



The India Association Hong Kong

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The Hon. Mrs. Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, GBM, GBS

Chief Executive of the HKSAR
Office of the Chief Executive

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
Tamar, Hong Kong

Dear Mrs. Lam

Chief Executive Policy Address

On behalf of The India Association Hong Kong, we would like to thank the Government of the Hong Kong SAR for its commitment to addressing the needs of the non-ethnic Chinese communities of Hong Kong. In particular, we would like to commend the Administration for its recent substantial commitment to spend HK\$500 million to support the non-ethnic Chinese communities.

The non-ethnic Chinese communities have been an integral part of the development of Hong Kong for over 150 years and it is important that we continue to work together to integrate the diverse communities of Hong Kong. We are all Hong Kong people first and foremost and the success of Hong Kong is important to us all.

In addition to the need for funding, there are a number of policy matters, which need significant attention. Accordingly, in preparation for your second Policy Address, we would like to highlight some of the main issues that concern the non-ethnic Chinese communities in the hope that you may take some or all of these into consideration as you formulate your policies.

In our view, the most important issues surround education, employment and the promotion of racial integration, as set out below.

EDUCATION:

We would strongly urge the Government to treat the creation of a Chinese as a second language curriculum as a priority and adopt other measures to ensure that students who do not have the benefit of Chinese language exposure at home can achieve a high enough level of Chinese proficiency to properly integrate into Hong Kong society. It is the inability to read and write Chinese and in some cases to speak Chinese that is preventing ethnic minorities from fully participating in the work force and from accessing public services. It is also a key factor in inter-generational poverty.

- Since the 2014 Policy Address, and the implementation of the "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework", current policy has been to assist children from non-Chinese speaking backgrounds ("NCS students") with a view to enabling them to bridge over to mainstream Chinese language classes and master the Chinese language.

Our respectful view is that the Framework is well intentioned but fails to recognize the severe difficulties faced by students who are usually not exposed to any Chinese in the first years of life, which are critical for language acquisition.

- In recognition of these difficulties, NCS students are offered the opportunity to take foreign qualifications such as GCSE Chinese to permit entry into university. However, such graduates often fail to secure employment after their tertiary studies because of their low level of Chinese ability. Any alternative qualification should be adequate to provide students with the necessary Chinese skills to properly integrate into the Hong Kong community, for tertiary education and employment.
- This suggests the critical importance of formulating a Chinese as a second language curriculum as quickly as possible. Such a curriculum could be designed to be reasonable in its expectations of NCS students yet allow them to achieve a level of language proficiency much higher than that represented by foreign qualifications unsuited to the Hong Kong context.
- We would ideally like to see any second language curriculum extended to the kindergarten level because language acquisition starts at the earliest years and it is simply unrealistic to expect students to keep up when their families do not speak any Chinese at home.
- We would also encourage attention and funding to be concentrated on training teachers in teaching Chinese as a second language.
- More immediately, we are keen to see money spent on enforcement of the Government's educational policies. As you will be aware, the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme provides additional funding for kindergartens with more than 8 non-Chinese speaking students. However, in March 2018 the EOC released a survey of kindergartens receiving such funds. Of great concern was the fact that 30% of these kindergartens did not provide any support for NCS students despite receiving specific funding. The EOC also reported that most of the remaining 70% could not give clear answers about the formal support structure they had put in place.
- Additionally, we advocate the setting up of Key Performance Indicators to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the funding such as:
 - Number of non-ethnic Chinese students in each school;
 - Acceptance rate of non-ethnic Chinese students in each school – (number of places offered/number applied);
 - Teachers trained in Chinese as a Second Language teaching;
 - Grades in Chinese for non-ethnic Chinese students compared to the average grade for the school;
 - Grades at DSE in English, Chinese and mathematics for non-ethnic Chinese students studying in English-medium schools vs Chinese-medium schools; and
 - The impact on grades when students are streamed by ability.

