

„Discovering International Relations and Contemporary Global Issues“

Cultural Relations Policy

News and Background

February 2013





About CRP News & Background

Cultural Relations Policy News & Background is a part of ICRP Monthly Review Series and an initiative of Institute for Cultural Relations Policy Budapest. Launched in 2012, its mission is to provide information and analysis on key international political events. Each issue covers up-to-date events and analysis of current concerns of international relations on a monthly basis.

As an initiative of ICRP, the content of this magazine is written and edited by student authors. The project, as part of the Institute's Internship Programme provides the opportunity to strengthen professional skills.



Editorial Team

Andras Lorincz, Series Editor

Ádám Török, Jenelle Ramsaroop, Petra Hinterauer, Norbert Imre, Wazir Ali,
Authors – Issue February 2013

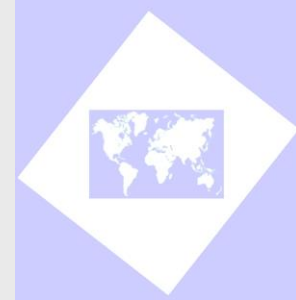
Csilla Morauszki, Executive Publisher

© Institute for Cultural Relations Policy

ICRP Geopolitika Kft

45 Gyongyosi utca, Budapest 1031 - Hungary

Contents



-
- 01** Pope steps down after eight years of papacy

 - 04** Hungary and Romanian Székely flag dispute

 - 07** Kosovar and Serbian presidents to discuss normalization

 - 08** Syrian civil war goes on for almost two years

 - 10** François Hollande declares Mali intervention successful

 - 12** Tribal conflicts in Sudan

 - 13** North Korea tests raises threats for South Korea and US

 - 15** Intensifying anti-Shia violence in Pakistan

 - 17** Protests in Bangladesh for capital punishment of war crimes

 - 18** Towards peace in the Philippines

 - 19** China hits back over cyber-warfare allegations

 - 20** End of an era in Cuba

 - 21** News in Brief

Pope steps down after eight years of papacy



Pope Benedict XVI at a private audience in 2006. Photo: Giuseppe Ruggirello [Wikimedia Commons]

On 11 February Pope Benedict XVI called a gathering of cardinals who supposed it will be about the canonization of three later saints, but the main attraction was a historic resignation which shocked the audience. He announced that because of his advanced age, he is no longer suited to lead the Roman Catholic Church of over a billion adherents. According to his

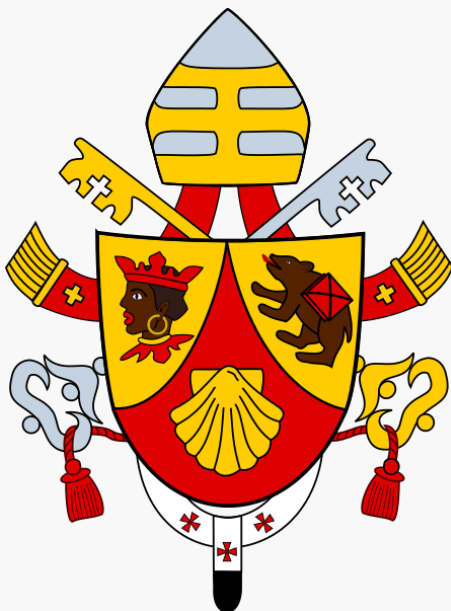
statement as a result of the weakening he went through during last months he recognized his incapacity to fulfill the ministry entrusted to him and needs the strength of mind and body.

The announcement was a great surprise for the participating cardinals who respected the papal decision which was made and proclaimed well aware of the seriousness and with full freedom. Editor of the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* revealed the resolution formed after the Pope's visit of Mexico and Cuba in March last year and since then it was shared with just a few closest counselors of the Holy Father.

Spokesman Father Federico Lombardi stated Pope Benedict – whose title changes to Pope Emeritus – intends to retire to the Castel Gandolfo papal residency near Rome then later he will move in Mater Ecclesiae monastery in Vatican City. After his retirement he would like to devote more time to prayer and meditation. It is said that he will keep wearing white dresses but his “trademark” red shoes which represent the blood of the martyrs will be replaced with brown color pairs.

Joseph Ratzinger as Benedict XVI was elected to the 265th pope of the church on 19 April 2005 and served for nearly 8 years.

As successor of the extraordinarily popular John Paul II who led the church successfully through turbulent periods of the world and pioneered a widely adored new kind of representation of the Catholic Church, Benedict had to satisfy high public expectations and the requirements of the clergy at the same time. Because he has a different personality than the charismatic John Paul II and since he reaffirmed the conservative position on issues like birth control, family and divorce, his critics often voice his tenure was a slight setback. It is also mentioned that his elderly – he took office 78 years old, the oldest elected since 1730 – could also be a factor which did not let him to operate as a dynamic manager. His success was achieved more within the church's inner structures. Reform attempts such as the downsizing of the Roman Curia and the reorganization of some other Vatican institutions supported an image of a clerk-like Pontiff of Rome. The sexual abuse cases damaged general reputation



The coat of arms of Pope Benedict XVI.



Pope Benedict XVI. in 2010. Photo: Kancelaria Prezydenta RP

of the church and people deem the Holy See did not helped to eliminate such deviations and rather chose an attitude marked by hush up behavior. Scandals broke out because of the incidents and disappointment was feed by Vatican's response.

During his papacy the dialogue between religions seems to be slowed down. Despite some new initiatives, such as the meeting of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, relations to other beliefs remained cool, partly because of some unfortunate statements of Benedict. The global background was also unfavorable to ground close ties between

religions, cultures. The Arab Spring has turned Middle East upside down and political-based violence undermined religious freedom and tolerance as well. Receiving formerly excommunicated holocaust denying bishops back into communion overshadowed the Jewish-Catholic cooperation and was a very divisive action within the church as well.

The fact that there is no a specific – medical – reason for the resignation boosts speculations about the antecedents and motivation of Benedict's decision. It is known that the Pope has a peacemaker, suffered a wrist break in 2009 and arthritis was diagnosed. Eyewitnesses sometimes described the Holy Father tired and he also dozed off during a Christmas Eve ceremony.

