

Language barrier 'factor in Nepali's death'

A Nepali shot dead by a policeman might not have understood the warnings shouted at him in Cantonese, ethnic-minority and human rights concern groups said yesterday.

They questioned the level of cultural sensitivity shown by the officer and hoped the coming inquest would answer their questions.

Police said yesterday that the 31-year-old victim was Nepali-born and living in [Hong Kong](#), not an illegal immigrant as they had suspected on Tuesday. He was shot that day while attacking the policeman with a chair on a hillside in Ho Man Tin.

Fermi Wong Wai-fun, campaign director of [Unison Hong Kong](#), a non-governmental organisation that represents minorities' interests, expressed regret about the tragedy and questioned the policeman's justification for opening fire.

"The South Asian man was not holding a hostage; it doesn't make sense for a police officer to open fire in reacting to an attack with a wooden chair, as he had the alternative of waiting for reinforcements," Ms Wong said.

The man died after being shot in the head at close range. A police source said the man had a criminal record, including several woundings and serious assaults.

A resident of Lok Man Sun Chuen, which overlooks the shooting site, caught the incident on video and the clip was uploaded to the internet yesterday.

The one-minute video records the policeman's warning as he shouts: "Drop your weapon, drop your weapon. I am police, don't move, otherwise I will open fire. Don't force me to do it." All the warnings were given in Cantonese.

Ten seconds after the warnings began, two gunshots rang out. The video image is in low resolution, but the sound is clear.

The chief superintendent of the Police Public Relations Bureau, David Ng Ka-sing, said yesterday that the police were handling the case carefully.

"The man wasn't treated any differently because of his nationality."

Ms Wong said the Nepali might not have understood Cantonese, and perhaps became emotional when the policeman kept shouting at him.

"The police officer was slightly injured," Ms Wong said. "It doesn't look like his life was in danger, which would have justified the shooting."

She wondered whether the officer's decision to shoot was faulty.

In a case in Britain, a Chinese person who did not understand English was shot by police during a stop-and-search on a road, Ms Wong said.

The director of [Hong Kong](#) Human Rights Monitor, Law Yuk-kai, suggested that police improve their cultural sensitivity, especially in handling cases involving members of ethnic minorities.

Tony Liu Kit-ming, chairman of the [Hong Kong](#) Police Inspectors' Association, said the video clip showed that the officer tried his best to warn the suspect and get away, but the wooded terrain made it difficult for him to move easily. Mr Liu said he was sure the policeman did not want to kill anyone. Officers' cultural sensitivities could be improved, he said.

Kowloon City district councillor Kitson Yang Wing-kit said the Nepali had been living on the hillside for about six months, and Mr Yang had received nuisance and noise complaints about him.

A police spokesman said a postmortem examination would be conducted today. The officer in the case is on sick leave over his injuries.



Officers of the Police Tactical Unit search for evidence in the area around the site of Tuesday's fatal police shooting on a hillside in Ho Man Tin. Photo: David Wong

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Phyllis Tsang and Clifford Lo

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