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Five languages, but police don't want him

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Khezar Hayat speaks Cantonese, English and three South Asian languages. He can also read and write Chinese well enough to get an A* result in a government-recognised overseas examination. But this was not enough to get the Hong Kong-born and raised ethnic Pakistani a job in the police force.

Hayat's story is typical of the difficulty members of ethnic minorities have in getting government jobs despite long family histories in the city and ability with useful languages.

'We really want to serve the community and work in the government, we have a heart to serve,' Hayat said.

What particularly frustrates him is the fact his knowledge of the minority communities and fluency in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi would be useful in dealing with South Asians who get into trouble. 'There are many Pakistanis and Indians in Hong Kong and I could use my home language to help them if I worked as a police constable, which I think is a big advantage,' he said.

In an interview conducted in Cantonese, in which he often used highly idiomatic Chinese expressions, Hayat told how, after sitting the Form Five Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, he applied to join the police force as a constable.

During the process, he was asked to answer three written questions in Chinese on why he was interested in being a police constable. Hayat did his best but was told by a senior inspector in the one-to-one interview that his written Chinese was below standard, despite the fact he had obtained an A* in the British General Certificate of Secondary Education, which the government accepts.

'I do agree Chinese is very important in government, but it seems that my GCSE result in Chinese, which is a government-recognised one, is not working; and they don't even emphasise English,' he said. There was no test in English and his strength in South Asian languages was ignored.

Like many young Indians and Pakistanis, Hayat grew up speaking Cantonese. When he was studying at the Delia Memorial School in Mei Foo, he decided to be the first one in his family to study Chinese formally instead of French. 'Whatever way I could think of to learn Chinese, I did it,' he said. 'On Christmas Day, we tried to write Christmas cards to each other in Chinese.'

A good student who left school after Form Five last year to help his family's finances, he failed Chinese in the HKCEE but later got an equivalent pass in the GCSE exam.

But as well as the police, he was rejected for clerical and sales jobs by employers who only took

his HKCEE result, not the GCSE, into account.

Hayat, who works as a deliveryman, said he would not give up trying to improve his Chinese and would apply again to be a police constable.

Since 2003, the government has applied Chinese language requirements to all applicants for government jobs. At that time applicants for posts not requiring a degree needed a pass in HKCEE Chinese. From August 2007, applicants have been allowed to use Grade D in the GCSE Chinese as an alternative to the HKCEE qualification. But some departments, including the police, have their own written Chinese test.

Alan Din Wai-bun, project officer of Unison Hong Kong for Ethnic Equality, said the government should review its policies on recruitment so as to be a racial-equality employer.

He said the government at present did not have statistics on the number of applicants or serving civil servants by different race groups.

The Civil Service Bureau says in a Legco paper it is considering what steps can be taken to measure the Civil Service's composition by race.

Topics: Ethnic Groups in Hong Kong
Standardized Tests

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