Benedictus PP XVI

The guesses suspecting non-health reasons beyond the scenes are mostly based on the leaked confidential documents appeared in the Italian media. The papers reveal dark phenomena of the Vatican's clergy containing homosexual and blackmailing affairs.

Pope Benedict issued a decree which enables cardinals to convene the pope-

electing conclave earlier than the former rule determined which stated the assembly must be opened no earlier than 15 days and no later than 20 days after the death or resignation of the Holy Father. Waiver of Benedict comes into force on 28 February at 8 pm. The new leader is expected to be elected by the middle of March since clergymen and experts suggest the election will not need more than a few days.

According to the regulation the number of electing cardinals is maximized in 120. Only those cardinals can be electing ones who has not turned to his 80th year till the day before the vacancy. Technically any Catholic male in good standing who reached the age of reason can be elected, but traditionally he is chosen from the cardinals. Habitually the conclave takes place in the Sistine Chapel and four votes are held per day with the use of hand-filled ballots burned after each procedure. After a candidate managed to obtain the required two thirds plus one votes – or if the conclave does not elect the new pope within 12 days, a selecting with a simple majority is also allowed – chemical additives turn the color of the smoke into white signing the success of the conclave to those waiting for the new pope at St. Peter's Square.

Hungarian-Romanian dispute over Székely flag

Romanian Prime Minister, Victor Ponta affirmed Romania's position during a cabinet meeting on February 6, 2013, responding to Hungarian Secretary of State, Zsolt Németh's comments the day before on the flying of the Székely flag, saying that Romania does not accept impertinence and patronization. Calling on the Romanian Foreign Minister Titus Corlăţean to give an immediate response to the Hungarian government, Ponta vigorously stated, "I wouldn't like to use an undiplomatic term, although I would have been tempted to say 'cheekiness' – lessons from anyone on how Romania should enforce its laws... I believe we do have the highest standards in Europe when it comes to the representation of minorities and local autonomy... I really don't think anyone can tell us what flags we may display and how we can display them..." Hungarian Ambassador Oszkár Fűzes was also called into the Romanian Foreign Ministry the same day to give an explanation of the Hungarian official's statements. According to reports, when questioned Fűzes affirmed Hungary's support for the flag being displayed in Romania. At an interview with a Romanian television station, he elaborated the position saying that Hungary is in support of territorial autonomy for the Székelys and advised the Romanians

to amend their constitution to make Romania a multinational nation. Bogdan Aureescu, undersecretary of the Romanian Foreign Ministry replied saying that "Zsolt Németh's statements are unacceptable and against the spirit of good neighborhood and strategic Partnership between Romania and Hungary", adding that both countries were part of an international and European system of values under which human rights protection, particularly those of national minorities, is essential.



*Ajnád (Nădejdea) village in Székely Land.
Photo: Szabiz37 [Wikimedia Commons]*

Zsolt Németh during his speech at the Székely flag display ceremony on February 5, 2013 at the Budafok City Hall in Budapest, had called Romania's decision to ban the Székely flag a "symbolic

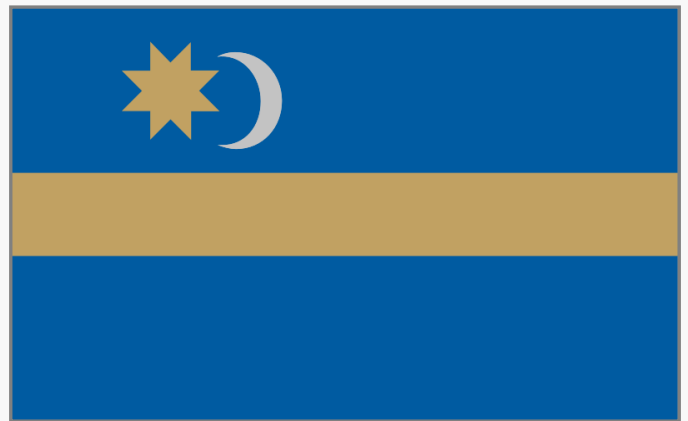
aggression” of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. In response to the ruling by the Covasna County Court that the Székely flag cannot be displayed in Romania he urged the mayors of the Hungarian municipalities to follow suit and hoist the flag of the Székely Land in solidarity. He further asserted that “the steps Romania has taken lately are contrary to Romanian-Hungarian cooperation, the values of strategic partnership, and the norms of the European Union.” Németh said that Budapest expects the Romanian government to intervene and bring an end to the dispute he termed “war of the flags” in the ethnically Hungarian areas of Romania. However, according to Hungarian ethnic party, RMD SZ President Hunor Kelemen, neither Németh's position nor the displaying of the Székely flag will solve Romania's issues.



Location of Székely Land in Europe

Németh's statements were hailed by József Kulcsár Terza, President of the Civic Hungarian Party (PCM) in Covasna, who also noted that Romania had no respect for the Székely, maintaining that if they did, the Székely flag would be displayed in the parliament. Hungarian Ambassador Oszkár Fűzes however negated the terminology used by Németh, stating that there was in

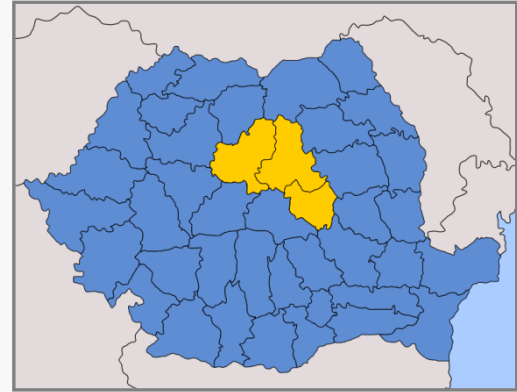
fact “no war of the flags” between the two nations, that the right and freedom to raise the flag is not a provocation or a trap but a “a natural right of the minority of the Székely in Romania...” He adamantly emphasized that the issue is that of “national identity of the Székely community”.



