FSB Accuses 5 of Plotting to Overthrow State

By The Moscow Times

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Five members of the banned Hizb-ut-Tahrir organization have been arrested in the Chelyabinsk region on suspicion of plotting to overthrow the government by force, the Federal Security Service said Wednesday.

"Proponents of a radical ideology that goes against the teachings of the traditional Muslim community have been recruiting new members and encouraging them to participate in organized, anti-constitutional activities," the regional FSB branch said in a statement carried by Interfax.

The five suspects hoped to create an Islamic state on Russian soil, it said, without specifying when the arrests took place.

The suspects have been charged with plotting to overthrow the government by force and face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

According to the FSB, supporters of Hizb-ut-Tahrir created clandestine cells in the region from 2009 to 2011 and held weekly gatherings in secret locations. Participants in the gatherings allegedly paid monthly membership fees that were then spent on supporting jailed local Hizb-ut-Tahrir members.

Attempts to contact Chelyabinsk's FSB branch were unsuccessful Wednesday.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir advocates the creation of an Islamic state but claims to reject violence. It has been outlawed in a number of countries, including Russia, Germany and Uzbekistan. Proposed bans in Britain and Australia, shelved almost a decade ago, continue to be debated.

The incident is not the first time that the organization has made headlines in Chelyabinsk. In 2008 and 2009, Hizb-ut-Tahrir members were arrested on suspicion of plotting terrorist acts.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir flags were spotted in Kazan at weekend protests over the arrest of dozens of people in connection with the attempted killing of Tatarstan's top Muslim leader and the shooting death of his former aide earlier this month, Gazeta.ru reported Monday.

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