

Community policing and its relevance to countering terrorism

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Masterminds of the London bomb attacks in July 2005 did not have much luck escaping from the arms of the law.

Community policing was cited as a reason why UK's Metropolitan Police were able to nab the perpetrators within one week after the horrific act.

And community policing will continue to play an important role in counter terrorism, says former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair.

Shortly after the 21st July 2005 bomb attacks that disrupted London's public transport system, UK's Metropolitan Police launched one of the most extensive manhunts for the perpetrators.

And vigilance of people in the community played a key role in the eventual arrests of the perpetrators, says Sir Ian Blair.

"In the 21/7 bomb attacks in London, we were still in the process of rolling out these community policing teams. And when we put the CCTV pictures of the bombers up, a local authority refuse worker came in and said two of them were living in a flat in this particular place and he felt it was odd that he was clearing a lot peroxide bottles out of the bins. Now, had we had the neighborhood policing in place earlier, it may be that he would have said earlier "do you know what chaps, I keep finding these peroxide bottles. And the story would have been very different."

It is possible for terrorists to be produced within communities, says international terrorism expert, Professor Rohan Gunaratna.

Which is why he stresses the importance of establishing strong networks of community policing.

Giving the community eyes and ears he says, will help ensure the best line of defense against acts of terrorism.

This is why Professor Gunaratna applauds the proactive stance the Singapore Government is taking in engaging the community.

"In Singapore, the community engagement approach has been highly successful, and a model for many countries. And today, I can tell you more than 99 percent of the Muslims in Singapore are against terrorism because the government has explained to them that Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiah are not Quranic organizations and they are not Islamic organizations, and that they are deviant groups."

While the community's role is important, Sir Ian says an all-encompassing network comprising government, intelligence officers, law enforcement officers, and community policing is needed to effectively counter terrorism.