

Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony
Notes of the meeting on 29 November 2023

Present

Home Affairs Department (HAD)

Mr TE Chi-wang (Chairperson)	Deputy Director of Home Affairs
Mr Wilson KWONG	Assistant Director of Home Affairs
Ms Rebecca CHAN	Chief Executive Officer
Mr Clarence CHING (Secretary)	Senior Executive Officer

Official Members

Miss Winnie YEUNG	Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs (5A), Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
Mr Sunny LO	Education Officer (Non-Chinese Speaking Student Support) 11, Education Bureau
Ms Kelly CHAN	Principal Information Officer (Local Promotions), Information Services Department
Ms Cecilia YU	Labour Officer (Employment Services)2, Labour Department

Non-official Members

Mr Syed Ekram ELAHI
Ms Rita GURUNG
Mr Vishal MELWANI
Mr Deep Singh VINNER

Mr WONG Ka-chun
Mr YEUNG Tsz-hei

In Attendance

Mr Raymond HO	Senior Equal Opportunities Officer Ethnic Minorities Unit Equal Opportunities Commission
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For Agenda Item (3)

Ms Carmen LEE	Centre-in-charge, CHEER Centre
Mr Chirag Rai DEWAN	Chief Interpreter/Translator, CHEER Centre
Mr Ernest WONG	Team Leader (interpreter/Translator), CHEER Centre
Ms Ann TAM	Centre-in-charge, LINK Centre
Ms Naseem FARRAH	Programme Worker, LINK Centre

For Agenda Item (4)

Mr LAM Chi-kwong	Senior Manager (Course Development), Employees Retraining Board
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Absent with apologies

Mr Avinash Chandiram HOTCHANDANI
Mr Mohammad ILYAS
Ms KONG Man-wai, Vivian
Mr Zaman Minhas QAMAR
Ms Lamia Sreya RAHMAN
Ms Tika RANA
Ms Himeshika SAMARADIVAKARA
Dr. Chura Bahadur THAPA
Ms TSUI Hang-on, Yvonne

Mr WONG Man-ho, Matthew
Mr YUON Fuk-lung, Eric

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Chairperson welcomed Members to the meeting, including the newly appointed member Mr Deep Singh VINNER. The Chairperson also congratulated Mr Syed Ekram ELAHI who received the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs' Commendation in March 2023 in recognition of his dedicated community services for ethnic minorities (EMs).
- 1.2 The Chairperson said that the Home Affairs Department (HAD) attached great importance to providing support for EMs and assisting them in integrating into the community. In the 2023 Policy Address, new initiatives for EMs were introduced, namely (a) set up two additional EM centres each in Kowloon Central and New Territories East, bringing the total number of EM centres to 10; (b) set up Ethnic Minority Care Teams (EM Care Teams) in each of the 10 EM centres; (c) continue to strengthen services for EM youths and EM new arrivals; and (d) regularise the District-based Programmes for Racial Harmony. The Secretary of Home and Youth Affairs briefed Members on these initiatives at an engagement session on 27 November 2023. In the meeting today, the Chairperson would invite Members' views on how best to implement these new initiatives, particularly through the EM centres and the new EM Care Teams.

2. Confirmation of the notes of discussion on 25 October 2022

- 2.1 The notes of the last meeting held on 25 October 2022 were confirmed with one amendment. In the post-meeting notes under paragraph 6.3, the term "NEC (Non-Ethnic Chinese) students" had been amended to "NCS (Non-Chinese Speaking) students" to better

reflect that the target service recipients were non-Chinese speaking students whose spoken language at home was not Chinese.

3. Matters arising from the meeting on 25 October 2022

3.1 There was no matter arising from the meeting on 25 October 2022.

4. Interpretation and Support Services for Ethnic Minorities provided by Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities

4.1 At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms Carmen LEE and Mr Chirag Rai DEWAN briefed Members on the interpretation services provided by the CHEER Centre. With the additional funding provided by HAD from 2019 onwards, the interpretation and translation services of CHEER Centre were enhanced. The usage of telephone interpretation services increased from 3 891 in 2018-19 to 6 674 in 2022-23. The number of hotlines also increased from 3 to 8, with Vietnamese service added. The interpretation service using WhatsApp was also introduced. Members were appreciative of the wide range of interpretation/translation services provided by the CHEER Centre.

4.1.1 The Chairperson asked about the publicity of CHEER Centre's interpretation service and how to make EMs aware of its services. Mr Dewan replied that they would promote the service through the centre's activities and collaboration with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that also provided services to EM communities. They would also visit religious venues of EMs during festive occasions to promote the services.

