Preventing Violent Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion:
A Practical Guide for Journalists
UNDP Malaysia’s Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) initiatives fall under the ambit of the EU-UNDP project titled ‘Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity’ funded by the European Union. The overall objective of the project is to strengthen the ability of Southeast Asian countries to identify, respond to and prevent violent extremism. To achieve this objective, the project identifies three strategies to secure the overall objective outlined above:

- Support ASEAN and national Governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand to further develop and implement policy frameworks for preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE), ensuring that NAPs are coherent with all international standards and commitments, and that they model the “whole of society” approach in each country as per best practice globally;

- Strengthen knowledge management pertaining to violent extremism in Southeast Asia, and mobilise and facilitate a Community of Practitioners to engage on the issue at all levels – regional, national, and local;

- Build the capacities of Government and key civil society actors in each country to disrupt processes of radicalisation and recruitment in the places where it is known to occur, while promoting civic engagement and voice, and indigenous cultural traditions of peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity

Amidst COVID-19 pandemic, the overall strategy of the project is to capitalize on its development approaches to PCVE in order to respond to this crisis as well as its further socio-economic impact on vulnerable groups.
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Executive Summary

Generally, the Malaysian media has been active in covering violent extremism (VE) and news on issues that impact social cohesion. The coverage on VE ranges from straightforward reportage to nuanced features, which aim to educate readers on the topic and the actors involved. That being said, there are still many ways that media coverage on VE can be improved.

Media practitioners are not necessarily peace negotiators nor are they activists solely working against the spread of extremist thoughts and actions. They may play these roles if they so wish, but they are storytellers first and foremost – individuals who are entrusted to apply investigative research, descriptive and narrative skills to provide communities with information they need to make informed decisions.¹

In essence, the media can play a role in providing accurate and nuanced reporting on a range of topics, which may include development issues related to conflict, VE, social cohesion, peacebuilding, etc.

In 2021, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia, in collaboration with the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embarked on a project titled ‘Preventing Violent Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion: A Practical Guide for Journalists’, in which the aim was to develop a handbook for media practitioners in Malaysia as a reference on issues pertaining to VE and to highlight the different ways that the media can get involved in PVE efforts. This handbook was written with the input of Malaysian media practitioners over a period of five (5) months in 2021.

Preventing Violent Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion: A Practical Guide for Journalists (hence, referred to as the Guide) is designed to provide media practitioners in Malaysia with a more thorough understanding of the global and local VE landscape as well as on how to write about VE in the most effective and nuanced manner possible.

More importantly though, this Guide seeks to highlight the specific roles that the media can play along with its importance in areas such as such conflict resolution and peacebuilding – an aspect that remains understated in Malaysia but one that this Guide will strive to change.

Methodology

This Guide was produced using a number of different research methods. It is based on two focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as formal and informal interviews with journalists, media experts, media development professionals and academics in Malaysia.

The aim of these discussions was to obtain their perspectives on VE and social cohesion, particularly with regard to the role of the media (if any) in PVE as well as any challenges, be it political, societal or structural, which currently impede the media from reporting on VE or engaging in related PVE initiatives.

Upon completion of the first draft, it was then presented and discussed during a two-day pilot workshop with media practitioners as well as subject matter experts in November 2021. Besides discussing the draft, the participants also engaged in an exchange of ideas on topics relating to VE, peace journalism and the ethics of conflict reporting and the urgent need for social cohesion to be supported and promoted by the media.
**Glossary of Definitions**

There is no universal definition to describe concepts such as terrorism, VE, radicalisation, etc given that terrorism has appeared under so many different circumstances.

However, to provide some clarity and to ease the understanding of what may seemingly be complex concepts, this Guide will use the following definitions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violent Extremism</th>
<th>Terrorism</th>
<th>Preventing Violent Extremism/Countering Violent Extremism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or are willing to use ideologically motivated violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.²</td>
<td>A strategy or act of violence that is adopted or undertaken to achieve a political goal.</td>
<td>An approach which aims to address the root causes of VE through non-coercive approaches.⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist-related offences include the use of violence for political purposes, such as the hijacking of aircraft, the targeting of maritime vessels, the use of chemical or nuclear weapons against civilians, kidnapping and other acts that target civilians.³</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Radicalisation</th>
<th>Social Cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A process through which an individual adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations. This may include the willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological or religious goals.⁵</td>
<td>The extent of trust in government and within society and the willingness to participate collectively toward a shared vision of sustainable peace and common development goals.⁶</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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³ Ibid.

⁴ Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), Preventing Violent Extremism: An Introduction to Education and Preventing Violent Extremism (September 2017), [https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_ThematicPaper_PVE_ENG.pdf](https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_ThematicPaper_PVE_ENG.pdf)


1 Violent Extremism: What the Media Needs to Know

1.1 Global Overview

It must be recognised and re- emphasised that no country is immune to VE and terrorism and that it cannot be linked nor attributed to any particular community or ideology.

Overall, although the rate of terrorism has fallen in most regions, it has become more widespread in others.

The Global Terrorism Index 2022

In 2021, deaths from terrorism fell by 1.2 per cent to 7,142 deaths and are now a third of what they were at their peak in 2015. The minor fall in deaths was mirrored by a reduction in the impact of terrorism, with 86 countries recording an improvement, compared to 19 that deteriorated.

Some of the findings are:

- **Violent conflict** remains a primary driver of terrorism, with over 97 per cent of terrorist attacks in 2021 taking place in countries in conflict.

- Forty-eight per cent, or 3,461, of all terrorism deaths globally occurred in Sub Saharan Africa with four of the ten countries with the largest increases in deaths from terrorism in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Niger.

- Overall, there is a decline in VE but the world has to be on guard with developments such as **politically motivated terrorism that has now overtaken religiously motivated terrorism**, with the latter declining by 82 per cent in 2021. In the last five years, there has been a five-fold increase in politically motivated terrorist attacks compared to religiously motivated attacks. There are now noticeable similarities between far-left and far-right extremist ideologies, with both targeting government and political figures.

- The decline of terrorism in the West coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on freedom of movement, public gatherings, travel and an immediate threat to personal health may help to explain some of this decline. Once the emergency measures are removed and societies begin to live with COVID-19, there is the possibility of an uptake in terrorism activity. This would require addressing the underlying issues of alienation.

The latest report from Europol suggests that the risk of online radicalisation has increased. The risk of online radicalisation is particularly true for right-wing terrorism. The UN’s Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) has warned UN member states that terrorist groups may present themselves as alternative service providers, particularly in areas with weak governance, which can be “…exploited to promote anti-State violence and accelerationist narratives.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has also given rise to a new landscape for extremist organisations to exploit those vulnerable to recruitment in Southeast Asia. The lockdowns in the region have disrupted livelihoods, increased socio-economic pressures, shifting the drivers and dynamics of violent extremist recruitment.

However, militant groups and ethn-nationalists have adapted to the pandemic and are using the catastrophe as an opportunity to expand their ideologies online.

In a United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) report on the impact of Covid-19 on VE and terrorism, such groups may undermine citizens’ trust in the government or in a moderate political society. “By spreading disinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda about the virus through online and offline settings, VE movements and terrorist groups aim at sowing mistrust in authorities.”

