

Dear Chairman and honored government officials,

My name is Sharnasree Datta and I am currently a freshman at HKUST. Today, I would like to bring the spotlight onto the issue of the government's inaction on ethnic minority new arrivals.

Two decades ago, my parents were new arrivals from Bangladesh. They did not know the language, the streets, the people- they were completely clueless. Fast forward to 2020, my father still cannot go to the wet market without getting scammed and my mother has never gotten a job as they still do not know an ounce of Chinese.

It could be argued that there was no system in place back then and that times are different now, but I beg to differ. In 2015, my friend and his family immigrated to Hong Kong. However, they had no idea how the school system was like- what schools to apply for, what exams would they have to take and how to start learning the language. Five years later, none of the children can speak Cantonese, and the oldest child failed his HKDSE exam twice. They were one of the brightest students in their country, so why were they not able to excel in Hong Kong as well?

It is because the government failed them. The government failed to identify them when they first immigrated and integrate them into Hong Kong. They never got the chance to be on an equal playing field with the rest of the students. Moreover, the government was aware of these consequences. It is the primary reason for the existence of the Initiation Program, where new arrival children learn the Chinese and English language and immerse themselves in a Hong Kong classroom atmosphere before entering a mainstream school. Yet, why are the needs of mainlanders only catered for in this program? Why doesn't the Immigration Department take the needs of ethnic minority new arrivals into consideration as well?

All it is asked of the government is to better use the current policy in three ways. First, update the information kit distributed to new arrivals. Second, improve the RDB Initiation Program by establishing a comprehensive plan on the social integration of EM NA and last but not he least, Push the collaboration of the Home Affairs Department and the Immigration Department to systematically identify and collect their data to refer them to the relevant support centres and NGOs, and providing a free assessment of their language ability to effectively initiate their social integration.

The solutions are simple in nature, and not difficult nor costly to implement. On the contrary, we have seen the vast economic benefits that arise from integrating immigrants into the society from countries like Singapore and the USA. If my parents were given this opportunity two decades back, I would have probably said this speech in Chinese instead because social integration does not end with an individual, it continues on for generations upon generations. Thank you.