



PHOTO: LIM WUI LIANG

## THAIPUSAM OFFERINGS

*Hindu devotees at the Sri Mariamman Temple in South Bridge Road make offerings to Lord Murugan ahead of*

Thaipusam today. Thaipusam celebrates the deity's birthday and the occasion when his mother, the Goddess Parvathi, gave him a spear, to slay the demon Surapadman.

It is believed that by making offerings, devotees will be blessed and have a safe and fulfilling Thaipusam. Yesterday, an idol of the deity was placed on a silver chariot and taken in a procession from Sri Thandayuthapani Temple in Tank Road to the Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple in Keong Siak Road and back.

# Muslims here going online to counter extremist websites

BY ZAKIR HUSSAIN

**DISTURBED** by the prevalence of extremist websites claiming to represent the true version of Islam, security analyst Haniff Hassan has fought back with a blog of his own.

Launched last October, he challenges radical views which misrepresent Islam and claim, for instance, that jihad means a perpetual war with non-Muslims, and that it is wrong for Muslims to live in a non-Muslim country.

"Such extremist ideology is widely available online and could influence the young," he said, explaining that Internet-savvy youths could be swayed by such views found on websites in

many languages, including English, Malay and Arabic.

Added Ustaz Haniff, a 38-year-old PhD student at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies: "The Internet is a critical battlefield in countering these ideas."

He is not alone in his concerns and efforts to tackle radicalism online. A group of Islamic teachers counselling Jemaah Islamiyah detainees also plans to launch a website this year to counter such extremist views.

"We have seen how deep-seated these radical views are and want to ensure they do not start to win support here," said Ustaz Ali Haji Mohamed, who co-chairs the Religious Rehabilitation Group.

"By having an online presence, we hope to help immunise youths against extremist ideas," the chairman of the Khadijah Mosque in Geylang added.

Such efforts are not only to educate Muslims that radical ideology has no place in Islam, but they also aim to clarify misconceptions non-Muslims may have that Islam condones extremism, the leaders said.

National Junior College student Muhammad Faisal Johandi, 18, welcomes the efforts being made. He believes these can help nip one of the root causes of terrorist activity: radical ideology.

"Radical sites could otherwise mislead youth who do not know better," he said.

Ustaz Haniff's blog – counter ideology.freeonlineblogs.com –

counters such sites by refuting their misinterpretation of concepts like jihad. Such views interpret Islamic texts out of context, he said.

He also links his blog to the websites of like-minded scholars worldwide and recently released a book – *Unlicensed To Kill* – which rebuts Bali bomber Imam Samudra's justification for the 2002 attacks.

Existing programmes to ensure that young Muslims here get appropriate guidance on Islam are also in place. Last September, the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis) launched a website – [www.iask.com.sg](http://www.iask.com.sg) – for young Muslims to e-mail questions and read replies online from religious teachers.

Muis also plans to launch an online discussion forum moderated by young teachers on the same website. As Ms Farah Mahamood Aljunied, head of Islamic education at Muis, explained: "This is an avenue where youths can feel secure asking any questions, and getting a response from a reliable source."