Flag of Székely Land (as used by the Szekler National Council)

Pro-autonomy peace marches for the Land of the Székelys began in January 2012 and had quickly spread beyond Transylvania and was increasingly gaining popularity in Hungary. In August 2012, Zsolt Németh openly declared Hungarian support for the autonomy of the Székely community. He, along with several other Hungarian officials including the Deputy Prime Minister of Hungary Zsolt Semjén, have been ardently supporting territorial autonomy for the Székely Land. For undisclosed reasons, in January 2013, the prefects of two largely Hungarian counties forbid the flying of the Székely flag on buildings in Romania. The flag had been flown in Romania since 2010 when László Kövér, speaker of the Hungarian parliament and supporter of the Székelys' plight ordered the flag's display

on the parliament building. On January 18, 2013 in response to the ruling by the Covasna County Court to ban the flag, the leader of RMDSZ called on Hungarian majors to hoist the flag of the Székely as a display of solidarity. Since then, several districts have shown their support and obliged the appeal. The first was Siófok, followed by Budafok and a few days later the historical Jewish area of Pest, District VII.



Location of Székely Land in Romania

“PRO-AUTONOMY PEACE MARCHES FOR THE LAND OF THE SZÉKELYS BEGAN IN JANUARY 2012 AND HAD QUICKLY SPREAD BEYOND TRANSYLVANIA ”

Kosovar and Serbian presidents to discuss normalization

Kosovar and Serbian presidents met in Brussels on February 6, 2013. Atifete Jahjaga and Tomislav Nikolić talked about the normalization of bilateral relations between Kosovo and Serbia. It was the first time when these countries met each other. Before the talks Jahjaga said she hoped the meeting would help to have better relations between the two neighbour countries. "This meeting is symbolic but also an important one, because this is a first meeting between the presidents of the Republic of Kosovo and Republic of Serbia, which is considered as a success for normalization and the advancement of relations of two sovereign and independent countries," "The main goal of this meeting is to find solutions for all the issues, with full consent, by respecting European norms and standards as well as international conventions," Kosovar president said.

This summit was organized by the European Union's foreign-policy chief, Catherine Ashton and was considered to be significant. Kosovo is one of the key issues to Serbia in order to join the European Union. The main goal of the meeting is to find solutions for the conflict as soon as possible.

During the summit Jahjaga did not mention

plans for agreement. In addition she declared the recognition of Kosovo would bring a strong stability in the region. Jahjaga added Pristine and Belgrade could support each other in the process of accession to the European Union as well. She mentioned that their main goal is the same: to achieve stability in the region and join the European Union.

Kosovo became independent from Serbia in 2008 with the support of the Albanian majority. Although Kosovo has a 93% Albanian majority, there are still Serbian ethnic groups isolated in the north of the country while not accepting the Kosovo administration. Most of the member states of the European Union have recognized Pristine so far. In spite of the fact that most neighbouring countries accepted the independence of Kosovo, there are still a few states, included Serbia, Romania along with Russia which object it.

Serbia has not acknowledged the government of Pristine so far. However the Serbian communities in North Kosovo demand autonomy which give an impetus to ethnic conflicts between Serbians and Albanians. Meanwhile the European Union Rule of Law Mission EULEX provides peace for Kosovars and the Serbian minority in the disputed territory.

Syrian civil war goes on for almost two years

Syria might fall into the Hands of radical Islamists

On February 9th 2013, an article was published about the comments of Syrian opposition leader in exile, Sheikh Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib. Soon after his comments about Hezbollah were misinterpreted in one of the leading newspapers in Israel. Sheikh Khatib later rejected the statements through his social networking site, declaring that his brief interview has been misinterpreted in the Israeli newspaper. That brief interview conducted by famous columnist and Israeli defence expert investigative journalist Ronen Bergman. Sheikh Khatib was quoted in the article reiterating the opposition's promise to keep Syria's chemical arsenal out of "the hands of unauthorized elements", and it was the international community, he said, not Israel that had "nothing to fear." Relations between Syria and Israel has not been good so far and especially after the conflicts in Syria raised many concerns to Israeli authorities about a possible threat from a Syrian Army backed rebel group, the Hezbollah. In this way, Israel is keeping a close eye on the movement of possible weapons of mass destruction in the hands of militant group like Hezbollah. Therefore,

the comments that were published in the Israeli newspaper by the Syrian opposition leader did not take light rather it provoked a debate in Syria and among different groups. And it is hard to find the evidence that Syrian Army is supporting Hezbollah with weapons and other logistical support, which can be possibly used against Israel during the current conflicts or after the end of civil war in Syria. There are also concerns raised among Israeli authorities about spill-over effects.



Sheikh Ahmad Moaz al-Khatib. Photo: SyrianNationalCoalition [Flickr]

Growing number of Syrian refugees flowing into neighbouring countries

On February 15th, 2013, it was reported that there has been more than 40,000 Syrians fleeing to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries. This resulted after three days fighting among the Syrian Military and the Free Syrian Army. FSA is believed to be consisted of different Islamic groups who are fighting to overthrow the regime in Syria led by President Bashar al-Assad. The fighting started in March 2011 during the uprisings in the Middle East that started in different Arab countries. Syria shares borders with Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Israel, and Turkey. Syrians had already started moving from the warzone to safer places in Syria and neighbouring countries. The new wave of displacement adds to an estimated 2.5 million people already



Syrian refugee on bus in Turkey. Photo: Henry Ridgwell [VOA]

uprooted within Syria, many living in squalid conditions in schools and other public buildings converted into shelters, according to the UN. The countries in which there is huge inflow of Syrian refugees are Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. These neighbouring countries have better economic conditions compared to Iraq. The uprising in Syria has now become one of the longest on-going internal conflict with the most casualties in the region. That raises concerns for the violation of human rights and other loss of properties to those who are being displaced to neighbouring countries. There is still question which Syrians seeks the answer that when this conflict will end?