EMPLOYMENT:

For many members of the non-ethnic Chinese communities who are already in adulthood, any future changes to the education system will be too late. We would therefore like to see assistance given to them to facilitate their becoming contributing members of the Hong Kong workforce. In particular, the following steps could be considered

- We suggest the establishment of dedicated resources at the Labour Department to assist those whose are not fluent in Chinese.
- We would like to see investment in a much broader range of vocational / language courses that would generally be treated as meeting the standards for civil service recruitment. The Applied Learning in Chinese curriculum is an excellent idea but one which we hope to see massively expanded. As we understand it, only two classes are offered “*Chinese for the service industry*” and “*Practical Chinese in Hospitality*”. This unnecessarily suggests that those who do not have a Chinese language background at home should limit their ambitions. To address this issue, courses could be designed for youth not fluent in Chinese to help them enter other industries such as accounting, marketing, design and engineering.
- We suggest efforts should also be taken to ensure the availability of vocational training courses in English as well as Chinese as many adults who are not fluent in Chinese are unable to access the existing vocational training courses. We have received feedback that courses in English for plumbers, mechanics, electricians and carpenters would be well received.
- We would also like to see Chinese language courses for adult non-ethnic Chinese become more accessible, affordable and better publicized.
- We hope that the Government will lead by example and hire more non-ethnic Chinese Hong Kong people into the civil service.

INTEGRATION AND RACIAL HARMONY:

The need to promote integration and racial harmony may seem like a rather abstract point but in some ways it is the most important. In 2016, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups released a study showing that 62.7% of young people surveyed had no contact whatsoever with ethnic minorities and a further 64.3% felt that they had a poor understanding of the daily life and culture of ethnic minorities. For their part, ethnic minority youth expressed worries not just about learning Chinese and finding jobs but also about making friends with Chinese youth.

We suggest that when interaction and understanding increases, some of the issues with ethnic minority employment and poverty may begin to ease. We therefore suggest that the Government consider measures to promote such integration. Our specific recommendations are as follows:

- A policy unit that includes members from the non-ethnic Chinese communities should be established to work specifically on matters of importance to the non-ethnic Chinese communities.
- The Government should amend the Race Discrimination Ordinance to make it unlawful for government services and functions to discriminate on the grounds of race.
- Publicity campaigns should be run showing pride in a diverse Hong Kong.
- Training courses among frontline staff in the civil service should be formulated to promote understanding of the various cultures of different ethnic minorities.
- Information about different cultures and religions should be incorporated into the education curriculum.

OTHER

In addition to policy proposals that are specific to the non-ethnic Chinese communities, there are two other areas of broader relevance in which we are of the view that urgent action is required.

Firstly, we think it is important that steps are taken to improve and maintain standards of English in Hong Kong. As explained above, we are very conscious of the importance of the Chinese language. It would be to Hong Kong's detriment if improved Chinese ability came at the expense of English levels. Hong Kong has always been an entrepot between China and the rest of the world and the reality is that we need high levels of fluency in both languages in order to thrive in a competitive world.

Secondly, we see continued shortages of medical personnel in the public health care system. For instance, the soon to be opened Hong Kong Children's Hospital in Kai Tak will initially have 200 fewer beds than initially planned.¹ Similarly, the North Lantau Hospital came under scrutiny from the Audit Commission in late 2017 because of delays in the introduction of medical services more than 4 years after the hospital opened.¹ Both examples largely result from shortages in manpower. Following the passage of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill 2017 and the consequent extension of the maximum period of limited registration from one year to three years, we hope that the Hospital Authority will be encouraged to actively recruit overseas qualified doctors to our public hospitals so as to improve services to the Hong Kong public.

We would be pleased to elaborate on any of our proposals above should this be of assistance. In any event, we look forward to working with your Administration to improve the livelihood of Hong Kong society and to work towards the continued success of Hong Kong.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raj Mank", written over a horizontal line that ends in an arrowhead pointing to the right.

For and on behalf of The India Association