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10 Ibid.
1.2 Drivers of Violent Extremism

There are two main categories of drivers, which can be referred to as ‘push’ or ‘pull’ factors. Simply put, ‘push’ factors refer to conditions that can push an individual towards violent extremism. Examples include lack of socio-economic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, violations of human rights, etc. ‘Pull’ factors on the other hand refer to individual motivations, i.e. psycho-social factors, that can stem from individual backgrounds, political ideologies, ethnic/cultural differences, and others.12

Case study: Youth Unemployment and Radicalisation

Al-Shabab is an Islamist terrorist group based in Somalia, which has been responsible for numerous deadly attacks within Somalia as well as their neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Uganda.

Al-Shabab is also known to have recruited many disaffected youths, in which one of the identified ‘push’ factors were the high rates of youth unemployment. An interview conducted with some of these youth showed that many viewed Al-Shabab as an employment option, given that they ‘paid well, from $50-$150 monthly, depending on the work, yet requires little effort’.13

As one participant explained: “All one had to do was carry a gun around and patrol the streets.” 14

Besides unemployment, revenge, the lack of education, and being viewed as a hero, were also some of the reasons cited by young people who had joined the group.15

Similarly, in 2019, IMAN Research found that social capital was a reason cited for Malaysian youth’s involvement in VE and crime.

“... young people become gang members not only due to social disadvantage or poverty but also because they seek resources and solace in these groups which their families otherwise are not able to provide. Some other factors include feelings of lack of empowerment, political cynicism, identity and ignorance of the “Other”.”16

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12 General Assembly report A/70/674, paras. 23 and 32-37; United Nations, Swiss Confederation, 2016, p. 4)
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
1.3 An overview of violent extremism in the Malaysian context

Malaysia’s experiences with VE dates back to incidents related to the Communist Insurgency beginning in the 1940s, the hostage crisis involving the Japanese Red Army in 1975, as well as the network of Malaysian foreign fighters who travelled to Afghanistan in the 1980s to join the Soviet-Afghan War.

More recently, Malaysia has witnessed an increase in VE which may be attributed to the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS), also known as Daesh, which successfully attracted scores of followers through its online radicalisation efforts, predominantly on social media.

Since 2014, Malaysia has arrested a number of its citizens involved in terror activities; Benar News reported that Malaysia made only seven counterterrorism arrests in 2020, while in 2019, Channel News Asia reported as of July that year, the Malaysian police arrested 519 people comprising Malaysian nationals and foreigners, suspected of having been involved in terrorism. The United States (US) State Government, citing media reports, noted that on January 16, 2020, five Indonesian fishermen were kidnapped off the coast of Lahad Datu in Sabah state by Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants.

There have also been numerous attempts by Malaysians to attack the country.

Since 2013, the Royal Malaysia Police (Police DiRaja Malaysia - PDRM) thwarted 25 planned terrorist attacks in the country, including several large-scale strikes on Christian, Hindu and Buddhist houses of worship and entertainment outlets in the Klang Valley.

However, the dramatic drop in arrests during the pandemic should not be taken as an indication that radicalisation has decreased. “Lower arrests don’t mean the terror threat has decreased, but coronavirus-related movement restrictions affected everyone, including sympathizers and supporters of the Islamic State group (IS/Daesh).”

However, what continues to be of concern, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, is the rise in dangerous rhetoric that may exacerbate VE conditions. The deterioration of social conditions related to the pandemic has polarised communities further. As a result, many have turned to social media to express their frustrations, which has led to a spike in online hate speech. For example, a social media scraping exercise performed on Twitter from March to April 2020 revealed a high number of racially charged postings directed at various ethnicities.

The involvement of Malaysians in terror activities does not mean that they were members of terrorist cells. Many of them were either sympathisers or radicalised by terrorist ideologies, who were then inspired to plan attacks on local targets.

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In Malaysia, a factor that may contribute to VE is expressions of hate speech on social media platforms. Hate speech is a possible precursor to VE; it makes the environment conducive to VE as it can affect social stability and peace. As seen in the graphs, 87% of Malaysians feel that the level of VE in the form of speech has reached worrying levels.24

How serious is the issue to Malaysians?
A large majority of our study respondents (87%) comprising 200 Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysians respectively, feel that hate speech is at serious levels today.

Where is it Most Prevalent?
Top sources according to this study’s respondents:
• By far, social media (FB, IG, Whatsapp, etc.)
• Mass media (online news sites, newspapers, TV, etc.)
• Politicians

Case study: Violent Extremism and Hate Speech in Malaysia

It is also important to note that VE experiences in Sabah is different from Peninsular Malaysia, in that the state faces complex social issues, for example, such as undocumented persons and statelessness.25 Research has also shown that Sabah’s proximity to the Philippines, combined with longstanding trade routes and close cross-border familial ties between the two countries facilitate migrant flows. Most who come to Sabah seek better lives, but several militant groups have been exploiting the situation.26

1.4 Counterterrorism Laws and Regulations in Malaysia

01 Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA) 2012

SOSMA was created under Article 149 of the Federal Constitution to protect against internal security issues, including threats to public order, acts of terrorism, sabotage and espionage. ²⁷

Under SOSMA, it is considered an offence to take or threaten any action that intends to:

• cause a substantial number of citizens to fear, organised violence against persons or property;
• excite disaffection against the Yang di-Pertuan Agong; which is prejudicial to public order in, or the security of, the Federation or any part thereof; or
• procure the alteration, otherwise than by lawful means, of anything by law established; and
• where Parliament considers it necessary to stop such action.

SOSMA is a procedural law that governs the procedures relating to the arrest, temporary detention, investigation and trial of an individual in place of the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) when it involves offenses against the state, terrorism, organised crime and human trafficking. For these offences, SOSMA is used instead of the CPC. ²⁸

02 Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) 2015

POTA was enacted in response to the increasing threat of terrorism corresponding with the rise of the Islamic State (IS) terror group in 2015. Unlike SOSMA, POTA is a detention law that allows for any individual to be detained for up to 60 days pending investigation and assessments made by the public prosecutor and an investigating officer into the individual’s involvement in terrorist activities.²⁸ If there is sufficient evidence of the individual’s involvement in terrorist activities, a recommendation is made to the Prevention of Terrorism Board (POTB). The POTB is appointed by the King and comprises legal experts and police officers who can decide to either:

• Issue a detention order (DO) of up to 2 years together with a state-sanctioned deradicalisation programme
• Issue a restriction order (RO) for up to 5 years with constant monitoring; or
• Release the individual.

03 Special Measures against Terrorism in Foreign Countries Act (SMATA) 2015

SMATA was drafted alongside POTA and allows the Immigration Department director–general to suspend or cancel the travelling documents of any Malaysian involved in a foreign terrorist organisation.

04 National Security Council Act 2016

The Act was passed in Parliament in 2016 to provide for the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC), which is placed under the Prime Minister’s Department. The NSC is responsible for managing the government’s response to security threats, including terrorism and violent extremism.

The Act also allows for the declaration of security areas in the country, including the power to declare a ‘state of emergency’. It also governs the special powers of security forces within these areas, as well as other matters deemed to be in the interest of national security.

05 Sedition Act 1948

Originally enacted under the British colonial rule in 1948, the Sedition Act is a legislation that prohibits any kind of speech or discourse that can incite unrest, racial or religious tensions.

Insults and derogatory remarks towards the Royalty are also considered seditious, especially if uttered against the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King) and State Rulers, who are figureheads for the Islamic religion in Malaysia. Those found guilty of sedition can be fined or jailed for up to three years.

