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# Interaction

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## THE HAIDER MBT:

**PIONEERING SELF-RELIANCE  
IN PAKISTAN'S DEFENSE INDUSTRY**



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August 2024

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# MODI 3.0: EMERGENCE OF INDIA AS AN ELECTORAL AUTOCRACY



**TARIQUE AHMED ABRO**

On 9 June 2024, Narendra Modi was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India for the third consecutive term after garnering support from the coalition parties that are part of National Democratic Alliance (NDA). His party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), managed to secure 240 of 543 seats during the recently held 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections that concluded on 1 June 2024.

Unlike the previous two elections, when BJP had won an outright majority, they were 32 seats short of 272 number required to form a government. In 2014 elections, BJP had secured 282 seats the first straight majority for any party since 1984. It was able to secure 303 seats in 2019 elections. However, in 2024, BJP lost 38 seats, primarily from the states where farmers were protesting i.e., western UP, Punjab, Haryana, northern Rajasthan, and Maharashtra. Interestingly, looking at BJP's poor performance during



recent elections, Modi's boastful slogan of 'Abki Baar 400 Paar' turned out to be nothing more than wishful thinking.

The persecution of religious minorities, restrictions on press freedom, increased concerns regarding the independence of the judiciary and decline in civil liberties and political rights, especially of the Muslims, are some of the most infamous characteristics of Modi's previous two terms. In regard, "To perceive 'Modi 3.0' as any less dangerous would be misreading," opined Professor Anand Teltumbde, a renowned Indian writer and civil rights activist, in his latest article carried by The Wire on 12 June 2024.

He noted that it is most likely that "Narendra Modi will revert to his typical fascist tendencies and seek vengeance," once he is done with forming the government. According to his analysis, Modi's main targets during his third term would be the Muslims and Dalits, who have collectively voted against the BJP during the recent elections. Owing to Modi's autocratic style of governance and utter disregard for civil, religious and political liberties, he is blamed for the weakening of the country's democratic credentials and polarizing the Indian society by fanning anti-minority prejudice, especially against Muslims.

India has slipped on various international indices since Narendra Modi came into power



as Prime Minister in 2014. Since 2020, India has been labeled an 'electoral autocracy' by the V-Dem Institute, a Sweden-based think-tank, in its annual 'Democracy Report.' Likewise, India has been ranked at 159<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in the 'World Press Freedom Index (WPFI) 2024' by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a France-based international non-profit and non-governmental organization. The continued marginalization of Muslims has laid bare Modi's rhetoric about the "freedom of faith" within India. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its '2024 Annual Report' has listed a number of incidents of violence and intimidation against religious minorities in India, including Muslims and Christians, and attributed them to BJP. It notes that "the BJP government reinforced discriminatory nationalist policies, perpetuated hateful rhetoric and failed to address communal violence."

A two-part documentary series titled 'India: The Modi Question,' aired by BBC Two in January 2023, highlighted that Narendra Modi, while he was the Chief Minister of Gujrat, was "directly responsible" for providing the "climate of impunity" that enabled the violence which led to over 1,000 Muslim deaths the violence had "all the hallmarks of a genocide." In June 2023, more than seventy members of the United States

Congress had written a letter to the Biden administration to address human rights concerns during Modi's state visit to the US. They had raised serious concerns that there were "troubling signs in India toward the shrinking of political space, the rise of religious intolerance, the targeting of civil society organizations and journalists, and growing restrictions on press freedoms and internet access."

Ironically, a month later, in the city of Gurugram in northern Haryana state, right-wing Hindu mobs affiliated with BJP set on fire several shops owned by Muslims and torched a mosque and burnt alive its Imam. The United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) António Guterres, during his visit to India from 18-20 October 2022, also noted that as an elected member of the Human Rights Council, India had a responsibility to shape global human rights, and to protect and promote the rights of all individuals, including members of minority communities.

The founder and Director of Genocide Watch, Gregory Stanton, had also warned during a United States Congressional briefing in 2022 that there were early "signs and processes" of genocide in the Indian state of Assam and Indian-administered Kashmir. In the same year, Muslims were categorized as a "persecuted minority" in India by the International Panel of Law Experts comprising



Sonja Biserko (Serbia), Marzuki Darusman (Indonesia) and Stephen Rapp (United States).

Undoubtedly, the global perspective on the projection of Hindu fundamentalist organizations during the Modi era is marked by significant scepticism. Yash Raj Sharma, who contributes to Aljazeera, has quoted Michael Kugelman, Director of the Wilson Center's South Asia Institute, as saying that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has now positioned India to become a Hindu state in a formal sense, a move that would be welcomed by his large base but decried by many non-Hindus and critics as a betrayal of India's secular traditions." The political mainstreaming of Hindu fundamentalist organizations during Modi era has transformed Hindutva into a preponderant form of Hindu nationalism, which derives its inspiration from far-right and authoritarian political ideologies such as Fascism and Nazism. This phenomenon poses great danger for the religious minorities and the Indian state itself. In the words of Arundhati Roy, "Hindu Nationalism could lead to the breakup of India." Importantly, the oppression of minority groups in India goes beyond just the Muslim community, as Christians also experience persecution. A resolution expressing concerns regarding the situation in Manipur, India, was passed by the European Parliament on 13 July 2023. It underscored that violent clash between the Meitei and Kuki ethnic communities in Manipur since 3 May 2023 had resulted in at least 120 deaths, 50,000 displacements, and the destruction of over 1,700 houses, 250 churches, temples, and schools. The resolution also highlighted concerns about politically motivated, divisive policies promoting Hindu majoritarianism.

Sushant Singh, a lecturer at Yale University, had pointed out in his article published in Foreign Affairs magazine on 4 September



2023, that Hindu "mobs have set fire to over 350 churches and burned more than 200 villages in Manipur." It was reported by The Wire on 9 September 2023 that according to the United Christian Forum (UCF), a Delhi-based civil society organization focused on issues pertaining to Christian community, "there have been 525 attacks against Christians in India during 2023." In March 2024, UCF said that more than 150 attacks on Indian Christians were reported in the first quarter of 2024.

Lastly, keeping in view Modi's dismal track record, his re-election as Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy does not augur well for certain sections of the Indian society. A large mob screaming 'Jai Bhavani', 'Jai Shivaji' and 'Jai Shri Ram' ransacked properties belonging to Muslims and desecrated a mosque in Gajapur, Maharashtra, on 14 July 2024. It signals that Indian Muslims shall continue to face discrimination and religious persecution, which critics say is aimed at marginalizing Muslims and transforming India into a Hindu Rashtra. Undoubtedly, Modi's India is two-faced: it projects itself to the world as a pluralistic society while encouraging communal hatred and the persecution of minorities internally.

The author is a Research Officer at the Center for International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS).