

Prominent Muslim leader calls for locally-trained imams

By *Dhairya Maheshwari*

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Training Muslim imams domestically in Australia would see clerics grounded in Australian values and reduce radicalisation, according to Sheikh Mohamadu Nawas Saleem. Master of Journalism student, [Dhairya Maheshwari](#), interviews the Muslim leader and terrorism expert, Professor Greg Barton.

A PROMINENT Melbourne-based Muslim religious leader has supported the idea to train imams domestically, saying that having clerics grounded in “Australian values” would have a huge impact on reducing the number of people attracted to violent extremist ideologies.

We have about 500,000 Muslims here in Australia, with those below 29 years of age constituting a majority among them. More than a third of them are first-generation Muslims. Ideally, we should have imams who grew up

here as they would understand the Australian culture better than the foreign-trained imams, besides being able to communicate in a more convincing manner, Sheikh Mohamadu Nawas Saleem, spokesperson for the Board of Imams Victoria, told the writer.

His comments came as Australian authorities grappled with framing an effective strategy to counter violent extremism that was acceptable to the Muslim community at large. Most of the major Muslim organizations of the country **denounced** the [counter-terror raids](#), conducted earlier this year, by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) across major cities as being 'opportunistic', fearing that such operations could alienate the community.

Sheikh Saleem believed that the federal and state governments should facilitate setting-up of imam-training institutions, along the lines of other advanced democracies such as U.S., Germany or France, all of which train most of their imams.

"Although there are several community organizations that are teaching Islam the way it should be taught, still to expect them to establish madrasas, like the College of Divinity in Turkey, is asking too much of them."

He proposed that the government could fill the logistical gap that prevented Muslim organizations from developing the required infrastructure to train imams.

"Land could be allocated at concessional prices, or certain theological courses could be taught in a different way,"

Sheikh Saleem said, proposing few solutions which should be looked at to make imam-training schools a reality.

Dhairya Maheshwari interviews Sheikh Mohamadu Nawas Saleem and terrorism expert, Professor Greg Barton

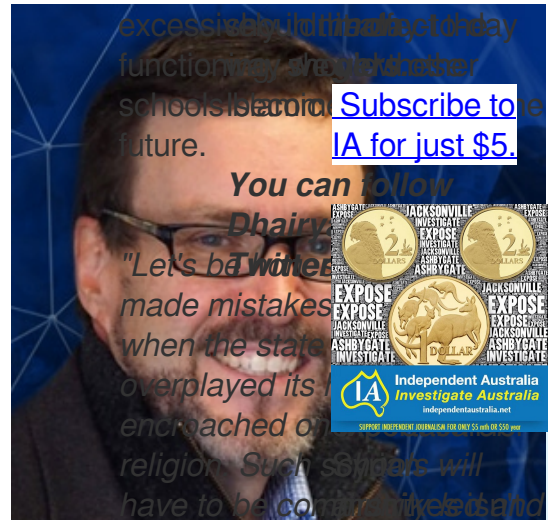
On paper, the federal government's current strategy to check violent extremism was based around engaging the community and identifying vulnerable people who were on the brink of embracing violent ideologies. Announced in August 2014, the [Countering Violent Extremism \(CVE\) Program](#) strived to intervene as early as possible to prevent people from committing violent acts.

While several Muslim organizations had been awarded grants, under the four-year \$13.4 million CVE program, to counteract violent extremism in the community, there hadn't been any concerted efforts till now at establishing imam-training institutions.

[#Australia #News](#) ; Keenan: Countering violent extremism will not work in isolation from broader social cohesion po... <http://t.co/E8nDaVPIKL>

— Australian News (@newsonaust) [July 24, 2015](#)
Challenges

The Deakin Professor Greg Barton also freely that government should have careful to fear is fear-



Terrorism expert, Professor Greg Barton, said that the main obstacle that had prevented a state-run imam training program was the government's having its own imam training schools in the past which were being run on a "mass" basis to have teaching with standard national curriculum and Islamic principles of governance. <http://t.co/Gt-Hkbat48>

Formerly government funding was essential to sustain Melbourne Global Islamic Studies Centre at Deakin Institute and also a member of Deakin University's new Australian Intervention Support eDigital Hub. [A school would be August 12, 2015](#) without government funding at the grassroots level. [We have to follow the same](#)

model followed in the private education in Australia. There are many Turkish schools which are Islamic in nature but without explicitly claiming so, that are open to funding from the government."

However, Professor Barton said that Australia should aspire to having its own theological schools as the long term goal, due to the fact that the population was bound by the Constitution to not interfere in the running of religious institution affiliated to any denomination. ["As we have more Australian-](#)

born Muslims, the demand for local education will definitely increase.”

Importance of imams

According to him, the diverse nature of the Australian Muslim community was another challenge that had to be taken into account and social change in imams are agreed to be essential in providing training institutions within their

respective communities. The From 1968 onwards, thousands of people settle in Australia and led by way of Muslim countries. So after that, 2005 was a huge influx of Lebanese Muslims, in the country during the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s. We need to understand that the Australian Muslim community is racially and ethnically diverse like that of France and Germany where it is more or less homogeneous. Some- composition demands a solution to

engage with Muslim youth who are alienated from the society. aimed at countering violent extremism. Mr. Sommarek declined to provide further details.

The ABC News **Al-Furqan Islamic Centre** in Adelaide August 10, 2015

This year had brought the issue of violent extremist preachers in the public limelight. It was alleged that three youth charged with terror offenses, including Numan Haider and two other 18-year olds arrested in subsequent counter-terror raids, frequented the Springvale South Center. Its president **Harun Mehicevic** had been accused of making controversial sermons to his followers, a fact not lost on police while investigating the recent terror-related incidents.

CHILDREN have been cared for in the home of a notorious extremist Islamic preacher who <http://t.co/Qm77s5eb6> **H #AUSPOL @Abloorable @OZzSue**

— Juliette (@Juliet777777) August 5, 2015