

## **A calibrated approach**

### **Religious counselling for some in early stages of radicalization**

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**SINGAPORE** — Not every person with a radical bent will end up in detention or issued with a Restriction Order (RO).

Those detected with having such tendencies in the early stages would likely be referred for religious counselling to correct their erroneous understanding of the religion.

In response to MediaCorp queries, a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) spokesperson said on Friday that it adopts “a calibrated approach” when it comes to dealing with radicalised individuals.

She noted that “there have been a number of cases in the past where individuals were in the early stages of jihadist radicalisation”.

“As they were in the nascent stages, they did not then pose a threat to the extent that warranted them to be placed in detention or be issued with Restriction Orders (ROs)”.

Still, their radical ideas had to be corrected — through religious counselling — so that they did not become further radicalised.

“Whether an individual will be detained, issued with a RO or directly referred for religious counseling without any disruption to his/her life, will depend on his/her level of radicalisation at the time of the investigation,” the MHA spokesperson added.

The MHA’s response to Media-Corp queries came amid a call by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) to bring to its attention “any individual who appears to espouse militant views in the name of Islam, so that Muis can intervene early and provide the necessary follow up and counselling”.

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**Ministry of Home Affairs**

On Tuesday, the MHA announced that full-time National Serviceman Muhammad Fadil Abdul Hamid, 20, had been detained for two years, from April 4, for expounding jihadist views and striving for martyrdom.

Two others — unaccredited religious teacher Muhammad Anwar Jailani, 44, and a small business owner, Muhammad Thahir Shaik Dawood, 27 — were placed under restriction orders, also for two years.

The MHA spokesman on Friday also called on members of the public to report to the authorities if they “are aware that an individual is preaching or spreading radical jihadist ideology”.

“Prompt reporting can prevent that individual from infecting members of the community and from leading them down the path of radicalism and potentially,terrorism,” the spokesperson added.

Mr Azhar Ghani, a risk consultant who is also an Adjunct Research Associate with the Institute of Policy

Studies, pointed out that “the Muslim community is not averse to whistle blowing, as can be seen in the many cases where deviant teachings were reported to Muis in the past”.

While Malay/Muslim community leaders here have been working closely with the Government to combat religious radicalism, more needs to be done, said Mr Abdul Halim Kader, chairman of the Inter-Agency Aftercare Group.

The latter provides welfare services and preventive education for the families of terror detainees. For example, it may be useful to have a hotline system to report issues relating to religious radicalisation, Mr Abdul Halim said.

When one detects a change in someone they know — be it relative or friend — who shows signs of subscribing to radical beliefs, one must have the moral courage and initiative to report that relative or friend to the authorities (eg Muis, ISD).

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Meanwhile, in a prepared sermon delivered by imams (religious leaders) at 70 mosques around the island during the weekly Friday prayers, Muis called on the Muslim community to seek help from friends and companions when in doubt.

They are “those who will remind us to do good, point out our mistakes, advise us with all sincerity and wisdom and motivate and encourage us to hang on when we face difficulties and challenges,” the sermon said.

While it made no direct references to the ISD cases, the sermon emphasized the importance of holding on strongly to Islamic principles and faith “in face of all challenges”.