

# Non-Muslims' role in fighting radicalism

## Security experts say they should challenge extremist views

### ► Zakir Hussain

NON-MUSLIMS can do their part to counter the threat of radicalism in Singapore, security analysts and students at a seminar said yesterday.

They can challenge prejudiced views of Muslims, suggested research analyst Jolene Jerard of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR).

Community leaders who are not Muslim can also step forward to talk about the dangers of radicalism, including from hardliners in their own groups, she said, noting that Muslim groups have done a lot to challenge extremist views.

Nan Hua High School student Tan Wei Qing, 16, agreed.

"If people challenge the stereotype that Muslims are prone to radicalism, there can be more trust between Muslims and non-Muslims," she said. Radical ideas that misinterpret Islam will then be less likely to win support.

She was one of some 200 stu-

dents from junior colleges and largely-Chinese Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools at the half-day event at the Home Team Academy.

It was organised by Malay-Muslim group Taman Bacaan, the inter-agency committee looking after the families of JI detainees and the S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, where ICPVTR is based. Also present were 40 trainee teachers from the National Institute of Education.

Participants also listened to presentations on the terrorist threat and what Muslim leaders

were doing to rehabilitate some 30 terror detainees here. They also had a closed-door discussion with the director of the Internal Security Department, Mr Pang Kin Keong.

ICPVTR head Rohan Gunaratna reminded them that terrorism was not committed by Muslims alone, pointing to Christian militias in Indonesia, among others.

Ms Jerard also noted that atheists have taken to terror acts to seek political change, citing the communists of the past and environmental terrorists today.

Taman Bacaan organised similar sessions last year, but this is

the first time it is targeting SAP school students as they may have fewer chances to mix with Muslims, said the group's president Abdul Halim Kader.

The need for such an understanding has become more crucial with the new threat of "do-it-yourself", or DIY, radicals who imbibe extreme ideology without being part of a terrorist group.

Three such radicals have been detained by the authorities here in the past year, as they were planning to engage in acts of terror.

Speakers were also asked who was to blame for the worsening image of Islam since the Sept 11,

2001 terrorist attacks on America.

Ustaz Feisal Hassan, a member of the Religious Rehabilitation Group which counsels JI detainees, said that assigning blame was not the issue.

"We must have positive responses to people who want us to throw stones at each other. We move on, promoting messages of moderation and peace against these messages of hatred."

Anderson JC student Glenn Zeng, 17, agreed: "What's most important is to look at our Muslim friends as individuals and Singaporeans."