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June 10, 2007

Case serves as reminder not to let guard down: Yaacob  
Issue is about rejecting violence, says Muslim Affairs Minister

By Keith Lin

ABDUL Basheer Abdul Kader was one of the Malay community's brightest.

But the law graduate's detention for his militant plans is a reminder of how even such individuals can be caught up in these activities, Malay political leaders said yesterday.

Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim expressed sadness that a small number from the community were 'waylaid into things dangerous, even though we learnt our lessons through the Jemaah Islamiah episode and shared this with everyone'.

'This example serves as a reminder that we cannot let down our guard and that even our brightest can be susceptible if they don't watch it,' he said last night.

His disappointment that someone with a promising future could allow himself to be led astray was shared by other Malay political and community leaders.

They said it was fortunate the security authorities kept a watchful eye, but also said it was important for the community to play its part against the emergence of extremist views.

'We have to continue to be wary of dangerous political agenda coming under the guise of religion through attractive media,' Dr Yaacob said in a reference to the Internet, through which Abdul Basheer's radical views were shaped.

Youth who seek religious guidance must go to mosques and religious teachers whose names are available under the Asatizah Recognition Scheme - which lists religious teachers, their qualifications and areas of expertise, he added.

But he said it was not a matter for security agencies and religious teachers alone. The community has to also shoulder responsibility.

'At the end of the day, it is about rejecting violence. Our leaders, parents, teachers and those in positions of responsibility and influence must continue to shape our young towards a life that benefits the community and nation,' he said.

'We must help anyone - a relative, a friend or an acquaintance who seems troubled - to get the right support and guidance to stay engaged in society.'

Dr Yaacob was also happy at the support and understanding that community leaders of all faiths had shown.

The Home Affairs Ministry said on Friday that Abdul Basheer, 28, had been detained in February. It outlined, among other things, how he became influenced by extremist ideas on the Internet and wanted to pursue

'militant jihad' in Afghanistan.

Reacting to the news, Senior Minister of State (Foreign Affairs) Zainul Abidin Rasheed said he was sad and disappointed that young Singaporeans could be influenced 'by such warped thinking' available online.

What was worse was the fact that there were scores of sites purveying extremist Islamist teachings.

Said Mr Zainul: 'When you have an unguided mind searching for answers on issues they are troubled with and get misguided, you wonder who else may again fall prey to the Internet.'

In this regard, he said it was important for mainstream Muslim organisations 'to be savvy to meet that challenge'.

'It is not just about religious knowledge only, but engaging the young when faced with difficult contemporary issues facing the Muslim world post 9/11,' he said.

But, like Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education Masagos Zulkifli, he was reassured there were programmes in place to counter such teachings, including the work of the the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a group of religious teachers who counsel Jemaah Islamiah detainees.

Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) and other Malay-Muslim groups also had programmes for youth and to combat extremist teachings.

Mr Masagos commended the RRG and others for their work.

'The leadership of Muslim community will continue these efforts and expand them and can assure the nation at large that it takes these efforts seriously and will not look at incidents like these lightly even if there is only one because it's one too many,' he said.

He and other leaders noted that there were Muslims trying to search for answers but who were not well-grounded in the religion and could be vulnerable to what is being propagated in cyberspace.

'This episode is so close to home that it should drive the point that circumstances may exist for anyone to become susceptible to deviant doctrine. We should just not ever let our guard down,' he said.

While some Muslims may feel sympathetic at the plight of other Muslim nations and its people, they must not be swayed by damaging 'quick fix efforts', Mr Masagos added.

'These short cuts to solve the problems of the Muslim world community and to attain salvation are sweet but false promises,' he said.

'Clearly terrorism resorts to violence and terror as the first option and only solution... Hurting and killing the innocent in the name of justice and religion are just unacceptable means to ends in any religion.'

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**DR YAACOB IBRAHIM, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs**

'No matter how unhappy one is about such issues, one can express them responsibly and not resort to violence, (which is) at odds with our people, country and Islam's interests.'

**SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ZAINUL ABIDEEN RASHEED**

'We must commend the ongoing efforts of Muis, the Religious Rehabilitation Group and other Malay-Muslim organisations to minimise the possibility of a radical doctrine taking root here. The Muslim community leadership will continue these efforts and expand them. It can assure the nation at large that it takes these efforts seriously and will not take such incidents lightly, even if there is only one incident, because it's one too many.'

**SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION MASAGOS ZULKIFLI**

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