Syrian refugees in Lebanon staying in small cramped quarters. Photo: Margaret Besheer [VOA]

“THE UPRISING IN SYRIA HAS BECOME ONE OF THE LONGEST ON-GOING INTERNAL CONFLICT WITH THE MOST CASUALTIES IN THE REGION”

François Hollande declares Mali intervention successful

French Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian announced on February 2, 2013 that France intended withdrawing their troops from Mali within weeks declaring the mission a successful intervention, despite continued clashes in the West African nation. The French Minister acknowledged that although the African army was not ready to take over from the French, he told the media that “we have no reason to stay ... it's a matter of weeks.” During his visit to the Saharan city of Timbuktu, French President François Hollande confirmed French pull-out plans and their eagerness to handover security to the UN-backed force of some 8,000 African troops. However he said that French military will remain until the al-Qaeda-linked extremists have been driven out.



Touareg secessionists . Photo: Magharebia



French troops prepare for take-off in Istres, France. Photo: Nathanael Callon [Africom]

In excess of 40 regional representatives and world bodies including the African Union, European Union, United Nations and ECOWAS, the regional West African Body met in Brussels on February 5, for the latest in a series of discussions on the stabilization and reconstruction of Mali following the defeat of the fundamentalist Muslim rebels. The conference organized by the EU primarily focused on Mali's future following the conflict, particularly the rebuilding of its economy, the creation of a new political structure that will permit Malians to be represented in the government and arrangements for the planned elections on July 31. Diplomatic focus was also placed on the French military's rapid progress against the rebels along with measures for ensuring a lasting peace to prevent what some anticipate will be a “simmering guerrilla war” future.

Questions of human rights violations have also raised concerns as separate reports by Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have accused the Malian army of undertaking extrajudicial killings. Hollande raised these humanitarian concerns while on his visit, saying, "There have been serious allegations of human rights violations committed by the Malian army, including summary executions and disappearances... incidents of mob lynching and looting of properties belonging to Arab and Tuareg communities. These communities are reportedly being accused of supporting armed groups, based simply on their ethnic affiliation."

Subsequent to the French withdrawal, the job of the African army will be to secure the towns in the northern region and pursue



Turban seller near Timbuktu, Mali. Photo: Alfred Weidinger[Flickr]



Azawad in dark green, with the remainder of Mali in gray

Islamist militants into their mountain retreats near Algeria's border. The Muslim insurgents have been fighting the Malian government since January 16, 2012 for independence of the Azawad area in Northern Mali. France sent around 3,700 ground troops to help retake back the Northern Malian region fearing that the area would become a terrorist haven. French assistance has been both overwhelmingly welcomed and resented by Malians. Those against, such as the Interim president of Mali, are unhappy about negotiations between France and the MNLA, a secular Tuareg Nationalist Militia. Several French hostages are being held by the Muslim rebels, while 11 westerners are believed to have also been captured by Jihadist elements. There has been no recent information on the status of the hostage situation.

“THE MUSLIM INSURGENTS HAVE BEEN FIGHTING THE MALIAN GOVERNMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE OF THE AZAWAD AREA IN NORTHERN MALI”

Tribal conflicts in Sudan

Tribal violence between Sudanese tribes has a long history and there are some separate ongoing conflicts in Southern Sudan and in the freshly founded country, Republic of South Sudan. In such arid, semi-arid environment there is just limited access to essential natural resources and the different – and antagonistic – lifestyle based on the way of using lands cause continuous tensions. In general, major conflicts lay between the grazing wandering Arab tribes and the settled and partly plant-cultivating African tribes.

Rebellion of African groups against the Arab-led central government has been the consequence of the unsolved situation for decades, but recent years oppositions between Arab tribes make the situation even more complex. These tribes have been supported with policy and with military equipment by the government in order to help putting down the insurgencies of the southern African tribes. Because of the insufficient quality and quantity of water, land for agriculture and because of the existence of valuable energy sources and precious metal deposits the competing tribes use their weapons against each other.

Heavy fighting broke out in early January between tribes Bani Hussein and Rezeigat Aballa over the exploration and exploitation of a gold mine located in

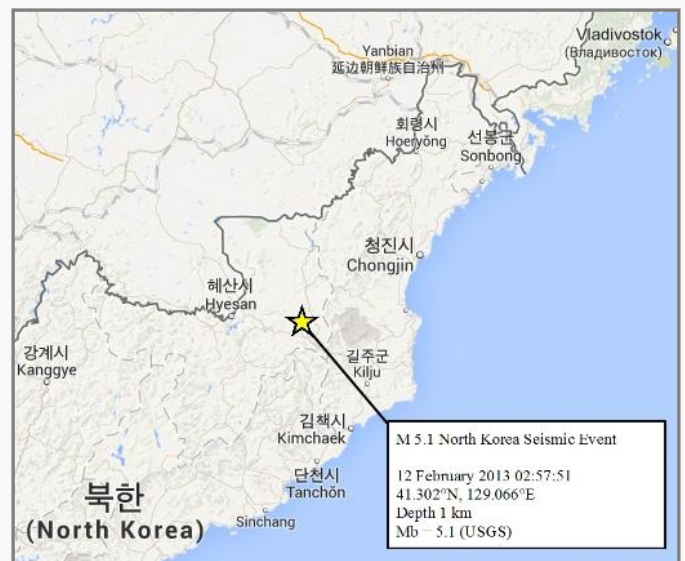
Jebel Amer area in North Darfur state. By the cease-fire was arranged later the month thousands of scared poor people had to leave their homes and the number of casualties was over 100. In spite of the tribal leaders mediated truce violence flared again. On 21 February a Rezeigat Aballa group attacked Bani Husseins in El Sireaf area killing 21 and wounding more than 30 people and the dead toll rose with more than 60 as the result of further clashes during February.

On 8 February a new incident took place in Jonglei state when a band of Murle tribesmen assaulted a convoy of the rival Lou Nuer tribe. The bloodshed claimed the lives of at least 103 people, mostly women and children.

