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Report – Book Launch

“Rising Hindutva and Its Impact on the Region”

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PICTURES OF THE EVENT



Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organized a book launch on February 20, 2019 titled “*Rising Hindutva and its Impact on the Region*” authored by Group Captain (Retd) S.M. Hali. The Chief Guest and the keynote speaker at the occasion was former Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC) General (Retd) Ehsan ul Haq. Other speakers at the occasion included Senator (Retd) Nisar Memon and Ambassador (Retd) Ashraf Jehangir Qazi.

Welcoming the guests, Director General ISSI Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry lauded the efforts by the author on a very special topic. He said that the societal march towards a narrow, extreme and hate-filled ideology in India needs greater analysis and focus which this book presents. Elaborating on the book, he was of the view that it explains how a radical Hindu right would exacerbate existing fault lines within India and cautions that this would lead to increased violence and hatred against all other religious minorities, especially Muslims. He said that there are huge implications of the Hindutva phenomenon and it is important to understand the genesis, evolution and the impact of Hindutva within India, Pakistan and the broader region. He said that the author has offered valuable suggestions for both India and Pakistan to counter the phenomenon and its dangerous implications for the region.

Ambassador Chaudhry said that the war mongering and hysteria being whipped up by the Indian leadership and the media post Pulwama is touching dangerous levels. He said that Prime Minister Imran Khan has given a highly mature and measured response to Indian allegations and hoped that Indian leadership would reflect and introspect on what its policies are doing to India and the entire region. He further added that the policies of hatred borne out of a flawed philosophy of Hindutva, the use of ruthless force against hapless Kashmiris and persecution of Muslims and other minorities in India will spell disaster in the region.

The author of the book Mr. S.M Hali in the introduction of his book thanked God Almighty that He has given him the opportunity to write this book on a sensitive subject. He also thanked the Institute of Strategic Studies for launching his book. Mr. Hali said that he had been working on this book for nearly two decades. He said that Hinduism is a religion and no religion preaches evil, but Hindutva is a phenomenon which preaches extremism and hatred. Mr. Hali explained the methodology of the book and said that instead of giving his own views about Hindutva, he

has pulled out opinions of Indian scholars and there are a number of balanced and sane Indian authors that have written extensively on this subject.

Quoting a former RSS chief that non-Hindus "Stay in the country wholly subordinated to Hindu nation deserving no privileges," Mr. Hali said that this ideology has gone too far and even the low caste Dalits have not been spared from this exclusionism and hatred. He said that this book has disproved many of the myths regarding Hindutva, an overview of how Hindutva was formed in its formative years, and what are the dangers from it. Mr. Hali added that there is a special chapter allocated to Narendra Modi. Mr. Hali said that he has also given a set of recommendations for both the people of Pakistan and India that how they need to shun Hindutva. He concluded by commenting that we are dealing with an enemy which is not rational and who can go to any extent and we have to be prepared for it.

The Chief Guest and keynote speaker General (Retd) Ehsan ul Haq thanked the Institute of Strategic Studies for organizing the launch and praised Mr. Hali for writing a book on a subject which is of enormous relevance and competently addresses a crucial subject. He said that there has been a serious dearth of studies and analysis of India in Pakistan. Given the history, current relations and future projections, India's impact over Pakistan and the regional situation will be dominant and critical. General Ehsan said that our understandings and perceptions of India are cursory based on clichés, stereotypes or inadequate study, and there is a need for more in-depth studies and comprehensive research on India. He said that we should also be cognisant of socio-political changes within India that are transformational. This is even more essential as the generation that had lived in pre-independence India are now in the twilight zone. From this perspective, General Ehsan hoped that this book would trigger great scholarship on what is happening around us and in India.

He said that with BJP ascend to power in 2014 with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, a known fanatic and RSS *pracharak* (propagator) at the helms of affair, the oppressive traits of Hindutva and its implementation by radical adherents have produced anxiety within India and beyond. He noted that there is an increasing interest to fathom the true nature of Hindutva's fascist ideology, its impact on India's socio-cultural landscape and internal dynamics. It is also of enormous concern both regionally, as well as internationally. General Ehsan opined that India's pursuit of

hegemony in the region under this radical Hindutva ideology has profound implications for Pakistan. He said that this well-researched book while carefully discarding number of myths regarding Hindutva objectively highlights the real motivations, aims and aspirations of *Sangh Pariwar* which is what the family of Hindu nationalist call themselves. A significant feature of the book is that it is resourced from writings within India and this is what is very important. This feature gives the book an objectivity rather than bias. He further added that the book convincingly unmasks the draconian terror agenda of Hindutva and the mainstreaming of communalism in the Indian body politic.

General Ehsan said that the book also covers social agenda of Hindutva of creating a majoritarian domination that subjugates the very significant Indian minorities including Dalits, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs into perpetual tyranny. He noted that the books also discuss in detail a particular ominous facet of Hindutva which is the increasing ingress in the armed forces of India. While Indian military prided themselves for their colonial era ethos of professionalism, apolitical culture and secular outlook are under increasing pressure of aligning with the radical Hindutva thought. He said that the more critical concern that Pakistan and the international community should have is the world view and strategic culture of armed forces of a nuclear power that has been flaunting its recently acquired nuclear triad and it is ironic that Western powers that have promoted the Indian narrative of extremist threat to Pakistan's nuclear weapons are shying away from indicating this threat developing in India.

