you choose an employer in Hong Kong."

The sectors drawing the largest number of Indian executives to China are telecommunications, fast-moving consumer goods, manufacturing, information technology and IT-enabled services, banking, healthcare, and chemicals. And they are offering senior posi-

tions: from project manager and project operations head right up to general manager and country manager.

"We have seen an increase of demand for Indian executives in senior roles in China by 15 to 20 per cent," says Paul Lien, managing partner, IIC Partners China, which is among the world's top 10 executive search firms by revenue.

In fact, if you hear the Indian managers in China talk, you would wonder why it took them so long to break into the Chinese market. "You can often win your Chinese

bosses by showing up on time, following protocols seriously, and taking copious notes during meetings," says one.

In addition to the higher salary and promotions, Indian executives have another incentive to move to China. "Work experience in China boosts the resume phenomenally," says R Suresh, managing director of RGF India, an arm of Japan-headquartered RGF Executive Search. "Almost every country does business with China and needs people who know how to deal with Chinese companies."