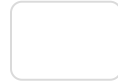


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New Hizb ut-Tahrir Networks Uncovered in Southern India; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 21 Issue: 24

By: Animesh Roul

The transnational Islamist political movement Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) has increased its India-centric propaganda. HT is often described as a non-violent extremist group seeking to unite the global Muslim community under one Islamic caliphate. The arrests of several HT operatives from Central and South Indian states, including Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu, confirmed HT's shadowy presence in the country. HT is attempting to revive the group's past pro-Islamic state and anti-India discourses through its preaching campaigns.

Exposing HT Networks

In May, a coordinated operation executed by multiple Indian security agencies, including the Intelligence Bureau, the Anti-Terror Squad of Madhya Pradesh, and the Counter Intelligence Wing of Telangana, exposed covert networks linked to HT. These networks were accused of forcibly converting and marrying individuals from the Hindu community. These cells reportedly infiltrated educational and other vocational institutions in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana. The initial phase of the operation led to the arrest of 11 suspected HT members in multiple locations in Bhopal and Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, five individuals were apprehended in Hyderabad, the capital of Telangana ([Statesman](#), May 10; [Deccan Chronicle](#), May 10). Among the arrested, at least three were converts from the Hindu community. Notably, most of those arrested were professionals, including a dentist, a cloud service engineer, and a teacher specializing in pharmaceutical biotechnology. Police also found that five had married Hindu women and converted them to Islam. Subsequent police operations led to the arrests of several more

HT operatives, which brought the total of arrested HT cadres to 17 by August 1 ([DDNews](#), August 1).

According to investigative reports, arrested HT operatives engaged in covert close-combat and shooting training in the forests in Madhya Pradesh. They also communicated via encrypted web apps like Rocket Chat and Threema and listened to Islamist speeches on those platforms ([NDTV news](#), May 10). These arrests were part of an ongoing investigation tracking individuals and networks since the earlier arrests of HT “influencers” Ziyavudeen Baqavi and Bava Bahrudeen. According to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) report, Baqavi was the leader and chief recruiter of HT for the Thanjavur, Madurai, Erode, and Salem districts of Tamil Nadu and Karaikal district of Puducherry ([NIA](#), March 14, 2022). Both were apprehended several years ago in the Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts of Tamil Nadu for recruiting Muslim youth through Facebook. Alongside this, the two HT leaders were found to have been conducting secret meetings where they advocated the establishment of an Islamic state in India, with the end goal of instituting a Sharia-compliant constitution as advocated by Hizb ut-Tahrir’s central office ([New Indian Express](#), March 16, 2022). [1]

Long before Baqavi’s arrest, HT activities in southern India became known in April 2021, when the NIA initiated a search for Mohammad Iqbal, for his pro-Islamic State (IS) social media posts. This garnered attention in particular because Iqbal was a Hindu convert and a resident of Kazimar Street in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, an area of the city known for having several hundred residents descended from the same family living on the same street for more than 800 years. In May 2021, the NIA charged Iqbal for promoting the establishment of an Islamic caliphate and posting offensive materials against Hindus, with the goal of inciting Indian Muslims to unleash violence against the majority Hindu population ([The Week](#), May 29, 2021; [Hindustan Times](#), May 16, 2021). In response to these developments and the subsequent investigations, HT denounced the NIA and the present Indian government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. HT accused Indian agencies of attempting to criminalize Islamic preaching and discourses related to the concept of the caliphate ([Khilafa.com](#), October 4, 2021; [Hizb-uttahrir.info](#), June 23).

In recent years, HT’s recent press releases focusing on India have garnered much interest within the country’s security establishment, even though the group has yet to announce the creation of a regional Indian chapter or promote an Islamist leader to that end ([Hizb-uttahrir.info](#), July 20; [X/@HTmediaPak](#), August 14). In March, an India-centric HT press release hinted at the presence of militant networks in the hinterlands of India. It also discussed various activities held early this year by HT members where they promoted the re-establishment of the caliphate. The campaign undertaken in India was part of HT’s global campaign commemorating the abolishment of the caliphate in 1924. This was

primarily aimed at rekindling awareness and understanding of the caliphate among the Muslim community in India.

Conclusion

HT's presence in the hinterlands of India would undoubtedly be detrimental to Indian democracy and its secular fabric in the long-run, due to the group's use of inflammatory rhetoric against India and its Hindu majority population. HT has engaged in non-violent activities, such as pro-caliphate campaigns and religious conversion, alongside indoctrination. However, its vehement rejection of modern, secular state structures, democracy, and pluralism could revive Islamist sentiments in India.

Notes:

[1] Draft Constitution, Hizb ut-Tahrir, <https://dustoor.hizb.net>, March 20, 2023 <https://hizb-uttahrir.info/en/index.php/dawah/india/24381.html>

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