4.1.2 A member opined that a number of Government websites was now providing information in ethnic minority languages. However, there was still a lot of information on Government websites only in Chinese or English, causing difficulty for EMs to understand the messages. In addition, he shared that his assistant who could speak a little English visited a hospital under the Hospital Authority.

The staff insisted that the assistant used his not-so-good English to communicate with doctor, instead of providing interpretation service. The member pointed out that in this case, a small miscommunication could lead to a significant negative consequence. Not only service users, but also the staff in public services should also be encouraged to use interpretation services when communicating with EMs who had limited communication skills in English and Chinese.

- 4.1.3 Another member said that there had been a significant increase of number of calls from 2019 to 2023. He asked if the usage figures of the interpretation services provided by CHEER Centre could be further broken down into different EM languages so that he could have a picture whether a specific ethnicity was not aware of such services. He cited his own case as an example and believed that many Punjabis in Hong Kong were not aware of the interpretation services provided by CHEER Centre. The Chairperson agreed that the interpretation usage data of different EM languages should be collected on a regular basis so as to assess the publicity efforts.

[Post-meeting notes: The usage data broken down into different EM languages are collected regularly. CHEER Centre will conduct a yearly review on the interpretation usage to consider if publicity efforts could be strengthened for certain EM languages.]

- 4.1.4 A member also expressed his wish that the CHEER Centre would provide interpretation services in Bangla in the future. The member also advised that the Bangladesh Association of Hong Kong organised Bangla language classes for Bangladeshi children in Hong Kong. The Association got the premises from the Government and he hoped that the Government could also provide funding for the Bangla classes. In addition, he raised the issue that the Bangladeshi ladies preferred to see a female doctor rather than a male doctor. This was their cultural preference, but was not always appreciated by local medical practitioners.

- 4.1.5 In response to the Chairman's enquiry, the Member said that the Association only organised Bangla classes at the moment. Regarding the requirement for same-gender doctor examination, the Chairperson said that the Committee would pass his concerns to the relevant Bureau.

(Post-meeting notes: The opinion on same-gender doctor examination was sent to the Health Bureau on 15 December 2023.)

- 4.2 At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms Ann TAM and Ms Naseem FARRAH of LINK Centre briefed Members on the support services provided by the LINK Centre. To help EMs integrate into the local community, LINK Centre organised a series of programmes, including Chinese and English language programmes, orientation and familiarisation programmes, integration programmes, dedicated programmes for EM Youths, after-school tutorials and innovative programmes. After-school tutorial was one of the popular programmes with a waiting list. Ms Farrah also highlighted some innovative programmes such as "Dialogue with a Stranger", "Cantonese Competition for EMs", "Hong Kong in my Eyes", sports programmes and "Cantonese Debate Competition for EMs". Members were appreciative of the wide variety of the programmes organised by the LINK Centre.

- 4.3 The Chairperson noted that as announced in the 2023 Policy Address, two new EM centres would be set up next year. He also noted that EM Care Team would be set up at each EM centre to reach out to the EM community and promote cultural awareness. He invited Members to share their views on how these new initiatives could better serve the EM communities.

- 4.3.1 A member considered that the after-school tutorial classes could help EM students with their homework, especially when their parents could not provide any help with Chinese homework. He also expressed concern about the waiting list. He asked if more after-school tutorial classes could be organised to meet the demand.

Ms Tam said they would take turns for the students on the waiting list to join the after-school tutorials because of the high demand. A member said that the government should provide more resources to EM centres to organise enough tutorials for EM students. To help EM students learn Chinese, a member opined that a reading/translation pen would be useful and suggested that schools could provide such pens to them.

(Post-meeting notes: The opinion on Chinese learning assistance tools was sent to the Education Bureau on 15 December 2023.)

4.3.2 A member stressed the importance of learning Chinese learning in Hong Kong. He acknowledged that the matter was beyond the scope of HAD. He pointed out that without a decent level of Chinese language proficiency, one might face difficulties in getting good jobs even if they had other talents.

4.3.3 A member pointed out that learning Chinese was a challenge for EMs, especially the reading/writing Chinese, because Chinese characters did not have pinyin letters or phonetic alphabets. EMs had to remember how to pronounce each character in order to read it. This was very hard for EMs who did not have family support, so they needed more support from the Government.

5. Employees Retraining Board's Dedicated Services for Ethnic Minorities

5.1 At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr LAM Chi-kwong briefed Members on the dedicated services provided by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) for the EMs. ERB currently provided about 700 training courses covering 28 industries and various generic skills. Among them, 38 courses (10 full-time placement-tied and 28 part-time non-placement-tied courses) were designed for EMs. Teaching assistants who could speak English and EM languages could be arranged to assist EM students in attending ERB courses. Moreover, there was a training consultant to

provide personalised consultation services to EMs. The ERB Service Centre and ERB Service Spots were located in different districts (including Tin Shui Wai, Kwai Ching and Tsuen Wan, Kowloon West and Kowloon East) to facilitate EMs to register/enquire ERB courses. ERB had been working closely with EM centres to promote the dedicated courses and services for EMs.

