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Press Release

JMI organizes Online Lecture on Sri Lanka: Tamil Nationalism Post-LTTE

The MMAJ Academy of International Studies organised an Online Lecture on the topic “Sri Lanka: Tamil Nationalism Post-LTTE” on 14th July 2021 as part on its South Asia Lecture Series. The lecture was delivered by Mr. N. Sathiya Moorthy, Distinguished Fellow and Director, Observer Research Foundation, Chennai. He is a well-known journalist and an expert on Sri Lanka and Maldives.

Prof. Ajay Darshan Behera, Officiating Director, MMAJ AIS chaired the session and welcomed the speaker and the participants. In his introductory remarks, Prof. Behera referring to the growth of Tamil nationalism historically in Sri Lanka raised questions about the nature of Tamil nationalism after the end of a violent militant phase after the decimation of the LTTE in 2009. But unfortunately the demands of the Tamils for a fair equitable share in powers have not been addressed. The moderate Tamil nationalist movement in the post-LTTE period is in disarray. It was, therefore, important to understand the nature of Tamil nationalism in the contemporary context.

Mr. N. Sathiya Moorthy began his lecture by elaborating the historical context of the Tamil-Sinhala issue. He traced the relations to the past two thousand years. He pointed to the significance of the Sinhala only Act passed in 1956 by the Sri Lankan government leading to the growth of Tamil nationalism. The mishandling of peaceful Gandhian Tamil protests by the Sri Lankan police became the grounds for the Tamil youth’s resentment and created an environment of animosity and eventually led to the Tamil youths turning towards militancy and the subsequent quest for a separate state. The 1983 riots in Colombo targeted ordinary Tamils and Tamils who dominated small businesses in the city. From this period on India’s involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict grew.

Mr. Moorthy analyzing the LTTE leader, V. Prabhakaran pointed to his flawed understanding of sentiments about the Tamil militants. He pointed how the demand for a separate Tamil nation had now died down in Sri Lanka and was dominantly being carried forward by a narrative still espoused by the Tamil diaspora. He surmised that looking at the way the political groups within the Tamil society interacted with the Sri Lankan government in regards to finding a political solution to the issue, the Sri Lankan government was very unlikely to concede to anything. The Tamil cause was still a national problem and the West’s fixation with human rights and accountability overlooked key ground realities in the Tamil-Sinhala relations. He believed that the Tamil struggle was a dying cause and if the Sri Lankan government focused on development and jobs and healing with conversations within the communities, some solution could be found.

The lecture saw enthusiastic participation of people from diverse backgrounds. Prof. Ajay Darshan Behera, Officiating Director, MMAJ AIS thanked the speaker for his valuable insights and the participants for their interest and questions.