06 The Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLATFA)

Section 3 of AMLATFA defines money laundering as the act of a person who:

• Engages directly or indirectly in a transaction that involves proceeds of any unlawful activity;
• Acquires, receives, possesses, disguises, transfers proceeds of any unlawful activity; and
• Conceals, disguises or impedes the establishment of the true nature, origin, with respect to, or ownership of, proceeds of any unlawful activity.

In short, the source of illegally obtained funds is obscured through a succession of transfers and deals in order that those same funds can eventually be made to appear as legitimate income.

For more information on Malaysia’s terrorism laws, please refer to the Appendix 1 and the Federal Legislation Portal (https://lom.agc.gov.my/).


1.5 Media Laws and Regulations

**Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984**

The Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 requires all media organisations in the country to obtain licences to operate and publish their content. Section 3 of the Act allows the Home Minister to issue or deny any applications for a license, which has to be renewed periodically. The license can be revoked or suspended at any time. The amended Act currently also regulates books, pamphlets and the import of publications from abroad. The Act also prohibits the publication of materials that can incite violence or promote feelings of ill-will, hatred or disharmony. Offences under this Act are punishable by a jail term, fine, or both.

**Amendments to the Sedition Act**

The Principal Act was amended in 2015 to include seditious publications shared via electronic means. The addition of Section 10A of the Act prohibits the electronic creation or circulation of content that appears to promote hostilities or hatred among the different races or religions in Malaysia. This also applies to content that is shared anonymously, and can result in the removal of such content or a revocation of access to the publications responsible.

**Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (Regulatory Body)**

The Malaysian government actively regulates and monitors news on terrorism and violence. For example, when the Christchurch mosque attacks occurred in New Zealand in 2019, the MCMC requested all social media platforms to take down videos of the incident that had been spreading online. The MCMC also continues to regulate the Internet for content and postings that can sow discord, hatred, or trigger unnecessary fear within society.

At the same time, the MCMC also encourages the public to self-regulate and to be vigilant about the information they share online, either through instant messaging apps or on social media platforms. They are also encouraged to report inappropriate content so that accounts which violate the terms of service can be suspended or deactivated. The Malaysian media plays an important role in this as well, and has an obligation to report sensitive information found online to the authorities, especially if they are linked to terrorism or violent extremist activities.
2 Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

PVE can be described as an approach that focuses on directly addressing the drivers of VE, which are conducive to terrorism and ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law while countering terrorism.29

It is important for the strengths of various stakeholders to be leveraged in a whole-of-society approach to PVE. For instance, government agencies, women, youth, and civil society organisations (CSOs), including religious and community leaders, play important roles in addressing the drivers of violent extremism in communities.

2.1 PVE Initiatives in Malaysia

A substantial number of PVE programmes in Malaysia are aimed at the youth. This focus stems from the understanding that young people are key to the prevention of VE and must be involved as partners in developing and implementing policies, which can effectively counter the growth of extremism.30 When youth engage as activists, students, researchers, community organisers, leaders, civil servants, entrepreneurs and politicians, they find ways to prevent the rise and influence of VE by taking direct action, promoting development and fostering peace.31

Case study: YouTube X UNDP Creators for Change

One example would be the YouTube Creators for Change programme. UNDP and YouTube joined hands in a global initiative which saw CSOs and social media influencers using the platform to foster productive conversations around difficult issues and make a positive impact in the world.32

31 Ibid.
Case Study: Early Warning Early Response (EWER)

SEARCCT embarked on an initiative in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to explore an Early Warning Early Response (EWER) mechanism for Malaysia that would equip frontline practitioners with the knowledge and skills to identify the early warning signs or indicators of radicalisation, and to conduct interventions where necessary.

The initiative comprised a series of virtual workshops to promote early detection of violent radicalisation and to formulate community-level responses to deter VE at the outset and before the authorities get involved. The programme aimed to explore the role of various stakeholders and community actors, including media practitioners, in carrying out monitoring and early intervention programmes, as well as to gather ideas for greater collaboration across various sectors on PVE efforts.

The number of CSOs involved in PVE in Malaysia is still relatively small in number, as compared to neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines. That being said, the number of CSOs doing work on PVE is increasing, as the level of awareness on VE-related issues rises. CSOs who regularly conduct PVE initiatives include Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia); IMAN Research; IKRAM; Komuniti Muslim Universal (KMU Malaysia) as well as Initiative to Promote Tolerance and Prevent Violence (INITIATE.MY).

These CSOs regularly conduct community-based PVE initiatives that target the youth population, in which their general objectives are to bridge diverse communities and build community resilience against violent extremist narratives and/or sentiments.

Case Study: “Belia Mencegah Ekstremisme” (Youth Preventing Extremism)

In 2021, ABIM collaborated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to conduct a series of online programmes with students, which was based on an adapted interactive module. The initiative, which involved more than 300 student participants, comprised of presentations by counter-terrorism and PCVE practitioners, breakout sessions as well as webinars that were live streamed on Facebook and YouTube.

The interactive module was adapted from the “Youth Work Against Violent Radicalisation and Extremism” module that was developed by the SALTO EuroMed, SALTO EECA and SALTO SEE Resource Centres together with the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth in Action of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the United Kingdom as well as the EU and the Council of Europe Youth Partnership.

The module focuses on youth capacity building on three areas, which are:

a) Youth character-building
b) Conflict resolution and problem-solving; as well as
c) Building the resilience of youth to VE

Another good example of PVE approaches would be the interfaith dialogues by IKRAM Malaysia and the Malaysia Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST).

Such dialogues are important in PVE as they promote social cohesion and allow people to understand and appreciate each other’s differences.
2.2 National Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism

One of the key tenets of the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism is the call for Member States to consider developing a national action plan (NAP) to prevent VE. 36

Recognising the importance of national ownership, the NAP is a strategy where Member States set national priorities for addressing the local drivers of VE and complements national counter-terrorism strategies where they already exist, working with government stakeholders, CSOs, the media, youth groups and other non-governmental organisations.

On 8 November 2021, Malaysia announced during a Parliamentary sitting that it has also embarked upon the drafting of a National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE), which is currently being finalised. It should be noted that the NAPPCVE was also referenced in the 12th Malaysian Plan. External and internal elements, such as the possibility of Malaysians being indoctrinated with violent extremist ideology through online sources, were identified as contributors to the threat of terrorism. 37

3 Social Cohesion and Preventing Violent Extremism

Social cohesion is an important component in a diverse country that requires a resilient community to actively address its issues and conflicts. Improving social cohesion has become a cornerstone of the prevention of violence and peacebuilding programmes around the world.

3.1 Understanding Social Cohesion

Social cohesion takes time, and the best route would be to work on this organically. Force and manipulation will only adversely impact such efforts. The following factors are important:

- **Values and commonalities**: What are the similarities and common goals the involved parties share, and want to proceed on? Do bear in mind that in certain situations, the shared values can be dangerous. For example, in the case of ethno-nationalists building bridges with sympathetic parties, who aim to achieve a common goal.

- **Objectives**: What does society want to achieve and how will it do so?

- **Transparency**: Dialogue between stakeholders must be honest, clear and address problems critically. Only then can the parties move towards their goals.

- **Stakeholder involvement**: Prior to the start of the discussion, stakeholders should already have their arguments ready, and amplify their voice on the concepts as they define the situation. Preparation is key.

- **Evolving and constant**: Social cohesion does not have a fixed endpoint. Instead, it is constantly evolving as communities develop, and their politics change. Global and regional current affairs that may impact them also influence society and its directions.

