

Terrorist Rehab Gets the Airing it Needs

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938LIVE, 24 February 2009

Two thirds of the terrorist detainees Singapore has arrested since 2001, have been released after rehabilitation.

And so far, Law and Second Minister for Home Affairs says they've not strayed back into terrorism.

But how can one be sure the terrorists have fully reformed?

And how can terrorist ideas be countered at the societal level?

These are topics to be discussed at the first ever Conference on Terrorist Rehabilitation in Singapore, co-organised by the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Religious Rehabilitation Group.

Only 20 persons remain in detention here, Deputy Prime Minister Wong Kan Seng told Parliament earlier this month.

That means another 40, or two-thirds of the 60 terrorists arrested have been released.

At Tuesday's event, Mr Shanmugam says they've re-integrated well into society, but are still being closely monitored.

They're also required to stay on the rehab programme to ensure they're inoculated against radical ideas.

"Putting into practice an effective rehabilitation strategy would be extremely challenging I think we all recognise that because we're dealing with people who're willing to give up their lives for a cause. How do you take them away from those beliefs and get them back into society and there's another major challenge - how do you know they've truly reformed? There's no foolproof assessment system."

Mr Shanmugam cites the US' efforts to rehabilitate 26,000 Iraqi detainees as one successful model.

By heavily engaging the family and religious scholars, the number of detainees who've gone back to terrorism after being released fell from 15 to 1 percent.

Another good example thrown up is Egypt where two major terrorist organisations involving more than 20,000 people have all but renounced violence.

One is the Al Jama Ah Al Islamiyah, which from 1999 onwards, did so on the basis of debate and discussion with scholarly clerics.

The other organisation is Al Jihad, whose leadership has, since 2007, been trying to deradicalise itself.

Dr Omar Ashour, a lecturer at the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, in Britain explains how the process has been happening.

"What led them to this decision was a combination of repression from the regime and interaction with moderate religious leaders and liberals and human rights activists and other type of seculars, coupled with inducements from the regime, mainly employment, pensions and so on and so forth."

200 experts from 20 countries will learn about Singapore's rehab efforts and share theirs during the three-day conference.

A website to promote peace and counter the spread of terrorist ideas online was also launched today - www.p4peace.com