
Moderates to help in fighting terror

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AUSTRALIA is developing a plan to turn convicted terrorists with the help of moderate Muslim leaders and engage in a hearts-and-minds campaign to counter radical Islam in ethnic communities.

Federal and state authorities have established a taskforce at the request of Attorney-General Robert McClelland, and are consulting Islamic countries in which an estimated 100,000 detainees have been through deradicalisation programs.

Security sources said the move reflected a fundamental shift of strategy under Kevin Rudd, who was determined to engage with Islamic terrorism, rather than solely counter it through force, under the leadership of the US.

Following a string of convictions of Islamic terrorists around the country in recent years, authorities are concerned there is a risk of them re-engaging in extremist activities after their release without an effort to convert them to moderate Islam.

After discussions with overseas leaders, Mr McClelland said he had established the taskforce to look at options to introduce deradicalisation strategies as part of a broader engagement with the Muslim community to en-

courage moderate Islam: "Experience from around the world indicates that enlisting and engaging families, communities and moderate religious leaders is crucial."

Victorian Corrective Services deputy commissioner Rod Wise, a taskforce member who in February attended a conference in Singapore on the issue, said the state government was interested in deradicalisation efforts after the trial of several Islamic terrorists in a Melbourne court last year.

"We have now got a number of terrorists who have recently been convicted and sentenced," Mr Wise said.

"We have an obligation to put them back into the community when they are released in such a way that they engage in law-abiding activities."

Efforts were currently limited, although Muslim chaplains were available to visit prisoners, he said. "We are in the process of developing a more sophisticated approach."

It is understood the Prime Minister is behind the new direction in dealing with terrorism. While in Opposition, Mr Rudd consulted Professor Rohan Gunaratna, head of a regional think tank on terrorism in Singapore.