

RSIS Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical and contemporary issues. The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and due credit to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email to Editor RSIS Commentary at RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg.

Hizb ut -Tahrir Bangladesh: A Growing Threat and the Need for Action

By Iftekharul Bashar

SYNOPSIS

Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh, an extremist organisation banned since 2009, is swiftly expanding by recruiting Bangladeshi youth through social media and educational institutions. The group's recent rally in Dhaka, attended by over 2,000 supporters, underscores its resurgence and the growing challenge for the government. Bangladesh must recalibrate its response to this threat by strengthening law enforcement measures, enhancing counter-radicalisation programmes, and creating job and entrepreneurship opportunities for its youth.

COMMENTARY

On March 7, 2025, the banned group Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HTB) held a [“March for Khilifat” public rally](#) in Dhaka attended by over 2,000 supporters. Participants carried the group's flags and chanted anti-government slogans. The group's goal was to promote the idea of creating an Islamic Caliphate and gain support from the people, particularly the military. This rally was the first of its kind since the group was banned in 2009. Before the rally, HTB had put up flyers and flooded social media with posts promoting the event.

Although the police had warned that they would take legal action against banned groups holding rallies or spreading propaganda, the rally went ahead. Police were reportedly unable to control the crowd and had to use [tear gas and sound grenades](#) to disperse them. They [arrested](#) 36 HTB members and filed cases under the Anti-Terrorism Act, with 17 of them placed on a five-day remand for interrogation. Police stated they could have dispersed the rally easily but chose a strategic approach to avoid casualties. The operation to round up the law breakers is still ongoing.

In the aftermath of the rally, HTB issued a statement in Bengali calling for the return of the Islamic Caliphate, blaming Western powers for its collapse in 1924. They also urged Bangladesh's military to support them, presenting secularism and Western influence as a "betrayal of the Muslim community".

The HTB rally raises questions about the effectiveness of law enforcement in stopping the group's activities. The government's inability to prevent the rally from taking place and the group's continued activities suggest gaps in the monitoring and handling of extremist organisations.

The Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh

HTB is part of the global organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), which calls for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate governed by their interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia. The group rejects democracy and secularism and wants a political system based solely on their religious beliefs. HT was founded in 1953 by a Palestinian scholar in the region, then controlled by Jordan.

HTB was established in Bangladesh in 2000 and banned in 2009 due to its promotion of extremist ideologies that posed a threat to national security. However, the group has remained active, especially in its recruitment of university students and young people.

HTB has expanded its influence by tapping into youth dissatisfaction, especially following political unrest in 2024. Although the group has avoided using violence so far, it promotes radical ideas and has tried to gain support from key sectors, including the security forces. HT and HTB are deemed a growing threat to Bangladesh's stability.

The Growing Influence of HTB

HTB's influence in Bangladesh has grown significantly, especially among young people. The group currently has approximately 10,000-15,000 [members](#) in Bangladesh. Initially, the group focused on recruiting university students, but now it also targets high school and junior college students. It is particularly active among the young, using social media to spread extremist views and recruit new followers, often appealing to emotions and presenting a distorted version of Islamic history.

For HTB, social media is a platform to promote violent resistance to the state, framing it as a religious duty. This "us vs. them" mentality strengthens their message. It creates a sense of solidarity among members while justifying hostility toward outsiders, including the government and those who do not support their views.

The group had been particularly successful in spreading its ideology among the young during the COVID-19 pandemic. While HTB has not resorted to violence to achieve its goals (at least not in the way terrorist organisations do), some of its members have shown a willingness to use violence, if necessary, even supporting the idea of punishing or killing those they see as blasphemers. There have been cases of HTB members joining terrorist outfits such as Al-Qaeda or Islamic State. Hence, HTB can

be regarded as feeding the conveyor belt of terrorism. HTB also seeks to infiltrate state institutions, including the security forces, to further its political goals.

Despite being banned, HTB continues to recruit from various sectors of society. Its ability to operate and recruit amongst them suggests that traditional law enforcement measures are insufficient to stop its activities.

Besides ideology, socio-economic factors might be contributing to HTB's rapid expansion in Bangladesh. The youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh is high, with [28 per cent of university graduates unemployed in 2022](#), comprising about 800,000 individuals. Many graduates face lengthy periods of unemployment, with 20 per cent jobless for over two years. With the current political instability, uncertainty and lack of investment, these figures might be worsening.

The Threat to Bangladesh and Beyond

HTB's activities seriously threaten Bangladesh's national security and stability. The group's goal of replacing the current government with an Islamic Caliphate threatens the democratic values Bangladesh has worked hard to maintain. The growing radicalisation of youth, especially if HTB's influence continues to expand, could destabilise the country further.

Two days after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina administration in August 2024 following a mass uprising, HTB started to assert itself. It organised public meetings and processions and, on 9 September, [called](#) on Bangladesh's interim government to lift the 2009 ban on the group.

Bangladeshi observers believe [HTB is trying to enter politics](#) by taking advantage of the current political changes. They suggest that if the HTB is given this opportunity, it could spread radicalism within the country. Moreover, HTB's influence could extend beyond Bangladesh and inspire similar movements in neighbouring countries, creating security challenges for the wider South Asian region.

HTB has adopted the concept of Gazwatul Hind in its narrative, aligning with jihadist ideologies that seek to establish an Islamic state in the Indian Subcontinent. By promoting this vision of a "battle for India", HTB intensifies the threat to India, fuelling radicalisation and sectarian tensions. Indian authorities [banned](#) HT in October 2024. HTB has been exploiting various humanitarian crises affecting Muslims, particularly those in Myanmar's Rakhine State and more recently, in Gaza.

Addressing the HTB Threat

To effectively combat HTB and its growing influence, Bangladesh needs a more proactive and comprehensive strategy. Failing to act could lead to more young people being recruited by the group.

Some strategies that the government can consider are: 1) strengthening intelligence collection and counter-radicalisation actions to track and disrupt HTB's activities; 2) addressing socioeconomic issues by reducing youth unemployment, supporting skills development and creating more job and entrepreneurship opportunities to lessen the

appeal of extremist ideologies; and 3) countering HTB's Ideology by engaging religious leaders to promote peaceful, pluralistic, and democratic values and social cohesion. There is a need for credible and qualified mainstream leaders to reclaim the online space that extremists are increasingly dominating.

Iftexharul Bashar is a Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798