- **Uniting differences**: Recognising differences between rhetoric and realities, and engaging in evidence-based analysis of society, networks and relationships will solidify the commitment to a cohesive society. The need to understand local drivers and identify conflict vulnerabilities is the push to cultivating community resilience.39

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39 Ibid., Strengthening Social Cohesion.
3.2 Measurements of social cohesion

How can one measure social cohesion?

In Malaysia, a number of indices have been developed to provide an overview of social cohesion at the national level.

- The Ministry of National Unity published *The National Unity 2020 Report*, which has stated that The National Unity Index is a comprehensive model of measurement at the national level using empirical and systematic methods to comprehend and explain community dynamics in Malaysia. The index serves as an indicator/benchmark in measuring the level of social cohesion and national unity attained in Malaysia.

The results of this study indicate that the degree of unity in Malaysia is strong and sturdy even though social deficits still exist. Unification efforts need to be implemented on an ongoing basis with focus on specific issues from time to time.40

- The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index41 which was developed by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) and United Nations Development Programme Action for Cooperation and Trust (UNDP-ACT), measures different components of social cohesion as well as resilience capacities and vulnerability factors around the world in order to inform the efforts of peacebuilding and development actors with robust and scientific evidence.

The Index allows readers to check on the intensity of race relations and fundamentalism, for instance, as well as how Malaysians felt about their ethnic or national identity.

3.3 Social Cohesion Initiatives in Malaysia

Social cohesion is included in the Malaysian Constitution and the Rukun Negara, signifying how important unity is to the country’s well-being and progress. However, in recent years, relations among Malaysians have been fraught with tension. Many researchers have also noted that the drivers of violent extremism include political divisions, religious tensions, and growing inequality (intra and inter-ethnic inequality), which could generate widespread animosity, anxiety, and anger.

As observed and recorded by Pusat KOMAS in their annually published *Malaysia Racial Discrimination Report (2021)*:

> Malaysia continues to see the use of race and religion as a political weapon by both political actors and public leaders’ and that ‘...issues of race and religion, basic principles of equality and non-discrimination continue to be denied. This has led to greater animosity among different ethnic groups in Malaysia.’42

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Interestingly, Malaysia is not short of initiatives aimed at promoting social cohesion. Some of the more recent examples include:

**National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030**

The Blueprint serves as an umbrella policy that outlines continuous efforts to foster, strengthen and preserve unity among the people. The concept of *Unity in Diversity* is used to promote harmony within Malaysia’s plural society. This policy sets the direction of national unity and acts as a catalyst for Malaysia’s achievement as a united, harmonious, and prosperous nation. The blueprint is the first national policy dedicated to the strengthening of national unity and integration.\(^3\)

**Microsoft Malaysia**

Microsoft Malaysia has been active in supporting various organisations and communities. One of them would be the 2020 #shebuildspeace Malaysia Campaign, spearheaded by IMAN Research and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), in collaboration with Microsoft and with support of the High Commission of Canada in Malaysia. More than 100 peacebuilders across the region attended the launch and discussed the possibilities of working on peacebuilding in Malaysia and the region.

**‘Fatah dan Farah’ Web Comic**

In 2021, a novelist, Faisal Tehrani and a comic illustrator, Arif Rafhan Othman, collaborated to develop a web comic titled Fatah dan Farah, which aimed to promote dialogue on issues relating to race, culture, gender identities, etc. This comic was aimed at encouraging the youth to understand and respect the existence of various human identities, instead of bring discriminatory or hostile to those who are different.\(^4\)

**Rukun Tetangga (Neighbourhood Watch) Leadership Empowerment Plan**

Developed to complement the National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030, the Plan aims to foster good relations among neighbours, a policy that was initiated after the 1969 racial riots. Four major agendas under the Plan include: security (voluntary patrols); health (promotion of healthy lifestyles); beautification (physical upkeep and cleanliness of neighbourhods); and prosperity (identification of and aid to vulnerable groups).\(^5\)

**Refugee Festival**

Founded and organised by Beyond Borders, a local non-profit organisation that works on refugee matters, the festival showcased refugee talent, and featured theatre productions, forums, film screenings, as well as poetry and musical performances. The festival raised awareness on xenophobia and the true nature of human movements across countries. This encourages empathy, which is part of social cohesion.

**Program Kenegaraan (Nationhood Programmes)**

In amplifying social cohesion as a cornerstone of preventing violent extremism and peacebuilding, SEARCCCT has organised annual public awareness forums centred around themes like interfaith understanding, unity and peaceful coexistence. These programmes are organised in conjunction with the Bulan Kebangsaan (National Month) that takes place across August and September every year. Some examples include a virtual lecture on ‘Prinsip Kesepaduan Sosial dalam Membina Negara-Bangsa Bebas Ekstremisme’ (Social Cohesion Principles in Fostering a Nation-State Free of Extremism) in 2021, and ‘Persefahaman Antara Agama Perkukuh Kesepaduan Sosial’ (Interfaith Understanding in Strengthening Social Cohesion) public forum in 2022. Both programmes featured speakers from academia, religious institutions, and civil society.

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The sensitivities surrounding VE make it a delicate issue to touch upon for all stakeholders, including those of the media. When a VE-related incident occurs, the media ultimately plays an important role in reporting the incident in an accurate, responsible manner. Not only that, the media also has a role in bringing the attention of the public as well as policymakers to the circumstances and/or narratives surrounding the incident, which may possibly contribute to understanding the root causes of the particular incident.

That being said, reporting on a VE-related incident is not without its issues:

**A. Reporting accurately in the face of time-constraints**

In the wake of an incident, journalists are required to work extremely quickly in order to gather accurate data (including quotations from government agencies or key players).

Lack of thorough investigation in terms of gathering data or understanding potential risks may lead to the publication of inaccurate information, which may result in further unintentional harm being done.

Gaps between government agencies and the media implies that the media may not have access to credible, legitimate sources of information, which could be another factor that contributes to inaccurate reporting.

**B. Reporting creatively but responsibly**

In the interest of attracting readers’ attention, the media might frame the incident using a more ‘sensational’ narrative using certain descriptive terms and/or publishing photos, which might glorify the perpetrator as well as their actions.

Media agencies need to be aware that ‘sensational’ reporting could result in providing VE organisations with a platform to disseminate their propaganda, which feeds into their overall goal of gaining global attention to their cause.

VE organisations fully understand the power and influence of the media: acts of VE or terrorism are understood as the loudest form of communication, in which the media is perceived as a great ally to help them achieve their goals of influencing governments’ policies by instilling fear and/or inflicting damage onto the public as well as to propagate their violent ideologies throughout the world.

### 4.1 VE Reportage in Malaysia

Given Malaysia’s relatively peaceful state of affairs, the media in Malaysia rarely have such opportunities. Following its counterparts around the world, the Malaysia media has covered VE in a similar manner, though most are straightforward reporting.

Also, not many Malaysian journalists specialise in security matters and VE; when they cover such news, it is basic reportage of incidents. As result, many journalists are not familiar with issues relating to VE and PVE.

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Analysis:
An opinion piece by a columnist and rector of an international university based in Malaysia was published where he reflected on VE and how religion was not the main cause for violence.48

It’s a personal appeal to readers to not embrace a convenient truth, such as all terrorists are Muslims, and that there are many factors that drive someone towards extremism. Geopolitical or economic influences are more likely to be the cause, and social capital at siege could be another.