Ambassador (Retd) Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, in his remarks said that this book by Mr. Hali is seminal and is a must read book. He said that this book shows us an aspect of our great neighbor to the East that we need to be aware of. He continued by saying that India has a great history and civilization, but all collections of humanity from civilizations downwards have two sides - a brighter side and a darker side. While Hindutva has always been part of Indian civilization, however this aspect developed from mid-19th century onwards, particularly the 20th century, and in many respects clearly expresses violence and hatred. Explaining the features of Hindutva, Ambassador Qazi said that the hatred and resentment in Hindutva is derived from a resentment against foreign rule, first the Muslims and then the British and then what they see as division of Mother India into two states which is what Pakistan is. Therefore, he said, Pakistan is considered as illegitimate from the start and this has been expressed in many developments like communal

riots and hostility towards Pakistan. Ambassador Qazi quoted an Indian scholar Shiri Ram who once wrote that the login of Modi government is development, but the password is Hindu. He said that Mr. Hali has expertly traced the emergence of Hindutva or the *Sangh Pariwar* from fringes and sidelines of political spectrum to a mainstreamed group in Indian polity.

Commenting on the domestic electoral environment, Ambassador Qazi said that India is on the verge of another election in 2019 and the representatives of Hindutva are not only mainstream but under Modi it will be first time that a BJP leader on his own may won the majority in Lok Sabha as they had to make coalitions with other parties previously. He said that with the decline of Congress Party, particularly in the art of coalition, the BJP was in a better position to offer more to regional parties. But with the coming of Modi, the need for building coalitions had been transcended. He added that after five years of Modi administration, the latest polls are showing that BJP and Modi most certainly will not get majority and their best hope is to get the majority through building a coalition either pre or post elections. The economic performance under Modi, while still being reasonable, is not as bright as was promised earlier and this will also influence election outcome, he opined. Ambassador Qazi said that since Modi has not much to show on the domestic front, therefore, the greater emphasis is now on the enemy at the door - Pakistan. So we are now seeing what Mr. Hali has indicated in his book as a growing Hindutva phenomenon. He concluded by saying that Mr. Hali's book has come out at an extremely important time and what we are seeing now coming out of India is exactly what this book has discussed.

Senator (Retd) Nisar Memon expressed his pleasure for being at the prestigious Institute of Strategic Studies and commended Group Captain Hali for writing a book of contemporary importance for Pakistan and the South Asian region. Commenting on Hindutva and Hindus, Senator Memon was of the view that the history of Hindutva over a century, its actions, impact and myths have been documented in this book in a scholarly manner giving references of Hindu writers and their books. He quoted a statement from the book attributed to Indian politician Shashi Tharoor explaining Hindutva which, "seeks to impose a narrow set of beliefs, doctrines and practices on an eclectic and loosely-knit faith, in denial of the considerable latitude traditionally available to believers." He said that the Indian constitution given by its founding fathers clearly envisages a socialist, secular and democratic republic. However, with the rise of Hindutva to power, we see India's transition from its multi religious heterogeneous culture to

Hindu cultural nationalism, striking at the very foundation of its constitution. Senator Memon said that Hindutva has been used as a creed to get political control, like many other extremist philosophies like Nazism, Zionism, and Daesh. He said that intelligence agencies play a vital role in foreign and security matters and the author of this book has studied and analyzed the rise of Ajit Doval who is a key practitioner of Hindutva. He added that in line with Chanakyan guile and deceit, India has extensively used, and is using state terrorism as means to achieve its hegemony in the region. The book deals with this phenomenon in great detail and makes the assertion that RAW has used communication including fiction, cinema, false flag operations as weapons from its arsenal. He praised Mr. Hali for aptly explaining how Hindutva elements in Indian polity have impacted relations with China on Doklam Bhutan, Xinjian, Tibet and South China Sea.

In his concluding remarks, Chairman BOG, ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood praised the author Mr. S.M. Hali for this wonderful book that attempts to deepen the understanding about rise of Hindutva in Indian polity and its implications. He sincerely hoped that this book would act as a catalyst for researchers, media and political medium for further deliberations on the topic. He added that the internal developments within India in the context of "Rising Hindutva" is not an isolated trend in the broader global context. We are also witnessing the rise of somewhat similar trends and tendencies at the global level where identity politics is taking primacy in world politics for instance, rising populism, anti-globalization, anti-immigration and economic nationalism in the West. Within India, he said, that the violent acts like cow vigilante, communal violence against Muslims, Christians, as well as Dalits, and slurs like 'Love Jihad' are becoming an expression of this identity politics.

He said that India-Pakistan rivalry is a well-understood phenomenon in the region and abroad, both at the academic and policy making levels. What is less understood, is the implications of Hindutva brand over the relationship between the two nuclear armed rivals which are already beset by complications. This is where this book comes in handy as it attempts to answer these and many important questions and in fact has given rise to additional queries and untested hypothesis. Ambassador Mahmood commended Mr. Hali for making an excellent academic effort and hoped that this will not be the last one on this subject and looked forward to read more on this topic.