



Institute of Regional Studies

India's smear campaign against Pakistan has no limits, FM

ISLAMABAD, February 22, 2021: "India's smear campaign against Pakistan has no limits," said Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi. He was speaking at the concluding session of a seminar titled 'Disinformation as a Tool of Strategic Warfare' organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Monday. Referring to the recent report of the EU Disinformation Lab titled *Indian Chronicles*, the Foreign Minister stated that India had misused prestigious international and UN institutions for its nefarious designs. "Members of European Parliament were duped, disinformed and unabashedly manipulated" and "think-tanks, researchers and even students were used as pawns to peddle Indian fallacies," said the Foreign Minister.



Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi shared that the Government of Pakistan had called upon the international community to take due cognizance of India's systematic designs to damage Pakistan's image and international standing. He further shared that he had written to the EU High Representative asking him to make India accountable for its deeds that had been unearthed by an independent not-for-profit organization funded by the EU itself. He added that Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York had written to the chair of the NGO committee in ECOSOC to de-register the 10 fake NGOs identified in the *Indian Chronicles*. The foreign minister was of the view that *Indian Chronicles* had revealed the real face of India and its hate for Pakistan. He termed maligning Pakistan an article of faith for the BJP-RSS dispensation in New Delhi.

Speaking on the occasion earlier in the day, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir Mr Shahryar Khan Afridi urged the media, the fourth pillar of the state, to exercise freedom of expression without compromising the national interest of the country. He urged the media in Pakistan to highlight the contributions of Pakistan in hosting millions of Afghan refugees for decades, giving innumerable sacrifices in the war on terror, and fighting drug trafficking. He added that India stood exposed in front of the world after the revelations of the EU Disinformation Lab. He termed the prevalence of rape, the violation of minorities, and the controls on freedom of expression in India a scar on its international status.

Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs Ms Andleeb Abbas enumerated three challenges of countering disinformation in the 21st century: one, the use and abuse of information technology; two, the reality of the post-truth world where facts were constructed; and the inability of the international institutions to adapt to this new reality of fake news. She was of the view that India had created layers upon layers of deceit giving rise to the more dangerous reality of the fake news than plain ignorance.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed called for busting myths about propaganda that it was only linked to dictatorships, it was only employed in a situation of war, and it was only orchestrated through state-controlled media. He shared that the *Indian Chronicles* report of the EU Disinformation Lab had revealed that India was operating 750 fake internet sites and using 10 UN accredited NGOs across 116 countries to run a malicious disinformation campaign against Pakistan. Senator Sayed underscored the impact of disinformation by sharing that according to a survey 33 per cent of Americans believed that the US had discovered weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq while another 22 per cent believed that Iraq had used them. He further added that India's disinformation campaign against Pakistan revealed by the EU Disinformation Lab was something new because it was conducted for 15 years to malign a neighbouring country against which India did not have active hostilities.

Pakistan's former Ambassador to China Amb Masood Khalid said that fake news travelled faster than true news through social media and called for greater regulation of social media platforms. He condemned Indian tactics of spreading falsehoods about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Prof Glenn Diesen of the South Eastern University of Norway, who addressed the seminar virtually, stated that while the attempts by states to promote a national narrative were not new, international



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redistribution of power and the emergence of new technologies had emerged more recently. He said that while the states were trying to control and nationalize the internet, there was a need to debate the control of the digital space.

Prof Athina Karatzogianni of the Leicester University, who addressed the seminar virtually, highlighted the reach of the internet through cellphones around the world. She was of the view that the countries with lower levels of trust in their governments and politicized and fragmented societies were more susceptible to fake news rather than the ones with vibrant media environments.

Air Cdr (Retd) Khalid Banuri said that while spread of disinformation and propaganda had been used in warfare for a long time, it had been used in combination with kinetic warfare. The new wave of disinformation like the one unleashed by India, he maintained, was used in isolation of any kinetic warfare in peace time. He urged building a state narrative to counter fake news through the media and education. He further stated that trust was an element of authority when it came to news, therefore, the state needed to work on enhancing the level of confidence its people had in its narrative.

Defence Analyst Lt Gen (Retd) Naeem Lodhi remarked that social media could do anything mainstream media could but, in addition, could also interact with its audiences and their networks to tailor their inputs to their needs. For a country to unleash a disinformation campaign like the one India conducted, it had to have the capacity as well as the will to strategize and implement it, according to him.

Political Analyst Dr Huma Baqai was of the view that blaming the Asia News International (ANI) or Srivastava Group for the revelations of the *Indian Chronicles* was misplaced. She was of the view that the Indian government was responsible for the spread of fake news through distortion and concealment of reality.

Prof Shahab Enam Khan from Bangladesh highlighted how it was become more and more difficult for states to deal with the problem of fake news. He further highlighted that the countries in South Asia were not faring very high on the global freedom of press rankings.

Pakistan's former Permanent Representative to the UN Geneva, Amb. Faruk Amil urged the need for organizing the society to respond to fake news and to use soft diplomacy to promote Pakistan's cause.

Professor of International Relations at the NESAS US Dr Hassan Abbas termed independent and free media as the first line of defence against the spread of disinformation. He called for an institutional approach toward countering propaganda and urged the policymakers to agree on a resilient system to counter disinformation. He further called for educating the future generations on identifying fake information.

Columnist and public policy professional Mr Mosharraf Zaidi cautioned against reacting and responding and urged the policymakers to evolve a set of policy principles to counter propaganda. He called for building platforms and partnerships for building tolerance.

Pakistan's former permanent representative to the UN Geneva, Amb. Zamir Akram stated that disinformation was part of warfare. He called for developing a narrative to counter disinformation and align Pakistan's capabilities with its objectives.

President IRS Amb Nadeem Riyaz urged the governments and people to work together to ensure that people and governments were not led astray with fake news, propaganda, and false narratives. This, he added, could only be safeguarded with news literacy, high quality journalism, and social responsibility. Amb Riyaz further added that was imperative for the general public, policymakers, media houses, and governments to verify a news item through multiple sources before accepting any narrative. This, he added, could reduce damage caused by fake news and disinformation.