Case Study 1

Theme : Centrism: Opinion piece
Headline : A Merdeka Wish for Peace
Date : August 30, 2019
Channel : New Straits Times

Analysis:
An opinion piece by a columnist and rector of an international university based in Malaysia was published where he reflected on VE and how religion was not the main cause for violence.48

It’s a personal appeal to readers to not embrace a convenient truth, such as all terrorists are Muslims, and that there are many factors that drive someone towards extremism. Geopolitical or economic influences are more likely to be the cause, and social capital at siege could be another.

*Story Ideas #1:
Writing about victims of VE is always impactful. This doesn’t necessarily only refer to individuals/communities who have experienced VE or have lost loved ones in an attack. It is important to remember that victims of VE can also include the families of radicalised individuals, who have had their lives turned upside down due to the involvement of their family member in VE activities.

**Story Ideas #2:**

Real-life testimonies of former radicalised individuals can serve as powerful counter-narrative messaging. Besides debunking VE narratives, this type of messaging can also prevent the ‘dehumanization’ of VE offenders, by focusing on personal factors that propelled them towards VE as well as those that turned them away from the path of VE.

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**Case Study 2**

**Theme:** Reportage  
**Headline:** West’s War of Terror  
**Date:** September 8, 2021  
**Channel:** New Straits Times

**Analysis:**

This column is about the West’s ‘War on Terror’ campaign since 2001, and presents a distorted and stereotyped image of Western society. It questioned the role of the US Government in the 9/11 attack, and while it acknowledged the dissenting voices, it was overly critical of the lives lost and America’s foreign policy.
Analysis:

This article has chosen to highlight the Sultan of Perak, Raja Nazrin Shah’s message for unity and social cohesion among Malaysians. This is a good example of how the media can frame positive narratives and at the same time, leverage on the significance of the messenger, who in this case, was a respected Royal figure.

Case Study 3

Theme: Reportage
Headline: ‘Jangan serah masa depan negara kepada ekstremis kaum, agama’
Date: August 20, 2019
Channel: Sinar Harian, a Malay-language newspaper

Analysis:

This article has chosen to highlight the Sultan of Perak, Raja Nazrin Shah’s message for unity and social cohesion among Malaysians. This is a good example of how the media can frame positive narratives and at the same time, leverage on the significance of the messenger, who in this case, was a respected Royal figure.

*Story Ideas #3:

Vulnerable communities such as women, children, refugees, and migrant workers need to have their stories told in a sensitive way. When it comes to these vulnerable communities, focus on using shared values and fears as a way to bridge communities of different socio-economic backgrounds. For example, stories can focus on personal hopes and dreams, hobbies, or even their desire to give their families (especially children) and loved ones a better, safer future.
4.2 Challenges faced by the Malaysian Media when Reporting on Violent Extremism

In a consultation with media practitioners, some of the challenges that they highlighted include:

**The lack of definition on violent extremism and radicalisation in Malaysia**

Up till now, the idea of ‘violence’ has been more closely associated with issues of domestic and sexual violence. Therefore, a more concrete definition for the media to understand what VE and radicalisation are in this country is needed.

**Fear Mongering and Propaganda**

There is a fear that VE reporting may unintentionally instil fear and exacerbate the situation. Another concern is if the media unknowingly contributes to the spread of VE narratives, or lends justification to the use of violence by VE groups.

**Use of discriminatory language when reporting news related to terrorism and violent extremism**

There is a tendency for the media to use words and terms that were Islamophobic and discriminatory towards the Muslim community.

**Points of reference when it comes to reporting terrorism news**

There is a dearth of available points of reference when reporting about terrorism in the media. Most of the references are from the authorities, and when the media tries to approach them for a follow-up story, there’s often a lot of red tape.

**Media restriction/censorship**

Some of the laws in Malaysia may partly impose restrictions or censorship that constrain the media when it comes to reporting on issues related to terrorism and VE.

**Roles of the editors**

Lack of nuanced understanding of terrorism and VE amongst the editors. This is significant because editors have a tremendous influence in guiding national conversations on contemporary issues.
4.3 The Role of the Media in PVE in Malaysia

More and more, government stakeholders as well as media practitioners themselves are recognising the importance of the role of the media in PVE. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of initiatives aimed at familiarising the media with the field of PVE:

**Capacity-building Workshops for the Media on PCVE**

The Malaysian Press Institute (MPI) has collaborated with SEARCCT since 2016 to organize four workshops for media practitioners to better understand how their work could impact and may be impacted by VE. Discussions, explorations, and exercises were conducted to raise awareness and build the capacity of media practitioners towards acquiring the tools and references they may need to provide accurate, nuanced and more conflict-sensitive reporting on terrorism and VE.

**The Fat Bidin National CVE / PVE Campaign**

This campaign consists of 3 parts - documentaries, online content & journalism, all aimed at creating new Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)/ Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) content and content creators. The campaign has produced two feature length documentaries, two hyperlocal YouTube channels (for Kelantan and Sabah) as well as two special reports that have been published by The Malaysian Insight and The Vibes. All mentees under the campaign also underwent an 8-part workshop series where they trained under different media and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) practitioners. The campaign will be coming to a close at the end of 2022 with a nationwide tour of the three documentaries, and two community Wayang Pacak tours in Sabah and Kelantan.

**Prisons 3R Series**

SEARCCT collaborated with the Prisons Department and Fat Bidin Media to produce a series of counter-narratives, focused on video interviews with former and current detainees who were arrested for terrorism-related offences. This series was designed to feature the multiple perspectives of VE, with stories and insights not only from the detainees themselves and their respective journeys to radicalisation, but also the impact of VE on their family members. Besides that, video interviews were also conducted with prison officials involved in the rehabilitation process (for VE offenders), i.e., wardens, psychologists and religious teachers who were asked about their daily interactions with the detainees. The real-life experiences of the detainees were also illustrated and published as a digital comic.

**CVE Resource Portal (mycveguide.com)**

This project aimed at the establishment of a portal primarily for media professionals, for their reference to better understand approaches and best practices in reporting terrorism and issues related to violent extremism. Funded by the US Embassy KL and the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC-IIUM), in collaboration with the Malaysia Press Institute (MPI) and SEARCCT, to develop a media portal on countering VE for media professionals, CSOs, academia and others. The portal was officially launched in March 2022.
4.4 The Difference Faces of the Media in PVE

The industry can play a vital role in framing the narrative and responding to extremism in all its forms. It is powerful, and its platforms can be used to address and speak out against violence. It can play the part of a mediator to provide insights and different perspectives of a situation.

Here are some of the roles it can play:

**Messenger of good**
Positive news amidst the chaos of conflict can bring hope to affected people and readers, i.e. human-interest stories.

**Truth bearer**
It has been suggested that journalists can act as facilitators in conflict resolution, providing accurate information on conflict, and creating an environment of balanced reporting.\(^{50}\)

**Platform for discussion**
The media can act as a space and be the ombudsman for dialogue and a bridge for communities.\(^{51}\)

**Bridge builder**
The media can connect communities policymakers and the authorities to strengthen resilience and unity.

**Humanitarian support**
The media’s reach - with certain news and analyses picked up by international wires – demonstrates how far good journalism can go. The media should intensify support for provision of humanitarian information vis-a-vis the provision of radios, the setting up of transmitters and temporary radio production as well as offer support to news and other programmes about the situation.\(^{52}\)

**Mediator**
In a conflict, the media can help to mitigate the situation by writing about both sides of the conflict and suggest solutions. It may be counterproductive to be fair to instigators of hate and VE, but by displaying their grievances publicly, perceptions can then be clarified.

