[Malik Muhammad Ashraf](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/malik-muhammad-ashraf)

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**Web of deception**

Media in the modern era has emerged as the most powerful tool in influencing public opinion, changing attitudes as well as becoming a potent avenue for spreading disinformation and false propaganda against adversaries.

The web of deception woven by India to malign, denigrate and portray Pakistan in dismal colours in the eyes of the global community by generating and propagating false and fake news through a network of 750 fake media outlets and 550 website domain names in 162 countries as revealed by EU DisinfoLab has laid bare India’s sinister machinations to ruin the image of our country.

Reportedly, Indian RAW set up a fake front entity Srivastava Group (SG) with headquarters in New Delhi in 2005; this group over the last fifteen years developed this network of propaganda. Its modus operandi was using fake publications to spread fake news about Pakistan and then having them highlighted by ANI, a premier Indian news agency. It also got this news circulated among unsuspecting EU parliamentarians and members of the UN to maneuver unsavoury comments and statements by them against Pakistan. India has also been using fictional NGOs to spread disinformation and has been using these platforms to influence foreign dignitaries as well.

The report by EU DisinfoLab says: “we have uncovered an entire network of coordinated UN-accredited NGOs promoting Indian interests and criticizing Pakistan repeatedly. We could tie at least 10 of them directly to [the] SG family with several other dubious NGOs pushing the same messages.” The researchers of the group that unearthed this network also called for sufficient measures to counter such widespread and coordinated disinformation campaigns such as the one outlined in their report, titled ‘Indian Chronicles’. They said: “It is also our belief that the possibility for malicious actors to abuse search engines by reproducing the same content hundreds of times should also be challenged”.

There is no doubt that this sustained campaign has to a great extent tarnished Pakistan’s image at the global level. The strategy was deftly crafted to also influence decision-making in the EU Parliament and the UN as well as divert the world’s attention from the human rights record within India and in Indian occupied Kashmir.

Those who are savvy about Indian designs in the region and its perennial hostility towards Pakistan are not surprised by what India has been doing to tarnish Pakistan’s image at the global level. A cunning enemy like India cannot be expected to do otherwise. But what is surprising is how this was not detected by our own agencies and why successive governments failed to mount an appropriate challenge to such designs.

India undoubtedly is hell-bent on harming Pakistan by all means. It played an active role in the dismemberment of Pakistan, has fomented and supported insurgency in Balochistan and acts of terrorism within Pakistan as confessed by Kulbhushan Jhadav, and RAW has also been using Afghan soil to sponsor terrorism in Pakistan. Pakistan has recently handed over a dossier to the UN, containing irrefutable evidence regarding state terrorism by India, and also shared it with European governments through their envoys based in Islamabad.

Now that RAW has been caught red-handed, Pakistan has rightly urged the EU, UN and UNHCR for a credible probe into the unprecedented manipulation of the EU Parliament and its legislative process by fake media organizations involved in anti-Pakistan propaganda under a fully funded disinformation and influence operation run by India.

The revelations by EU DisinfoLab have coincided with reports about India once again planning to destroy peace in the region by launching yet another false-flag operation against Pakistan in a bid to divert the attention of the world community from India’s internal strife as well as the blatant human rights abuses in Occupied Kashmir. In this regard, India could launch attacks along the LOC and Working Boundary. In view of this threat, Pakistani forces have been put on high alert to thwart any such eventuality.

The present reality is that since the advent of Narendra Modi as Indian prime minister, the country has upped the ante against Pakistan, particularly in the backdrop of its illegal and unilateral action of scrapping Article 370 of the Indian constitution and declaring Occupied Kashmir part of the Indian union.

Indian security forces continue with their killing spree in Occupied Kashmir and the persistent violation of the ceasefire agreement targeting civilian population along the LOC. This also almost brought the two nuclear powers to the brink of war when in February 2019 India attacked imaginary terrorist targets in Balakot, Pakistan. However, the restraint shown by Pakistan and intervention by friendly countries prevented the situation from descending into cataclysmic consequences. Any similar adventures by India, as feared, may not have the same results. It all may rather snowball into a full-fledged war between the two countries.

Pakistan, as is evident from the foregoing, is faced with a persistent and formidable hybrid war by India. Notwithstanding the fact that the world community remains indifferent to Indian abuse of human rights in Occupied Kashmir and its belligerent posture towards Pakistan – which threatens regional peace – Pakistan must persist with its diplomatic offensive to unmask Indian machinations against it.

In my view, Pakistan should formally raise the issue at the UNSC and all our missions abroad should be tasked to sensitize the relevant governments about the sinister Indian campaign to malign Pakistan; they should also brief them on the nature of the threat the RSS and its Hindutva ideology poses to peace and security in the region.

Meanwhile, there is also a need to maintain a matching nuclear and conventional deterrent to the Indian threat, upgrading our intelligence network and devising appropriate strategies to counter Indian propaganda. Promoting national unity and harnessing the economic prowess of the country could also help a great deal in neutralizing India, an imperative which can hardly be overemphasized.

The writer is a freelance contributor. Email: ashpak10@gmail.com