International Centre for Ethnic Studies

Professor Shahul Hasbullah

Professor Benedikt Korf

In Memoriam to Professor Shahul Hasbullah:
Territorial anxieties and the impossibility of boundary demarcation

by

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Abstract:

This talk is dedicated to the work of late Professor Shahul Hasbullah. I will discuss collaborative research with late Professor Shahul Hasbullah on the politics of boundary demarcations of local administrative units in Eastern Sri Lanka to commemorate his academic legacy. Taking the controversy around the formation of a new administrative entity, Koralai Pattu Central D.S. division (known as "KPC"), and the delineation of its territorial boundaries as a case study, this research shows the impossibility of demarcating local administrative boundaries to the satisfaction of "local people", because the demands voiced by "local" populations are deeply contradictory and antagonistic, especially if they are couched in an ethnic register. Our presentation will trace the history of the evolution of KPC and neighbouring D.S. divisional secretariats and the Pradeshiya Sabha system from the late 1980s, to illustrate how administrative boundary demarcation and ethnic segregation became increasingly entangled. The contradictions and controversies around the boundary demarcation in the Batticaloa district illustrate the impossibility of boundary demarcation as a politics of (ethnic) purification – the attempt to purify administrative (and political) entities into ethnically homogenous territorial containers. The case of "KPC" has lessons, not only for Batticaloa's politics, but for boundary demarcation politics for administrative or electoral purposes in Sri Lanka more broadly.

28th January 2020 at 4 p.m.
ICES Auditorium,
2, Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8