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4.5 PVE Pillars of Reportage

The media has varied approaches when it comes to reporting on VE—some media agencies operate with minimal, if any, codes of conduct, whilst others have chosen to establish strict guidelines. (Please see Appendix 3 for examples of guidelines by international media outlets.)

Some of the Pillars of Conflict Journalism media practitioners can abide to would be the following recommendations by the Radicalisation Awareness Network’s report, Reporting about Violent Extremism and P/CVE Challenges for Journalists – Recommendations from Practitioners:

**Do’s**

- Explain the functionality of terrorism as manipulative communication and its desired effect on your audience to inoculate them from overreacting.
- Provide audiences with context. What is the story behind the event? Explain the complexity of this conflict.
- Address internal conflicts of terrorist groups, double standards and inconsistencies, as this can develop further doubts and counteract heroisation.
- Deconstruct and contextualise terrorist narratives when appropriate.
- Respect the rights and dignity of victims.
- Give victims a voice (if they would like to be seen/heard and if ethically sensible).
- Treat all unverified information with extreme caution.
- Check the credentials and level of specific expertise when working with terrorism experts.

**Don’ts**

- Avoid making assumptions and unconfirmed allegations.
- Avoid exaggerating the objective threat by terrorists and terrorist attacks, otherwise solidarity effects may occur or a preliminary interest may be developed by previously uninterested individuals.
- Avoid provoking panic and/or anger.
- Avoid (inadvertently) glorifying terrorist acts.
- Avoid sensationalist language.
- Avoid the unreflected use of terms [more].
- Avoid heroisation; don’t rush to name perpetrators.

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The Star newspaper of Malaysia covers violent extremism in a holistic manner. This feature article demonstrates how the writer had included a former militant’s story on becoming radicalised, how social media and the Internet played a role in his radicalisation, and how recruitment was conducted. The feature also provided readers with solutions on tackling violent extremism.

(The Star, December 1, 2019)
Theme: Analysis
Headline: Turning away from terrorism
Date: December 1, 2019
Channel: The Star newspaper

Feature: Turning away from terrorism

Dina Murad

He is slightly built with a soft-spoken demeanor, dressed in slacks and a simple T-shirt.

What might come as a surprise to those who meet Harris is that he is the son of former nuclear physicist and academic, and the former leader of the Islamic State (IS) or Daesh. He says, “I have always been like that (quiet), except when it comes to the topic of Jihad. Then I would become a sharp person because I was bluffed by anger,” he tells Sunday Star in Kuala Lumpur recently.

Harris spent a decade or so working in the hospitality field. Harris is comfortable speaking in both Malay and English, moving between both languages with ease.

In 2016, he was detained under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosama) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota) and consequently served two years in prison for terrorism-related offenses.

But after intensive rehabilitation, Harris says that he is now reformed and is looking to turn his life around.

And one of the ways he is doing this is assisting the Prison Department’s de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes.

According to a 2017 research paper titled Guidelines for the Prevention of Extremism & Radical Ideology Among the Youth and Community by the Institute for Youth Research Malaysia, 85% of youths convicted of terror-related offenses received their first exposure to violent ideology through social media. Like many others who fell for IS propaganda, Harris was initially kited via social media posts on the Middle East crises. He was also curious about the terror group’s apocalyptic narrative – in his wording, the radical group positions itself as the prophesied army that will rise at the End of Times.

“When I saw their writings, a lot of it was echoing what I felt. So it started with what I felt, not based on fact or true knowledge. That was the problem,” he says.

It started with social media.

Harris was recruited through Facebook, and when the man who recruited Harris was eventually caught by the authorities, Harris initiated his own group.

After assessing his kited social media accounts, Harris, who was based in Malaysia, would approach and interview individuals who showed interest in joining the jihad group. The group eventually had about 50 members after vetting through 300 people.

“I recruited old members, I recruited new ones. All through social media,” he says.

According to Harris, there were also minor chat groups under his purview across the country – consisting of about 50 to 150 people.

Most members were youths and they came from diverse backgrounds.

“Some were lecturers, doctors, engineers, mechanics, fishermen, farmers,” he recalls.

Although the chat group he controlled only comprised Malaysians, Harris says that he was also in other groups that crossed borders – once he was a regional youth-east Asian chat group administered by someone from the Middle East.

“I am glad we got caught. I do not know what would have happened otherwise,” he says now.

The filtering process for group members was meticulous. Potential members were even asked to produce pictures of their identity cards to make sure the group was not infiltrated by security personnel.

“In this group we would share ideologies and other radical things,” Harris says.

For someone who has given the label ‘jihadi’ or ‘belonging to Al-Qaeda’, former IS leader Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi, Harris is an anomaly in that he had his own sets of rules for his group, even if he’s in his radical years claims he did not abide by IS instructions wholesale.

“I drafted some terms and conditions but they could only be controlled within the ‘Jihadi group. Because as real we did not know” he says about the more radical splinter groups that sprouted, one of which fell under the influence of IS member Muhammad Wazdiy Mohamed Jiid who was killed in Raqqa, Syria in 2017.

“Miyudes were that we are not allowed to talk of weapons, bombs, or planning attacks. If they broke the rules I would kick them out,” he says.

When asked why he imposed these restrictions, Harris explains that while he subscribed to IS ideology, he did not agree with all its instructions, particularly the call by IS to carry out attacks in Iraq and other countries.

“I told those who are at war and oppressed are there (in the Middle East),” Harris says.

“They [IS] released a false (religious edict) for us to attack all American interests, strategic areas. But I really did not agree with that. Here, we only recruited, fundraised, and served as a transit point,” he elaborates.

“Because the conflict is not in Malaysia,” he says, explaining that many Malaysian Jihadi in Syria also disagreed with attacking home countries.

A change of heart

Initially after his arrest, Harris was uncooperative and held very strongly to some of his ideas.

However, he says that learning more about religion helped him to understand how his actions were wrong and he began opening up to rehabilitators and prison guards.

“When I was caught, I was (still) ignorant. I only took information from social media and websites,” he says.

“When I was detained, it was the first time I completed reading the entire translation of the Quran. I had never read it before then. When I was arrested, I could not read the Quran very well. From that moment, I looked back on myself and reflected.

“I cried alone in detention when I realised how ignorant I had been,”

The discussions that Harris was able to engage in while in detention also helped to reshape his worldview.

“Even when I was supporting ISIL, I still had doubts. One of the reservations I had was that IS was questioning the sunnah of the Prophet. I was tormented. Many of the following questions I had were answered during our classes at Baiti Aman.

“Now, after being released from prison, I am in a better place because I have more knowledge of the world and of religion. Now I just have to improve on that,” he says.

“Religious life. Life here is better than before.”

Protecting others

To stop others from straying down the same path that he did, Harris believes proper education is necessary – training in primary school.

“Perhaps the Islamic studies subject in school has to be improved. Because currently it is too basic. Too, it’s very difficult for those who study religion in depth to become involved in extremist groups because they are able to tell right from wrong,” he says.

Today, Harris’ past experience drives him to become involved in programmes countering violent extremism.

“Being someone who was once involved in wrongful activities like this, I know the trajectory how far they can go and the damage that they can inflict,” he says.

“As a human being, how could I just keep quiet?”

Parents, too, must be more involved in their children’s activities, he adds.

Harris shares that his parents did not worry too much about him because they considered him to be a mature child.

“But there are things that we cannot expect. We need to have some caution, a check and balance,” he says.

He also urges parents to introduce basic guidelines for their children using social media.