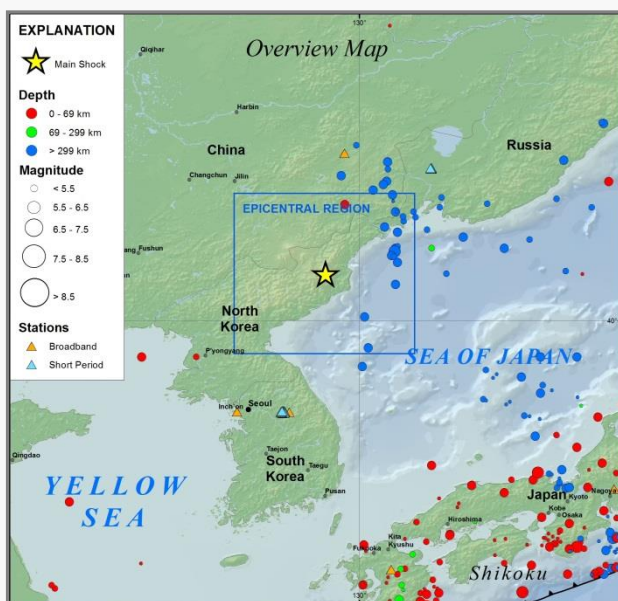
UNAMID (The African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur) attempted to stop violence sending peacekeeping patrols in the concerned areas, but sometimes they were stopped by armed tribesmen who forced them to stay away from the business of the tribes. Because of lack of security and the fact that authorities in Khartoum forbid foreigners to attend conflict areas medical and other kind of aids provided by the UN or other international organizations have minimal chance to reach those thousands suffering from wounds, malnutrition and refuge from torched villages.

North Korea tests raises threats for South Korea and US

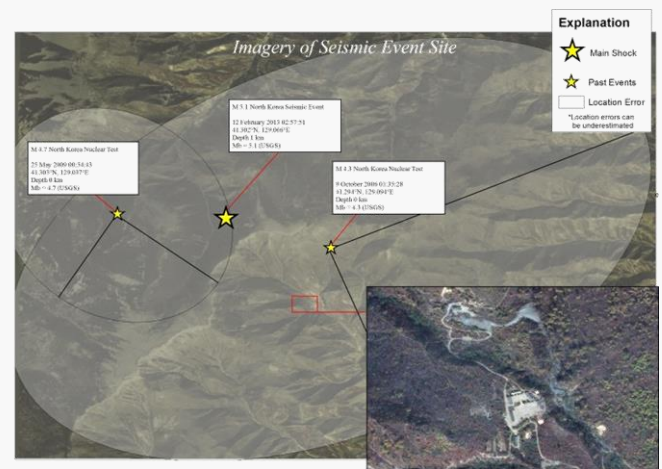
In the early hours of 12 February 2013, unusual seismic activity was detected around the Punggye-ri underground nuclear test site. This was followed with a confirmation by the state news agency that North Korea had successfully tested a device. In addition to that, the news from different sources started spreading out that North Korea has conducted secretly two to three nuclear tests. Those tests believed to be the sequence of the same level nuclear tests that North Korea has done in the year 2006 and 2009 after those tests, North Korea had to face tough sanctions in the United Nations. The new leader Kim Jong-un who generally aggressive in nature after the death of the death of his father started



pushing efforts to tests different nuclear and missiles tests. This raises concerns in the Korean Peninsula. North Korea is the only country in the region as a communist country ruled by only party had faced many sanctions and also the isolations because of the nuclear tests but the situation is getting worse related to the security. United States along with South Korea are the countries that are always raising the voice against the development of nuclear weapons by the North Korea. These countries also trying to pressure North Korea with the help of its close allies like China in the neighbourhood. China has one of the five permanent members of the Security Council also approved the sanctions in the past against North Korea



but China on the other one of the country for North Korea which has economic interdependence. The relations of both countries are strong due to their neighbourhood and that neighbourhood actually supports the North Korea in many different ways. Therefore, the situation is not easy for the UN, the US, South Korea and other countries in the area of the Korean Peninsula to put North Korea into isolation and to stop for testing different nuclear tests.



South Korea strengthens borders and its relation with United States

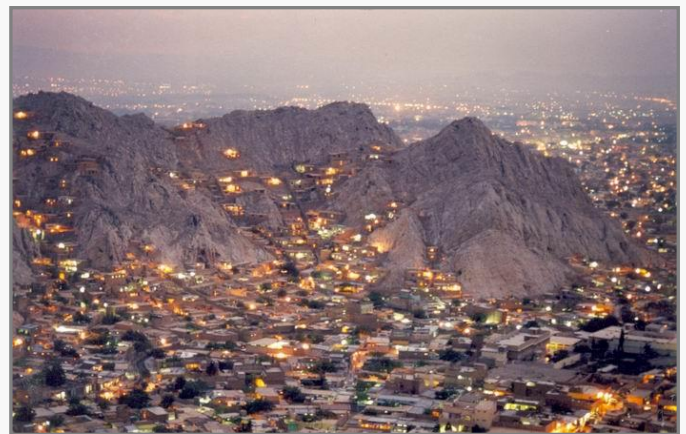
On February 7th 2013, South Korea prepared its military along with the border of North Korea for the strong actions against any possible attack from North Korean side. As North Korea was getting ready for its third nuclear tests according to different sources, South Korea prepared itself for the strong defence on the borders among the two countries. The conflict between two countries had been one of the oldest conflicts that started in 1950's and divided the country into North and South. Since the beginning North Korea posed many threats by improving its nuclear capacity in secrecy in the region. This capacity of North Korea and the conflict gives an edge to South Korea. South Korea is a key ally to United States.

Both countries have been having strong political and economic ties. The United States has the joint military command that is in charge of the two countries response to any North Korean military actions. North Korea on the other hand, has strong ties with China and both countries are strong economic partners to each other. Tensions are once again climbing on the Korean peninsula, with North Korea stepping up its rhetoric and saying it will stage a third nuclear test soon as well as more stronger than previous tests in 2006 and 2009. South Korea with the help of United States has kept a close observation on bordering areas and getting ready to avoid possible attacks from the Northern military side.

