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GEARING UP TO FIGHT TERRORISM: Ms Susan Sim (left) and Dr Rohan Gunaratna (right) with President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan.

Side by side to fight terrorism

Research body aims to equip nations with know-how to fight terrorism

JESSINTA TAN

jessinta@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE is sharing its counter-terrorism expertise with an increasing number of countries in Asia and the Middle East, especially those facing threats from the rise of extremism and terrorism.

Dr Rohan Gunaratna, head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), said the focus is on Asia and the Middle East because 90 per cent of terrorism activities occur in these regions.

"These attacks include suicide and non-suicide attacks, bombings, assassinations, sabotages, kidnappings and hijackings by terrorists," he said in an interview with TODAY.

The ICPVTR, which is part of the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, had helped set up the Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, the Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research and the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (Caps) in Afghanistan.

"One of the ICPVTR's guiding principles is to share our specialist capabilities in counter-terrorism with other countries," said Dr Gunaratna.

Bangladesh has an overwhelming Muslim majority with a traditionally moderate

mindset, but experts has suffered a lot in the last few years due to the rise of violent radicalisation and terrorism, experts say.

Dr Gunaratna said the ICPVTR's objective is to equip nations — such as by training their analysts, law enforcement personnel and politicians — to ultimately be able to fight terrorism and extremism on their own.

Countries receiving the knowledge and resources from Singapore in combating terrorism have been appreciative of the republic's contributions, he said.

"When a Singapore delegation met Afghan President Hamid Karzai last month, he thanked Singapore for training his cousin Hekmat Karzai as a terrorism specialist. The President also described Caps as a remarkable institution in helping Afghanistan," said Dr Rohan.

Mr Hekmat Karzai is in charge of Caps, which was set up in March 2006 and was initially funded by the ICPVTR. The centre produces threat assessment reports for the Afghan government and international bodies, including the International Security Assistance Force — a Nato-led mission in Afghanistan — and the United Nations.

Ms Susan Sim, a senior fellow at the ICPVTR and former deputy chief of mission with the Singapore Embassy in Washington, said terrorism is a global scourge, so Singapore should help other countries develop the capacity to counter it.

"Terrorism is an international phenomenon. We help them build their capacity. They must then take ownership of it," she said.