

Daily Fake News

Saturday 26th June 2021

Mass violence as COVID exacerbates sectarian tensions



As places of worship move to becoming online meeting spaces in the new COVID reality, intelligence agencies are allegedly increasingly targeting religious minorities as part of a concerted monitoring campaign.

By Nigella Negative

Over a year on from the outbreak of the corona virus and that old epithet of 'building back better' seems a forgotten fallacy as COVID response measures continue to exacerbate tensions among religious minority communities globally, and as mandatory global tracking systems lead to decreased freedoms and an increasingly powerful surveillance state.

In a toxic triage of high and rising unemployment, increasing poverty and restrictions on movement following the devastating second spike of the virus last winter, violence continues to escalate across Pakistan, India, Brazil, Yemen, Myanmar, Nigeria and many parts of Europe as angry protesters look for someone to blame for the virus and its resultant economic impacts that have ravaged their communities and the global economy.

Already persecuted religious minorities are facing increased targeting under conceptions that they are "dirty" and the

"spreaders" of the virus, with global watchdogs observing a spike in online hate speech, discrimination and incitement to violence over the past few months as angry mobs, as part of an increasingly coordinated violent backlash, target religious minorities for their perceived role in perpetuating the pandemic, including looting businesses and burning villages and places of worship, leading to pogrom-like actions against some communities.

Facebook and Twitter have faced mounting criticism for their seeming inability to keep pace with the unprecedented and largely unpredicted growth of hate speech on their platforms, where many groups have been mobilising for violence. Facebook could not be reached for comment, however a representative from Twitter stated that:

"We are working hard to respond to the spike in reports of hate speech, and have recruited specialist staff to review cases in line with national and international human rights legislation".

As sectarian tension escalates, critics

state that social media providers have been on the back foot throughout this crisis and are failing in their responsibility to moderate their own platforms and to foster safe spaces online, with some sources calling for social media to be taken offline altogether in an effort to stay the backlash in a row which has incensed anti-censorship lobbyists.

This follows the controversy in Silicone Valley following the recent whistleblower leak, which exposed several US communications giants, including Zoom and Facebook, for giving intelligence agencies direct access to millions of personal accounts in order to monitor online social and religious gatherings.

As places of worship move to becoming online meeting spaces in the new COVID reality, intelligence agencies are allegedly increasingly targeting religious minorities as part of a concerted monitoring campaign.

This comes hot on the heels of the recent outcry following the decree that movement tracker apps will now become mandatory for any citizen

wishing to access national health services, in a troubling move away from privacy and data protection laws as authorities are afforded an increased oversight and control over people's lives.

As divides become more entrenched through COVID, as tensions become exacerbated and as governments move to ringfence online and offline freedoms, religious minorities, stigmatised in their communities and under increasingly targeted surveillance online, are further suffering as it becomes clear that religious buildings will not be able to re-open for the foreseeable future, with all forms of events and organised worship banned under the new emergency COVID legislation introduced last month.

As increasing sectarianism decimates minority religious communities globally, greed and fear surpass that once proud dictat *we're all in this together* as it becomes clear in this pandemic that everyone, and every nation state, is for themselves - and Big Brother is watching you.

Disclaimer: This article is fictional. It was developed to provoke discussion & debate at the webinar "What can be done to address religious inequalities in post-COVID transition?", organised by CREID in June 2020. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the programme.

Image: 'Big Brother graffiti in France', Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 3.0