Intensifying anti-Shia violence in Pakistan

At least 84 people died and almost 200 injured on 16 February after a blast ruined a busy marketplace surrounded by schools in Quetta, capital city of Pakistan's Balochistan Province. The attack took place in the outskirts of the town dominantly populated by Shia Hazara people. First reports suggested that the exploding device was mounted into a motorbike but later authorities said the bomb was hidden into a water tank of a trailer pulled by a tractor. In fear of further attack locals and the ambulance approached the scene after certain security measures were taken. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) claimed responsibility for the action. The organization has been officially banned since 2001 is considered as an armed Sunni sectarian group which is in close relationship with the Taliban and its purpose is to wipe up Shia Islam in Balochistan.

Pakistan, the second most populous Islam country with nearly 200 million people is heavily hit by sectarian violence. About 20 per cent of the population is Shia Muslim and they frequently targeted by pro-Sunni groups all across the country. 2012 has been the most violent year so far, more than 400 people were killed in attacks and the first two months of 2013 claimed



Quetta city at night

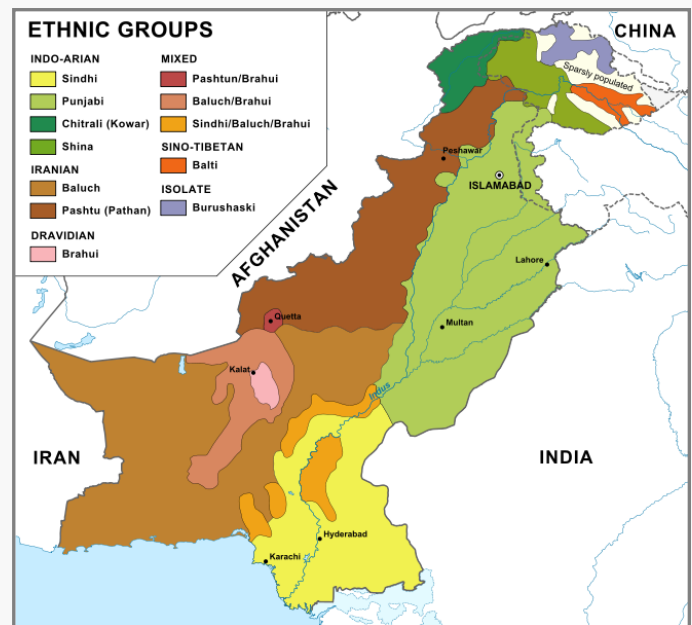
roughly 200 lives just in the region of Quetta. On 10 January a double suicide bombing attack on a pool club in the city's Alamdar Road killed about a hundred people and 9 smaller scale actions were reported in January and February.

Members of the Pakistani Shia community expect more effective national and local policy and deeply unsatisfied with the efforts authorities took to terminate atrocities against the religious minority. Some blamed the government mentioning it has no real willingness to oppose militant groups most of these are established and supported by the Inter-Services Intelligence – Pakistan's official intelligence agency – as guerrilla organizations in order to enhance the country's self-defence capabilities in the case of a war with India.

As the attacks became more deadly and there were no impeachment relatives of the February 16 blast victims launched a protest campaign to stress policymakers to take potent measures. Governor of Balochistan Zulfiqar Magsi – who has been in office since his predecessor was fired after the January 10 bloodshed – directed the anger of the people towards the security services stating the attack is their failure. 3 days after the attack official spokespersons announced 170 people have been detained and 4 high-level militants including the mastermind of the marketplace bombing and a bomb-maker were killed as a result of the successful investigation and a new operation against Sunni extremists.

But not just the anti-Shia groups threaten security in Pakistan's largest, western province. Balochistan suffers from sectarian and tribal local conflicts while clashes between the national army and the

Balochistan Liberation Army fighting for a greater autonomy of the region represent a national scale challenge. From an international scale approach Sunni Islamists linked to the Afghanistan-based Taliban and the Shia dominant Iran borders to Balochistan from the west cause the regional outreach of this escalating issue.



“THE SECOND MOST POPULOUS ISLAM COUNTRY WITH NEARLY 200 MILLION PEOPLE IS HEAVILY HIT BY SECTARIAN VIOLENCE”

Protests in Bangladesh for capital punishment of war crimes



*The martyr's grave-yard, a memorial of the Bangladesh Liberation War, at Rayer Bazar.
Photo: Farhana Islam Nova*

On 5th February, 2013 the largest protests – as reported by different national and international media in Bangladesh – demanded capital punishment against Abdul Kader Mollah and those convicted of war crimes during Bangladesh Liberation War against Pakistani troops in 1971. They also demanded the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami which had been an Islamic party before the creation of Bangladesh and mostly people in Bangladesh believed that the party was in favor of massacre during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Pakistan gained independence in 1947, but the country was divided into two parts in 1971. The larger territory of West Pakistan is now Pakistan and East Pakistan became

the independent country of Bangladesh. Clashes between Western Pakistani troops and different separatists groups of East Pakistan happened in that year. The leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami including Abdul Kader Mollah, who was the assistant secretary general of Jamaat, was found guilty of being behind a series of killings. The protest generally known as Shahbag protests which attracted thousands of people across the country to demand the death penalty against the Mollah and other convicted in it.



Pakistan between 1955-1970

Towards peace in the Philippines

Benigno Aquino President of the Philippines took an unprecedented visit in the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's (MILF) main camp in Mindanao Island on 11 February. The group was considered as a separatist guerrilla organization for decades however it started peace talks with the government recently and the cooperation led to a promising framework agreement signed in October. Aquino met with rebel leader Murad Ebrahim and stated they are within weeks of arranging the final contract.

Concerned parties, local and foreign analysts are very optimistic in the case of the peace deal; however there are still some key issues which need clarification in the pact. Status of women is one of these topics raised especially after MILF noted that the extension of sharia is a purpose of the group and since then human rights activists fear this would deprive female population from certain basic rights. Non-Muslims living in the planned autonomous region result another source of probable heavy disputes because in consequence of their presence both their distinctive legal status – autonomy within the autonomy – and also lack of this could produce oppositions. Besides it is an informal factor what pushes Manila to succeed the agreement, the suspected oil, gas and other natural resources in an estimated value of one trillion US dollars expect a mutually beneficial way of sharing future profits between the autonomous go-

vernment and the central one. Despite the development and transition programmes aim to transform the chaotic and lawless region to a liveable environment the integration of 12,000 MILF armed fighters to the civil society is a big concern and their probable shift to other radical Islamist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf is a real danger – not for the official peace deal but for security and prosper in the future.

