

This Singapore Police Coast Guard Officer has made a lasting impression on the nation

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Cultural Reckoning – Gim Joo Hyung, a Korean in the Police Coast Guard, recounts how Singapore’s diversity has enabled him to spread his wings and soar.

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At first glance, INSP (NS) Gim Joo Hyung looks and speaks like an average Singaporean – English with a Singapore accent, as well as Chinese. “No one will know I’m Korean until I tell them and start speaking in Korean,” he says with a laugh.

INSP (NS) Gim, 26, who is currently serving his National Service in the Singapore Police Force as a Police Coast Guard Coastal Patrol Squadron Officer, came to Singapore at the age of three with his Korean parents. “My dad runs a maritime engineering business in Singapore, while my mum is a chef. They met while working here,” says Gim, who will be graduating with a banking and finance degree from the Singapore Institute of Management.



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/-fv2ku_OoLg

He is thankful that he grew up in a place that is multicultural and multi-religious. "Singapore is a unique place where nobody feels that they don't belong," says the Singapore permanent resident. But he admits it took him a while to adjust to life here due to the language barrier. "When I started kindergarten, it was mandatory for me to learn Chinese. But I didn't speak a word of it. I didn't speak English either. But once I got past the language barrier, I led a regular student life, and that is a true testament of Singapore," he says.

While he was known as the "Korean guy" in school, he says it was "pretty normal" to have foreign students studying in local schools. "Almost all my friends are Singaporeans, although a handful of them are Korean," adds Gim, who used to study at Bukit Merah Secondary School.

Even when he was serving his NS and was later deployed to the SPF, he did not feel awkward due to his ethnicity. "We were all part of a group of young men who came from different races, religions, and family and financial backgrounds, and we had to live with each other during our nine-month training as cadets," he says.

"My cadet buddy was Malay and he taught me about his culture and religion. Thanks to him, I'm able to speak some simple Malay, and that has proven useful in my duties as I sometimes have to ask people where they are going in our waters."



Notably, Gim met some of his Korean countrymen who were also serving in the SPF during the first Trump-Kim summit, which was held in Singapore. He was the main interpreter during the event.

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Having worked in land patrol before transferring to his current sea patrolling duties a year ago, he said the new posting has been an eye-opening experience for him.

“A lot of Singaporeans only see the land threats, but they don’t realise the importance of protecting our waters even though Singapore is surrounded by water. Everybody can see what is in the sky, but nobody can see what is under the water,” he notes.

Being in the frontline, Gim and his team patrol Singapore’s territorial waters to deter and prevent crimes such as illegal border crossing, piracy, and the illegal smuggling of cigarettes, drugs and cash. “We can stop any ship that is crossing into Singapore and go on board to do an inspection,” he says.

Meanwhile, he says that being in the SPF – in particular during land patrols – has taught him humility. “The police are Singaporeans’ go-to guy for help no matter how big or small the problem. We try to assist even the smallest of matters – for instance, helping a lost child or an elderly with dementia, and keeping them calm till their guardians arrive.”

To brush up on his local language skills, Gim would hang out at the neighbourhood coffeeshops and chit-chat with the uncles, when he was growing up in Jalan Rumah Tinggi, an old housing estate near Redhill. “I’m thankful to be able to grow up in a society where I was treated equally as anyone else and that is the most distinct aspect of Singapore,” he said.

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