[**Path of instability**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1739208/path-of-instability)

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PAKISTAN is currently muddling through a storm of political instability, economic downturn and resurgent terrorism. Large sections of Indian media and pundits have seized the opportunity to demonise Pakistan as the epicentre of the problems plaguing South Asia. In doing so, they aim to absolve the Indian government of its own contribution towards an unstable South Asia.

Worrisome trends in India tell a different story. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen in an interview characterised the present Indian government as communitarian, majoritarian and anti-Muslim, which he deems as a ‘reduction’ of India from the pluralistic and culturally rich country it once was. He is not alone in raising these concerns. Since India is the largest state in South Asia, it is important to understand the recent rise of Hindu nationalism there, and why it matters to regional stability.

The secular, pluralistic and democratic country that Nehru had envisioned is rapidly giving way to a Hindutva-driven rashtra. Nehru’s book The Discovery of India des­cribed “unity in diversity” as the defining character of Indian civilisation. Conver­sely, the BJP’s political philosophy derives its inspiration from RSS leader Savarkar, who asserted that Hindu identity was the essence of India. Eventually, the Modi-led BJP actualised the nationalist political ideology of Hindutva. According to Aakar Patel, author of Our Hindu Rashtra, India today is a Hindu majoritarian state in practice.

The second dimension of today’s India is the personality cult of Narendra Modi that has been systematically developed. The BJP’s 2014 manifesto Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat (‘One India, Excellent India’) featured the pictures of many BJP leaders, but the title page of the 2019 manifesto Sankalp Bharat, Sashakt Bharat (‘Resolute India, Strong India’) had only the picture of Modi, a shift aimed at portraying Modi as the only hope for a strong India. In a Foreign Policy essay ‘The Cult of Modi’ published last year, Ramachandra Guha describes in detail how Modi has used a massive propaganda machinery to enhance his image as the “great redeemer of Hindus and Hinduism”. Arundhati Roy argues in an article published by The Guardian recently that Modi’s policy of violent Hindu nationalism was “underwritten by big business” like billionaire Gautam Adani.

Nehru’s India has given way to an India driven by Hindutva.

The third aspect of communitarian India is the growing anxiety of the country’s minorities. In 2018, then BJP president Amit Shah described Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh as “termites”. The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, offered Indian citizenship to religious minorities from neighbouring countries, except Muslims, which the UNHCR characterised as “fundamentally discriminatory”. The Muslim-majority population of Indian-occupied Kashmir has also suffered from communication blockades and lockdowns for years. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom asserted in its 2022 report that Modi’s India was committing “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom” against its minorities.

Hate speech and attacks targeting Muslims have become routine in India. Saffron-clad Hindu mobs frequently lynch Muslims on the streets. In February 2022, RSS followers made headlines in Karnataka when they heckled a hijab-clad Muslim student, Muskan Khan. On Aug 15, 2022, 11 convicted men, who had gang-raped a pregnant Muslim woman, Bilkis Bano, during the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, were released prematurely and received a heroes’ welcome. The recently relea­sed BBC documentary India: The Modi Question describes in detail how then chief minister Modi oversaw a pre­­planned pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. Minorities in India face hate-mong­ering programmes, like ‘Ghar Wapsi’ (conversion to Hin­du­ism) or ‘Love Jihad’ (discouraging Hindu women from meeting Muslim men). Even Bollywood is embracing right-wing narratives that glorify Hinduism and disparage Islam.

The fourth plank of the Hindutva strategy is to isolate and demonise Pakistan. A massive disinformation campaign against Pakistan was run in Europe using fake NGOs (unearthed by EU’s DisinfoLab). Indian leaders recycle their mantra that Pakistan is the epicentre of terrorism, without acknowledging Pakistan’s valiant fight against terrorism.

If these trends continue, and minorities are pushed to the wall, South Asia’s largest country could head towards tumult. Pakistan and other South Asian nations are already facing serious political and economic challenges; if there is instability in India too, there would be grave implications for regional peace and prosperity. As the BJP-led government completes its second term, one hopes that it heeds wiser counsel, and prevents India from turning into a majoritarian state that is fast losing its democratic ethos.

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