**Fifth generation warfare against Pakistan exposed**

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Last week, a report from a Brussels based NGO, EU DisinfoLab created ripples across the world.

As it uncovered a massive 15 year-long Indian web of propaganda, lies and fake news manipulating international institutions like the European Union and the United Nations “to serve Indian interests”, and “discredit” Pakistan in the international arena. The researchers referred to it as the “largest network” of disinformation they have unearthed so far.

The EU Disinfo Lab report revealed that the disinformation network was carried out by a New Delhi based entity Srivastava Group. The aim of this operation was information warfare primarily against Pakistan, but it also targeted China – both being India’s biggest rivals in the region. The goal was to influence international bodies like the United National Human Rights Council and the European Parliament against Pakistan by fabricating stories and then disseminating it through their vast network of fake news media to mainstream real news channels and media houses.

India-based Srivastav Group employed a network of more than 750 fake news media outlets as well as 10 ghost-NGOs. It even resurrected Louis Sohn known as the “grandfather of international human rights law”. Mr Sohn died in 2006, but he was listed as an attendee of the UNHCR 2007 and as a participant to an event which took place in 2011 in Washington DC.

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The report revealed that a website called “EU Chronicle” with a declaration of delivering &quot;news from the European Union&quot; was the latest source of the misinformation campaign. Some of the organizations being run by the Srivastav Group posed as NGOs to influence Members of European Parliament (MEP) included “the Women&#39;s Economic and Social Think Tank (WESTT), the South Asia Democracy Forum and Friends of Gilgit-Baltistan,” to name a few.

The content posted against Pakistan and China on the EU Chronicle was “often reused by the Indian News Agency ANI and hundreds of other domains, including outlets such as the Sierra Leone Times or TajikistanNews.net.” As per the report, at least eight clips of ANI based on the material from the EU Chronicle website were published on the Indian magazine BW Business World. This is only one instance of an organised web of lies, deceit, propaganda and fake news being carried out against Pakistan in specific, was unearthed.

What is interesting to note is how the EU Chronicles attracted MEPs over the last 14 years or so. The report states in less than six months of its functioning, 11 MEPs became associated with it in different capacity. Some of them wrote articles and opinion pieces or endorsed them on the platform.

During the research, it was disclosed that the Srivastav Group organized international trips for MEPs to Kashmir, Bangladesh and Maldives through their think-tank called ‘International Institute of Non-Aligned Studies’. The latest sponsored trip occurred in October 2019 when nine of the eleven MEPs (associated with EU Chronicles) were taken to Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir, after its special constitutional status was revoked by the Indian government. The divulge of information is extremely worrisome as it raises many questions on the decision making of the European Commission on issues pertaining to the South Asian region in general and Pakistan in particular, considering how its MEPs were influenced with a purpose to amplify Indian interests in Brussels at the policy-making level.

According to the EU DisinfoLab’s managing Director Gary Machado, &quot;What we learned in this investigation is that it is possible to turn EU Institutions into unwitting actors of a 15-year influence operation. With lobbying and fake media, Indian Chronicles [the name DisinfoLab has given to the operation] has been successful in building a strong sense of a constant official support of the EU to Indian interests, reaching millions in South-Asia.&quot;

The EU Chronicles are not a single instance of Indian fake news and propaganda against Pakistan. In 2019, it was revealed that a coordinated network of 265 pro-Indian sites operating across 65 countries including “UN-accredited NGOs promoting Indian interests and criticizing Pakistan repeatedly”, were traced to the India-based Srivastav Group. “These UN-accredited NGOs work in coordination with non-accredited think-tanks and minority-rights NGOs in Brussels and Geneva. Several of them – like the European Organization for Pakistani Minorities (EOPM), Baluchistan House and the South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF) – were directly but opaquely created by the Srivastava group. Events were held at the European Parliament where Pakistan would be criticized, all were bank-rolled by the New-Delhi based group.

One instance was the fake news site “EP Today”, exposed in 2019 which was then shutdown after this news was uncovered by POLITICO, based on the research from the EUDisinfoLab. The aim of “EP Today” was to highlight “highlight anti-Pakistan comments by some MEPs It should be noted that EU Chronicles main audience was not Brussels or the European people but the Indian populace. The fake news and propaganda items were picked up by mainstream Indian channels and publications. which was then accessed by hundreds of millions of Indians, since the fake news operation began in 2006.

It is a known fact that India is the biggest manufacturer of fake news in the world especially when it comes to targeting its minorities, like Muslims. Whatsapp forwards based on fake news have resulted in several public lynching’s of Muslims and other minorities in India. Even COVID19 was used to spread Islamophobia by Indian authorities and extremists who termed it as ‘CoronaJihad’ to target Muslims, and claimed they were deliberately spreading the virus. So much so that one of the leaders from the rightwing ruling-party BJP asked to ‘not buy from Muslim’ vendors.

The Islamophobia and hate speeches in India against Muslims became so heightened that in April, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Government of Kuwait, Princess Hend al-Qassimi, a member of the UAE royal family, and several Arab activists called out the Indians.

But this Indian behaviour is not new and Pakistan has been at the receiving end of Indian propaganda and fake news from decades now. The recent expose has only accentuated how far Indian machinery can go to harm Pakistan in the international arena, and how the latter’s fears of its Eastern neighbour using hybrid warfare against it, are based on facts.

The EU DisinfoLab revelations give credence to Pakistan’s claims that a fifth-generation warfare is being waged against the country. It is impossible to believe that the massive anti-Pakistan operations being run by the Srivastav Group had no backing from the Indian state.

The real consequences of this 15-year long Indian operation are hard to collate, but they cannot be neglected. The jingoistic Indian media regularly publishes fake news items against Pakistan and Muslims to achieve political interests of the ruling party in New Delhi. One example that took place in October was where Indian news organizations claimed that a “civil war” had erupted in Karachi, whereas reality could not have been more different. New Delhi has taken the same route to disseminate propaganda and fake news as was taken by the Nazi Germany.

It is time that the European Union, the United Nations, and other international institutions must introspect about its decision-making process and how it receives information and from where. Fake news cannot be taken lightly. It can have far-reaching consequences for international peace. It is significant that perpetrators from and behind the Srivastav Group are exposed brought to the court of law. The EU must devise a framework to ensure that such instances do not take place again.

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