**Leveraging the Ram Temple Inauguration**

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Republic Day is a momentous occasion in India, commemorating the enforcement of the Constitution of India on 26 January 1950. This pivotal document replaced the Government of India Act 1935, signalling India’s transition from a dominion under the British Raj to an independent republic. The Indian Constituent Assembly formally adopted the constitution on 26 November 1949, culminating in its implementation on 26 January 1950. This date holds historical significance, as it aligns with the proclamation of the Declaration of Indian Independence by the Indian National Congress in 1930.

Moreover, the choice of 26 January as Republic Day was deliberate, symbolizing the nation’s commitment to ideals of freedom and unity. India, from its inception as a republic, embraced a secular ethos, promoting inclusivity across faiths, religions, castes, creeds,  
races, and colours.

However, there is a growing concern about the secular fabric of the country being challenged in recent years, particularly since the rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Allegations suggest that India, once proudly secular, is now witnessing a shift towards becoming a Hindu state. This transformation is attributed to activities fuelled by animosity, directed particularly against Muslims, Christians, and adherents of other smaller religions and sects.

BJP’s agenda could lead to the forced conversion of Indian Muslims and increased hardships for religious minorities.

In this regard, in the city of Ayodhya (India), the construction of the Ram temple on the site of a historic mosque has become a pivotal political tool for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). This move has, however, exposed India’s secular facade on the global stage, with international media, including a major Australian media outlet publishing a story, about how Mr Modi is using religion to erode India’s secular identity and transform it into a Hindu state.

The grand inauguration of the Ram (Mandir) temple has been a cause for celebration since its opening, touted as a major achievement for Mr Modi and the BJP. In the ongoing election campaign that began in April, the Ram Mandir has become a central theme, strategically employed to garner votes at every political gathering.

Despite the festive atmosphere within India, global media scrutiny persists, shedding light on the BJP’s alleged role in the demolition of mosques, churches, and religious schools, along with rising atrocities against Muslims and Christians. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an extremist affiliate of the BJP, has been implicated in these acts.

The historic city of Ayodhya, a hotbed of Hindu extremism, witnessed the inauguration of the Ram Temple by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attended by prominent figures, including renowned Indian actor Amitabh Bachchan with his family. However, the event was not without controversy, as pilgrims chanted extremist slogans, creating an atmosphere of fear in Muslim areas.

The construction of the Ram Temple follows the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, sparking global protests. The Supreme Court of India ruled in favour of the Ram Temple in 2019, despite efforts by Indian Islamic organizations and Muslim leaders to save the Babri Masjid site through legal channels.

Residents, like Indian Muslim lawyer Khaliq Ahmad Khan, express deep distress over the transformation of the Babri Masjid into a temple, viewing it as a painful act and a controversial move by Prime Minister Modi. Mr Khan highlights growing concerns among Muslims in Ayodhya, fearing increased attacks by Hindu extremists.

Conversely, figures like Sunil Ambekar, a prominent member of the RSS, see the construction of the Ram temple as a step toward achieving the goal of declaring India a Hindu state. This ambition, coupled with ongoing efforts to make Hinduism the official religion of India, raises concerns about the diminishing space for the country’s 300 million Muslims.

International observers, including those in Australia, warn that Modi’s emphasis on Hindu nationalism for electoral gains may pose a threat to the rights of minorities in India. Critics argue that the BJP’s agenda could lead to the forced conversion of Indian Muslims and increased hardships for religious minorities.

It is noteworthy that Prime Minister Modi has allocated substantial funds for the development of Ayodhya, along with the opulent construction of the Ram temple. The government’s expenditure of $3.5 billion from the public treasury for these projects reflects its commitment to advancing its agenda.

Transforming India from a secular nation to a Hindu state could potentially erode its strong global standing and strain relations with Muslim nations. It is in India’s best interest to maintain its secular identity, ensuring equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their religion, caste, or creed. This approach not only aligns with principles of fairness and inclusivity but also contributes to fostering harmonious international relationships. Therefore, it is essential for India, a diverse and pluralistic nation, to reaffirm its commitment to secularism and unity in the face of such challenges. Preserving the core principles enshrined in the Constitution will ensure that the spirit of Republic Day endures, fostering a society that respects and celebrates its rich diversity.

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