“At the very least we need to watch over our family,” he says.

“Not his real name.”
Case Study #2

Principle: Journalists should respect the rights and dignity of the victims, providing them with a voice, if they would like to be heard.

THE ROAD TO RADICALISATION

"Hani" | Dr Anne Speckhard | Badrul Hisham Ismail
04-Oct-18 20:00

Journalists Ezra Zaid and Zan Azlee ask the question - are Malaysians being radicalised and why? Are Malaysians really sympathising with extremists and why are they picking up arms and heading out to fight in the Middle-East? They speak to the usual suspects of researchers, psychologists and activists. But they manage to get to the heart of the matter with an elusive individual who sheds light on the road to being a radical.

Produced by: Ezra Zaid and Zan Azlee

Presented by: Ezra Zaid and Zan Azlee

(BFM, 4 October, 2018)

Theme: Radio podcast
Headline: The Road To Radicalisation
Date: October 4, 2018
Channel: BFM.my

This podcast is a good example of a counter-narrative that provides victims of violent extremism with a safe, dignified platform to talk about their experiences whilst at the same time protects their rights and identity. It is also important to note that the podcast used pseudonyms for the wife and family of the terrorist, which protects their identities from being exposed. Additionally, this piece also shows responsible reporting as it does not glorify or sensationalise the radicalisation process, but instead focuses on the first-hand emotions and experiences of the affected family members, which could be a particularly impactful counter-narrative for young Malaysians.
Case Study #3

Principle: When reporting on P/CVE, journalists must bear in mind the balance between the general personal rights of the person concerned and the public interest in comprehensive reporting.

The filmmaker and PVE practitioner, Noor Huda Ismail, wrote about his experience making his documentary, Jihad Selfie, and what motivated him to pursue the project. In the essay, he recounted his chance meeting with Akbar Maulana from Aceh, who planned to go to Syria. While Akbar did not use a pseudonym to hide his identity, Noor Huda managed to portray the young man’s journey from being radicalised to deradicalized in a more human-centric way, which included Akbar’s personal struggles with his thoughts as well as the role of his family, specifically his mother, in bringing him back.
## Things to Remember when Writing on Conflict & Violent Extremism

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<tr>
<th>Empathy via shared values</th>
<th>Challenge the status quo</th>
<th>Build relationships</th>
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<td>Link the situation to an event the reader is familiar with. For example, if a community has been the subject of racist speech, make the connection by writing on a personal situation the reader may have encountered in his or her life.</td>
<td>The Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)’s work on marital rape not only challenged governmental processes, and the social and cultural acceptance of such practice, but also the meaning of violence and where sexual violence sits within it for the Arab region. They interviewed victims, doctors, social workers, lawyers, and NGOs, giving the reader the full context and picture.</td>
<td>Build relationships with not just security experts and affected communities, but with civil society, who usually have on-the-ground information and can act as an introducer and mediator for journalists.</td>
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<th>Use multiple platforms</th>
<th>Always be VERY mindful of the opposed partisan / sectarian interests</th>
<th>Be sceptical, not cynical</th>
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<td>such as social media, broadcasting tools like the radio and television; otherwise, alternative media and citizen journalism can assist in pushing for peace and tolerance.</td>
<td>promoting extremism and justification of violence, and their adversaries’ cause and methods. Be wary of partisan claims and choice of words, terms, and descriptions, as well as the phrases, terminology, and narratives of other (including mainstream) media.</td>
<td>about claims and arguments made while seeking their clear substantiation, if any, to support or debunk the claims and arguments from each side. Assess the arguments and claims made by each side in news releases, interviews, against the known and established facts as a way of evaluating their worth.</td>
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4.6 Peace Journalism

Peace Journalism gives peacemakers a voice while making peace initiatives and non-violent solutions more visible and viable.⑤⑧

When media practitioners address issues concerning peace and conflict in an objective and fair manner, it enhances readers’ knowledge on causes of conflict, inter-ethnic understanding and discrimination, enabling societies to build a common future.⑤⑨

Peace Journalism (PJ), is an approach whereby:

Principles of Peace Journalism⑥⑦

PJ looks to unite parties, rather than divide them, and eschews oversimplified “us vs. them” and “good guy vs. bad guy” reporting.

PJ is proactive, examining the causes of conflict, and leading discussions about solutions.

PJ is balanced, covering issues/suffering/peace proposals from all sides of a conflict.

PJ gives voice to the voiceless, instead of just reporting for and about elites and those in power.

Peace journalists reject official propaganda, and instead seek facts from all sources.

Peace journalists provide depth and context, rather than just superficial and sensational “blow by blow” accounts of violence and conflict.

Peace reporters reject official propaganda, and instead seek facts from all sources.

Peace journalists offer counter-narratives that debunk media that create or perpetuate stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions.


⑤⑨ Ibid.

4.7 VE Reporting: Theory to Practice

The following tabletop exercises were conducted with journalists during the Media Workshop that took place in November 2021. The objective of these exercises was to provide journalists with practical training on the different approaches to consider when reporting on VE-related incidents, as well as to raise their awareness on unconscious bias reporting.

1. Breaking the Stereotypes

The objectives of this exercise were to introduce participants on how to identify gender bias, break gender stereotypes and to create awareness about gender balance in the newsroom.

Journalists were divided into groups, to discuss news clippings and how they covered gender. They were encouraged to discuss about how men and women were covered in the news.

[Image of newspaper article]

2. Situation Crisis

You are a reporter working for a private newspaper and you see a tweet from a verified activist reporting that 3 people were killed and 20 were injured in a demonstration about land rights in Sandakan, Sabah. The area is home to a minority ethnic group. 30 minutes later you hear about some clashes from a newsflash on the official radio. In a span of 2 hours, footage and images from the clash flooded the social media. You reach the scene after 2 hours and sends the first footage. A major foreign channel reports later that the violent is sectarian nature. The Police later issues a statement stating the number of casualties without naming names or referring to sectarian violence.

Group Activity:

(i) You are reporting the news live. Write your first breaking news flash.

(ii) Write your break news story.

(iii) Write your first update.

(iv) Rank the sources based on their credibility and importance.

Question for Discussion:
At what stage do you start identifying ethnic/religious groups?
3. Challenges When Reporting on VE

The Malaysian media coverage of violent and terrorism is dominated by quick, breaking and occasionally superficial news coverage, which mainly tries to answer the question “What happened?” and ignores pivotal questions like “Why? What is the background? What dimensions are there? What is the local, regional, international context?”. The almost total absence of explainer and analytical media coverage in Malaysia as well as the absence of investigative journalism will lead to media coverage continuing to be superficial and lacking in clarity, explanation, analysis, and investigation as well as interest in getting to the root issues related to extremism and terrorism and their intricate political, social, economic, religious, cultural, racial and sectarian causes.

In your groups, describe some of the challenges and weaknesses faced by the media when covering issues related to terrorism and violent extremism.

4. Story-telling about PVE

When covering terrorist attacks, media outlets find themselves at the heart of telling journalistic stories and are often considered “oxygen of publicity,” a famous description by former British PM Margaret Thatcher, in which terrorists’ primary targets are those who watch the attack, not those who are the victims of it.

Knowing that extremist and terrorist groups commit malicious and violent acts to pique the interest of ordinary citizens, how can media coverage interest citizens in a way that bypasses the goals of the groups?