President Aquino, a great advocate of the peace process, expects the negotiations will be completed in March, then after the Philippine Congress ratified it, the established Bangsamoro autonomous entity will come into official and practical being by 2016 when the President's 6-year mandate expires.



The parts of Mindanao island colored in red comprise the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindano (ARMM). Under the October 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (FAB) between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippines government, ARMM will be named Bangsamoro. Bangsamoro will be a semi-independent region of the country.
Map: Wikimedia Commons [TheCoffee]

China hits back over cyber-warfare allegations

According to Chinese government officials, hackers from the United States attacked the website of the Chinese Defence Ministry. It is not the first time of such incident. There had been an average of 144,000 times in each month last year when Chinese government-related websites was tried to be hacked, ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng said. He also added more than 60% of attacks came from the United States.

In addition a report from the United States said hundreds of terabytes of data was stolen from more than 141 American organizations. Hacker attacks are operating under the name PLA Unit 61398 which has committed lot of actions against governments for years supported by the People's Liberation Army. China denies this statement and declares it has "no factual basis". An American report said attacks of Chinese hackers were the most influential enterprises and associations such as Coca-Cola or lobbyists like the National Electrical Manufacturers Association. In spite of Chinese actions United States made cyber-attacks too. A program called "Olympic Games" tried to attack Iranian nuclear facilities many times in the past years.

On the other hand some American sources say there is a 12 storey office building close to Shanghai which is the headquarters of a Chinese hacking group. China called the report "unreliable". About 90% of attacks

came from that building. According to a source from the Detroit News there are lot of well-educated Chinese computer engineers whose aim is to steal the latest American technologies to be able to make Chinese high tech industry more competitive.

The cyber-attacks were well known for the American government earlier too. A report from 2008 said: "Hackers based in Shanghai and linked to the PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Third Department have been using these compromised systems as part of the larger BC attack infrastructure to facilitate computer network exploitation (CNE) of U.S. and foreign information systems."

Relations between the United States and China are burdened due to such allegations. Washington said last month that Beijing is "the most threatening actor in cyberspace". According to China the accusation was groundless.

Recently there have been negotiations between China and USA about the prevention of cyber-attacks. The talks seemed to be promising. According to a source from the White House the negotiations were carried out "at the highest levels". On the other hand Beijing calls the attacks a big challenge. Most of the cyber actions are transnational and anonymous and it takes many efforts to trace them.

End of an era in Cuba

Since the 1959 revolution, Cuba has been ruled by the Castro brothers under a socialist one-party system in an isolated environment. Those iconic figures, first Fidel, then his younger brother Raúl, were the main factors in shaping the island's policy for more than half a century. However, the Castro-era is drawing to a close as president Raúl Castro announced his retirement in 2018 during the presidential elections.

On 24 February 2013, shortly after being granted with a second term of his presidency, Raúl Castro made it public that he does not wish to run for another term and that he would stand down at the end of the current five-year term. Raúl has been the leader of the country since 2006, when Fidel fell ill, and was officially sworn in as president in 2008.

But who will be able to take on such a prominent role? A fundamental change is imminent in Cuba's leadership. Attention is turned to the newly appointed vice president, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, who replaced the 82-year old José Ramón Machado Ventura, and who is likely to succeed Raúl. His promotion came as a surprise to many, as he is from a new generation, born after the Cuban revolution. Little is known about his life. He

graduated as an electrical engineer, served in the military then became a minister of higher education in 2009. He gradually climbed the career ladder, always staying loyal to Castro and the Communist Party. He is known to be a cool-headed pragmatist, just like Raúl himself, with a pleasant appearance.



Raúl Castro. Photo: Agecom Bahía [Flickr]

If Díaz-Canel was to become the next Cuban president, he would be facing a very challenging job. Expectations are high as reforms, with special regard to the economy, are urgent. He seems to be the right person to bring about a gradual transition towards a more open and competitive market under a renewed socialist Cuba.

■ News in Brief

World news

Japan airspace violated by Russian aircrafts

■ Two Russian SU-27 fighter jets flew across Japanese airspace near the northern part of Hokkaido Island. Japan has instantaneously protested against the Russian action. The violation of the Japanese air happened after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's plan which tried to find a solution for a territorial dispute. Japan and Russia have argued about four islands for 60 years.

Abe vows to defend disputed islands from China

■ Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a promise that Japan would defend disputed islands from China. The claimed territory is rich in valuable mineral resources which are required for both countries. The debate over the islands can jeopardize the stability of the region.

France protects Niger uranium mine

■ Niger had asked France to send its Special Forces to protect one of the largest uranium mines of the country. French company Areva is a key member of Nigerian mining industry. Five workers were kidnapped three years ago and four of them are still in captivity by Islamist groups. Nigerian President Mahamadou Issoufou would like to achieve a permanent guarding with special French forces.



Uranium mine in Niger. Photo: David Francois [Wikimedia Commons]

■ News in Brief

Terrorism

United States embassy bombing in Ankara

■ A far-left extremist suicide bomber killed a security guard at the US embassy in the Turkish capital. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the perpetrator was from a far-left group which is against the United States and NATO. According to a report from the White House the motivation of the action was unclear.

Blasts in city of Hyderabad

■ On 21st February 2013, two bombs blast in the crowded area in Hyderabad city of India, killing almost 20 and injuring more than 60 people. The police of the area reported these types of blasts as terrorists' attacks and there is always motive behind these types of attacks. India has been experiencing different internal threats from separatist and religious extremists groups. According the city police the bombs were planted in two different motorcycles and were parked in two different streets close to each other and the blasts timing difference were almost four mints. Police also reported that the area where the blasts occurred is mostly crowded part of the city and the motive of the blasts were to cause maximum damages in the city. In response to the situation, major cities in India like Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and West Bengal were put on high alert after the blasts. UN Secretary General along with different countries including Pakistan, Turkey and United States condemned the blasts in India.



