



- [Home](#)
- [Asia Compact](#)
- [Asia News](#)
- [South Asia](#)
- [Southeast Asia](#)
- [East Asia](#)
- [Germany-Asia](#)
- [Quiz](#)
- [Deutsche Welle in Asia](#)
- [Interactive](#)



Discussing Disputed Kashmir



Indian soldiers at the heavily-guarded Line of Control in Kashmir

The Indo-Pakistan border is one of the world's hotspots. At heights of 5,000 metres, thousands of soldiers from both countries face each other -- sometimes separated by a mere 100 metres. Prof. Dr. Hermann Kreutzmann, a geopolitical expert, spoke to Deutsche Welle about the current peace process between the two countries, and the general impact of the divided region on local people.

Prof. Dr. Kreutzmann worked in northern Pakistan for over 20 years. He is a member of the Research Group for Contemporary South Asia and teaches anthropogeography at Berlin University.

DW-WORLD.DE: What is the main difference between border making in Asia and border making in Europe?

Prof. Kreutzmann: The nation-state concept, which has international boundaries, is a concept from Europe. So the borders in Asia are mainly the result of European colonialism and imperialism, especially during the phase of imperialism at the end of the 19th century. We have borders, which were delineated by European powers without consulting or incorporating local rulers or populations. Afghanistan is probably the best example of these kinds of boundaries, which are a result of Russian and British cooperation -- Afghans were only involved as mountain guides. The boundaries are the result of the European interest in dividing the world. "Dividing" in this sense means that the world is divided into the different spheres of influence of the European powers -- the world is divided among Europeans.

What makes the Indo-Pakistan border so different from other borders in Asia?

The Indian-Pakistani Border, in contrast to other borders in Asia, is a result of the partition. A partition mediated by the British colonial power at the end of its influence in this area. Based on the census of 1941, the districts with a majority



Muslim population in a homogeneous area were to become Pakistan and the area with a majority Hindu population was to become India. Within only six weeks' time, a judge from England had to divide the Subcontinent into two new countries. The borders, though, were not announced until one day after the independence of India and Pakistan. The effect that this boundary making had was one of the biggest refugee movements of the 20th century.

What consequences does this have for today?

The other special thing is that this is the border, which defines a major conflict in the world, probably one of the most prominent conflicts of the world of today, between neighbours of such a size. We have very few boundaries which are so contested in an area like South Asia, where one fifth of the world's population lives.

What does this mean for people living next to the border?

In certain highly-populated areas such as the Punjab, relatives on both sides of the border are separated. After two generations, there are still relationships across the border, and people still cannot meet each other. In the mountainous area it is somehow different. In the well-populated area of Kashmir, the Line of Control (LOC) is just a result of military encounters.

Is the LOC part of the border or rather a frontier in times of peace?

The LOC is a factual border. UN observers on both sides monitor the area and keep track of violations. Under international law it is still a ceasefire line -- open to any kind of negotiation. But it could be a line, which could come very close to a solution for this dispute, if both governments were to find a way that was agreeable to their own parliaments -- communicating that peace is the solution and not claims from colonial times.

How difficult is it for people to cross the LOC, or the Indian-Pakistan border?

For some people, it is easier than for others. For some years, nomads have crossed the LOC with their herds, or smugglers crossed the LOC. But in certain areas, which are highly contested by military forces with barbed-wire fences and alert mechanisms, it is very difficult to cross. The Indian-Pakistan border is less permeable than many other boundaries in the world. Only in recent years has the process started of both governments allowing people to cross the boundaries, not only for family purposes but also for commercial purposes. The bus line between Lahore and Delhi is a symbol of this process, which is slowly changing the relationship between the two countries.

Both countries blame each other for interfering in the other's national security affairs by supporting the others side's militant movements for independence. How much external influence is there?

There are support lines on both sides of the LOC. Support in this region does not only come from India or Pakistan. It also comes from Iran, Saudi Arabia and even China. But we should emphasise the fact much more that there is a strong movement in the region against governmental oppression. Tens of thousands of people have lost their lives but not only as a result of interference across the LOC. They are the result of internal disputes. The vale of Kashmir has a lot of experience of clashes. The government and local people have created a conflict, in which people have lost their lives without any interference from outside. In the northern areas of Pakistan, we also have certain structures of a conflict between locals and the government.

Does this put pressure on bilateral talks between India and Pakistan?

The fact that we have talks between the governments is somehow a result of the fact that people have raised their voice and called for an independent Kashmir. Both governments are scared of losing that valuable area. Local voices are involved, although the negotiations between India and Pakistan are following different lines. They are following the broader picture of both countries -- both are interested in not losing face in the first place and neither wants to give up any territorial claims. India and Pakistan are looking for a solution that pleases both sides, which won't involve a refugee movement, a genocide or another military encounter.

Andre Sarin spoke with Prof. Dr. Hermann Kreutzmann

Andre Sarin 23/05/08

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[▲ TOP](#)

[Home](#) | [Asia Compact](#) | [Asia News](#) | [South Asia](#) | [Southeast Asia](#) | [East Asia](#) | [Germany-Asia](#) | [Quiz](#) | [Deutsche Welle in Asia](#) | [Interactive](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Contact](#) | [About Us](#) | [Press](#) | [Business and Sales](#) | [DW-AKADEMIE](#)

[▲ TOP](#)