- 5.1.1 The Chairperson inquired about the availability of ERB Training Net Course Search Terminals at the EM centres and the possibility of using the CHEER Centre's translation/interpretation services for ERB courses. Mr Lam replied that the Course Search Terminals were installed at over 100 locations, including Labour Department's Job Centres, Social Welfare Department's Social Security Field Units and NGOs commissioned by SWD. ERB had been closely working with CHEER Centre in the provision of translation/ interpretation services when necessary.

(Post-meeting notes: Due to space constraints, there is currently no ERB terminals being installed at EM centres.)

- 5.1.2 A member asked if ERB could include computer programming and bookkeeping courses for EM, in addition to the courses currently provided. Moreover, he asked if some ERB courses could provide training materials in English. Mr Lam responded that those training materials of courses dedicated for EMs were in English. He added that EM teaching assistants would also be provided when necessary. Mr Lam supplemented that members could propose their suggestions to ERB for consideration if they had any ideas to expand the types of courses or skill sets. ERB regularly met with a focus group composed of representatives from NGOs and EM organisations to discuss the job opportunities for EMs and exchange views on training courses for EMs.

- 5.1.3 A member inquired about the enrolment statistics of EMs in ERB courses and whether there was a minimum number of students required to start a course. He shared an experience of his student

who was interested in joining an ERB course, but was told by the course staff that they needed at least 15 students to run the course. The student had to wait for six months until they had reached the enrolment threshold. The member suggested that ERB should provide fixed schedule for the courses instead of depending on the enrolment situation.

- 5.1.4 Mr Lam responded that ERB courses had an annual intake of about 300 to 400 EMs, and that ERB had sufficient resources to accommodate more EM students. He added that ERB adopted a flexible arrangement on course commencement. Courses would be commenced when there were enough enrolments. He also mentioned that flexibility was allowed to combine students from different districts so that there were enough students to start a course.
- 5.1.5 Mr Lam understood the importance of spoken Cantonese for EM who wanted to secure a good job in Hong Kong so the ERB offered different types of job-specific Cantonese/ English courses for them. These language courses enabled EMs to acquire the language abilities needed for their work, such as managing a meeting, delivering a presentation, or serving customers. He appealed to all members to advise interested EMs to check the course information first or to consult the training consultant before enrolling in ERB courses so as to ensure that they were taking the courses which fit their training needs and job aspiration.
- 5.1.6 Another member said that, if a Form Three EM student could not speak Cantonese and did not study well, he might leave Hong Kong for a foreign country. He noticed that EMs in the United Kingdom were moving up the social ladder, from blue-collar workers to white-collar professionals. He hoped that Hong Kong could support EMs in finding suitable jobs that match their skills and talents so as to unleash their potential.

- 5.1.7 The Chairperson agreed that we should work together to provide EMs with more opportunities to fulfil their potential. He thanked all members for their opinions and Mr Lam for the presentation.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 A member raised a concern about the language barrier in reporting the data of students with special education needs to the EDB. He explained that the forms provided by the EDB were only in Chinese which required him and other teachers to translate all the information they had collected from EM students in English into Chinese. He requested that EDB should allow them to submit the information in English. The Chairperson said that the Committee would pass the suggestion to EDB.

(Post-meeting notes: The suggestion was to the Education Bureau on 15 December 2023.)

- 6.2 Another issue was that the Hong Kong Examination Authority had removed the Urdu language examination from the list of Category C subjects of Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) as the examination organiser, the Cambridge Assessment International Education, planned to discontinue the Urdu examination in 2025. This decision had a negative impact on many Pakistani students who relied on this examination in order to improve their overall score of HKDSE. The Chairperson said that the Committee would pass his views to EDB.

(Post-meeting notes: The views were passed to the Education Bureau on 15 December 2023.)

- 6.3 A member informed the meeting that he had nominated an EM candidate for the Youth Development Commission Youth Ambassadors Scheme. He asked about the status of selection process. The Secretary replied that he would check with the

Home and Youth Affairs Bureau on the selection progress and update the members who had made nomination.

(Post-meeting notes: As informed by the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, the selection process of the Youth Development Commission Youth Ambassadors Scheme has been completed and the results would be announced in due course.)

6.4 The Chairperson thanked members for joining the meeting. As the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election would be held on 10 December 2023, the Chairperson encouraged all electors to vote on the election day so as to elect capable District Council members to serve the people.

6.5 The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

**Home Affairs Department
December 2023**