

JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA

New Delhi-110025

July 20, 2021

Press Release

JMI organises Extension Lecture on “Hydro-Dynamics in South Asia”

The Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (NMCPCR), Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) organised a virtual Extension Lecture on July 17, 2021 on “Hydro-Dynamics in South Asia”. The Lecture was delivered by Dr. Uttam Kumar Sinha, Research Fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

The Honorary Director of NMCPCR, Prof. Kaushikee welcomed the speaker and introduced him.

Dr. Sinha began his lecture by talking about the broad context. Water can be looked at in two ways – as a source of tension and conflicts between and within states, and as a peace-building mechanism. Water is a security issue due to the following reasons: there is a territorial aspect to water in that it is found in transboundary rivers and lakes; it is the most shared resource in the world and most of all, there is no substitute for it. Further, the speaker debunked the thesis about ‘Water Wars’. According to him, water can be a catalyst but it can never directly lead to wars and historical evidence going back to almost 4000 years points to this. However, it is also a fact that water may lead to disputes and tensions.

Next, the speaker focused on the limited nature of water. Though 71 percent of the earth’s surface is covered with water, only 3 per cent of water on the earth is fresh or living. 2 per cent of this 3 per cent is stored in glaciers and ice caps. Only 1 percent of the fresh water is therefore in flowing form and 40 per cent of this is invisible as it is groundwater. So, we are left with only 60 per cent of the 1 per cent which is visible fresh water in the rivers, lakes, streams etc. This limited water has enormous interactive value and this is where states are engaging in either extracting and using it or sharing it with other states.

The speaker also highlighted that water is not just a contested resource but is also expressed from a cultural and civilizational point of view. It is a political, emotive and divisive issue and there is a lot of myth-making that takes place around it. The future projection about water, however, indicates that there will be water-stressed conditions mainly due to increase in the population and the pattern of human consumption in terms of food and energy requirements.

Additionally, climate change will have a negative impact – rise of temperature is likely to lead to extreme flooding and other hydro-meteorological disasters. In such a scenario, there is a need to go in for climate resilient infrastructure.

In the succeeding part, Dr. Sinha focused on hydro-politics in South Asia. All countries share rivers with India and India shares borders with all countries of South Asia. So, there is a very strong riverine neighborhood in South Asia. There is hydro-cooperation or water cooperation but there is politics around it too. He argued that hydro-cooperation itself is hydro-politics but sensible hydro-politics has prevailed in South Asia. This, however, does not mean that there will

be no competing claims over water. Water will in fact remain deeply political but there are ways to manage it. Water treaties are not just about water but about hegemony, high political leadership engagement, history, political climate etc.

The speaker further described the riparian behavior of South Asian states which presents interesting comparisons. India is an upper riparian when it comes to Pakistan & Bangladesh, and Nepal & China are upper riparian when it comes to India. China controls Tibet which is the source of the majority of its water. Besides it does not have any water sharing treaty with any other state – in the case of Brahmaputra it only has an MoU with India. India, on the other hand, is bound by treaties. So, India has a more bilateral and regional approach compared to China's unilateral approach.

Talking about hydro-diplomacy or cooperation, Dr. Sinha mentioned that there are perpetual conflicts on boundaries in South Asia and in most cases rivers act as boundaries. Secondly, rivers offer an active space for cooperation – they are important for prosperity, have navigational value and are essential for trade and commerce. So, sharing information and data with the neighbouring countries and having greater transparency is vital for cooperation.

Thirdly, there is the idea of Water-Peace Continuum which entails that we first resolve all issues and establish peace and then go for water cooperation. As a result, water cooperation today is on a downward trend. He concluded his lecture by calling for a re-conceptualization of geographies in South Asia as the cost of non-cooperation would be enormous. We thus need to look at it from a new lens and have a sub-regional approach towards it. Considering it as a riverine neighborhood is the way to move forward.

The lecture was followed by a Question & Answer session. The event concluded with the Honorary Director proposing a vote of thanks to Dr. Uttam Kumar Sinha for his insights and for engaging with a relevant theme. The lecture was attended by faculty members, students, and research scholars of NMCPCR, and also by students and faculty members of other centres and departments of JMI.

Public Relations Office
Jamia Millia Islamia