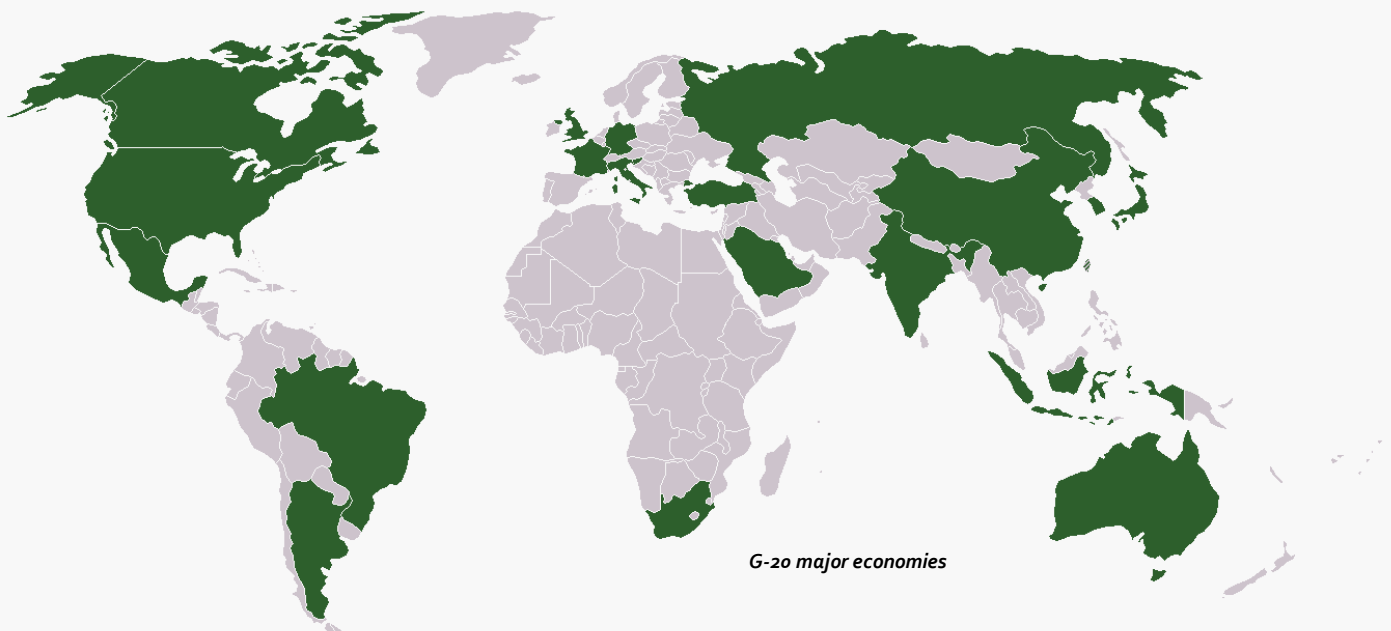
*The ground zero of the serial blasts in the Dilsukhnagar area of Hyderabad.
Photo: Strike Eagle [Wikimedia Commons]*

■ News in Brief

International summits

G20 ministers gather in Moscow

■ Finance ministers and central bankers of G20 countries met in Moscow in a summit focusing on currency wars. The main result of the meeting was that the participants agreed on to refrain from weakening their currencies, in order to achieve economic growth.



G-20 major economies

Regional leaders sign peace deal for Eastern DR Congo

■ Eleven countries from the African Great Lakes region have signed a treaty in Addis Ababa. The event was organized in the presence of UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon. He said this treaty would enable to build stability in the region. He also added it would be only the beginning, since the main goal is to support DR Congo in carrying out new reforms.

The presidents of the DRC, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia either attended or delegated the power to sign the deal.



■ News in Brief

Diplomacy

Cyprus inaugurates Embassy of State of Palestine

■ Cyprus is one of the first European countries which made a new step towards recognising Palestine. Embassy of State of Palestine was inaugurated by the Southern European country in February. This action is linked with the recognition of the state of Palestine. In spite of the diplomatic action Nicosia and Jerusalem have balanced relations because of economic ties.

Ahmedinejad's visit to Egypt

■ Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad arrived to Cairo in order to meet his Egyptian counterpart Mohamed Morsi. He was the first Iranian leader of state who visited Egypt since the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979. The official visit could be a new start of the Egyptian-Iranian relations.

Iran and Senegal to resume bilateral relations

■ Iran and Senegal have re-established their relations as a result of a bilateral agreement between Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and Macky Sall. Foreign ministers of the two countries had signed a statement on confirmation of political relations between Tehran and Dakar at the 12th summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Cairo.

Delegation leaves Cuba without winning release of American contractor

■ US congressional delegation met Cuban President Raul Castro. During the two days meeting American delegation took all effort in order to release US international development professional Alan Gross. The talks ended unsuccessfully. After being accused of working for American intelligence services in January 2010, Gross was ultimately convicted for "acts against the independence or the territorial integrity of the state" in March 2011, and is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence in Cuba.

■ News in Brief

Human rights

China cracks down on Tibetan burnings

■ Chinese police have detained 70 people to prevent self-burnings in the Tibetan region. Approximately 100 Tibetans have set themselves in fire so far to protest against Chinese power. Beijing extends number of detentions.

Churches attacked with petrol bombs in Indonesia

■ Petrol bombs were thrown at three Christian churches in Indonesia. The bombings happened in Sulawesi island, which had a decades-long history of sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians. As a consequence of the attacks, Indonesian authorities have sealed a mosque in Bekasi city and brought a decree which would forbid extreme religious actions. The Southeast Asian country has the largest Muslim population in the world, over 200 million.

Cameron regards Jallianwala Bagh killings as 'deeply shameful'

■ British Prime Minister David Cameron visited a place of massacre in India. According to a record from the period of colonization about 400 people were killed however some Indian sources report almost 1,000 deaths. Although Cameron visited Jallianwala Bagh garden, he did not apologize for the massacres in public. Recently the British government wants to achieve deeper economic ties with India.



Institute for Cultural Relations Policy



<http://culturalrelations.org>