Discuss.
References

- "Astro Awani. 10 things you need to know about SOSMA. Access at https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-sosma-76163"
- "General Assembly report A/70/674, paras. 23 and 32-37; United Nations, Swiss Confederation, 2016, p. 4)
- Ibid.
APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Terrorism Laws in Malaysia

It is a punishable offence for any Malaysian citizen to possess items linked to a terrorist group or terrorist activities. This includes storing any publication or paraphernalia linked to a terrorist group in one’s phone or computer; even if the material(s) is for research purposes, you can still be prosecuted. This includes media practitioners.

As such, when reporting on terrorism or violent extremism, it may be prudent to keep the following legal provisions in mind:

I. Under the Penal Code, there is no specific definition of “terrorism”. “Terrorist act” is defined by s. 130B(2) of the Penal Code as reproduced below:

(2) For the purposes of this Chapter, “terrorist act” means an act or threat of action within or beyond Malaysia where—

(a) The act or threat falls within subsection (3) and does not fall within subsection (4);
(b) The act is done or the threat is made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause; and
(c) The act or threat is intended or may reasonably be regarded as being intended to—
   (i) Intimidate the public or a section of the public; or
   (ii) Influence or compel the Government of Malaysia or the Government of any State in Malaysia, any other government, or any international organization to do or refrain from doing any act.

(3) An act or threat of action falls within this subsection if it—

(a) Involves serious bodily injury to a person;
(b) Causes a person’s life;
(c) Causes a person’s death;
(d) Creates a serious risk to the health or the safety of the public or a section of the public;
(e) Involves serious damage to property;
(f) Involves the use of firearms, explosives or other lethal devices;
(g) Involves releasing into the environment or any part of the environment or distributing or exposing the public or a section of the public to—
   (i) Any dangerous, hazardous, radioactive or harmful substance;
   (ii) Any toxic chemical; or
   (iii) Any microbial or other biological agent or toxin;
(h) Is designed or intended to disrupt or seriously interfere with, any computer systems or the provision of any services directly related to communications infrastructure, banking or financial services, utilities, transportation or other essential infrastructure;
(i) Is designed or intended to disrupt, or seriously interfere with, the provision of essential emergency services such as police, civil defence or medical services;
(j) Involves prejudice to national security or public safety;
(k) Involves any combination of any of the acts specified in paragraphs (a) to (j) and includes any act or omission constituting an offence under the Aviation Offences Act 1984 [Act 307].

(4) An act or threat of action falls within this subsection if it—

(a) Is advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action; and
(b) Is not intended—
   (i) To cause serious bodily injury to a person;
   (ii) To endanger the life of a person;
   (iii) To cause a person’s death; or
   (iv) To create serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; and

(5) For the purposes of subsection (2)—

(a) A reference to any person or property is a reference to any person or property wherever situated, within or outside Malaysia; and
(b) A reference to the public includes a reference to the public of a country or territory other than Malaysia.

From the provisions above, it seems that the definition of terrorist act is too broad. In Chapter VI A of the Penal Code, there is a wide range of terrorism offences, from a simple act such as having in possession an image or publication related to a terrorist group, without having to prove the intention of having the same (section 130JB) to commission of terrorist act by means of weapons (section 130C).
Appendix 2: Government Ministries and Agencies Working on Terrorism and Violent Extremism

• The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT)
• Ministry of Foreign Affairs
• Department of National Unity and Integration (JPNIN) - Prime Minister’s Department
• Research Division, Prime Minister’s Department
• E8 Special Branch, Royal Malaysia Police
• E3 Special Branch, Royal Malaysia Police
• Royal Malaysia Police
• National Security Council (MKN)
• Ministry of National Unity
• Ministry of Defence
• Malaysia Prisons Department (JPM)
• Ministry of Education/Higher Education
• Malaysian Immigration Department
• Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) and state religious departments
• Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOMM)
• Royal Malaysian Customs Department
• Serious Crimes Unit, Attorney-General’s Chambers (AGC)
• Ministry of Youth and Sports
• National Cybersecurity Agency (NACSA)
Appendix 3: Examples of Reporting Guidelines on VE and Terrorism

Reporting on conflict of any kind - whether it is war, terrorism, sieges or other emergencies - require journalists to strictly adhere to certain ethical and editorial principles. Some internationally applicable guidelines that have been produced for this purpose, and which can serve as a credible reference for the media, include:

**Example A: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Editorial Guidelines**

In particular, Section 11: War, Terror, and Emergencies of the guideline provides journalists with clear and comprehensive standards on the following:

- Accuracy and Impartiality
- Audience Comment and Moderation
- Use of Language
- Identifying Victims
- Disturbances and Riots
- Threats and Hoaxes
- National Security and Counter-Terrorism
- Terrorism Acts
- Hostile Environments and Travel Advisories

**Example B: The Al-Jazeera Staff Code of Professional Ethics & Conduct**

The Al-Jazeera Network published its editorial guidelines, which aims to provide the public with high quality news and programmes, whilst supporting creativity and innovation. The content of the guidebook outlines basic definitions, values and principles, including a section on how to deal with violence and terrorism:

6 **Terrorism**

6.1 **Criteria for dealing with kidnapping:**

Aljazeera network has a strict policy regarding the broadcasting of kidnapping and hostage-taking. To maintain such policy, the following guidelines should be observed.

1. **We do not broadcast images of hostages in humiliating or degrading situations.**

2. **We do not broadcast images of kidnappers to avoid glorifying them or portray them as role models. If it is absolutely imperative to do so, however, then their faces have to be pixelated prior to broadcasting.**

3. **We do not air hostage confessions because they are often made under duress.**

4. **In all cases, approval by a senior editor should be obtained before airing such scenes.**

6.2 **Requirements & Criteria:**

When receiving threats via telephone or other means of communication from any party claiming that they have planted a bomb somewhere, it is our duty to deal with such threats seriously and:

1. Notify security authorities immediately.

2. As soon as enough credible information about the location of the alleged bomb becomes available, we broadcast such information. However, we do not reveal the identity of the bomb planter or the party who reported it. Instead we state that “unidentified sources have contacted Aljazeera” whether the threat was real or not. In this manner we deprive them of any unwarranted credit.

Source: Al-Jazeera Network, ‘Al Jazeera Staff Code of Professional Ethics & Conduct’
The OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina collaborated with the local Press Council to publish a Guideline, which outlines the guiding principles for journalists to follow when reporting on terrorism and violent extremism:

- **a** Reporting on cases of violent extremism and terrorism must be balanced. To what extent the media should give space to the perpetrator and the influencing ideology must be the result of serious editorial assessment, which will avoid any generalization.

- **b** In the first reports from the field, journalists will be led by verified facts, while opinions, perspectives and analysis of the event should be conducted at a later stage. This means that field reports should be kept separate from the expert analysis.

- **c** Journalists have a responsibility to use the official, credible and trusted sources of information, to check them and, if necessary, protect their identity.

- **d** The information should be conveyed as accurately and as unambiguously as possible in order to minimize interpretation.

- **e** In qualifying the crime, only official information of the institutions involved in the investigation should be used.

- **f** In order to show the extent of the attack, publishing of photographs and videos requires a balance between the protection of dignity of the victims and their families and the interest of the public.

- **g** Victims and survivors must be in the focus of media coverage. For publishing their names, extent and circumstances of the attack, the number of the killed and injured only official sources of information should be used.

- **h** Journalists shall not allow eyewitness to interpret and analyse motives of an attack.

- **i** In case of spread of hate speech, panic and fear, the media will use available tools on social media and communication channels to suppress them.

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