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## India launches strikes on suspected militants in Pakistan

By Sanjeev Miglani and Asad Hashim

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India said on Thursday it had conducted “surgical strikes” on suspected militants preparing to infiltrate from Pakistan-ruled Kashmir, making its first direct military response to an attack on an army base it blames on Pakistan.



*Indian army's director general of military operations Lt General Ranbir Singh speaks during a media briefing in New Delhi, September 29.*

Pakistan said two of its soldiers had been killed in exchanges of fire and in repulsing an Indian “raid”, but denied that India had made any targeted strikes across the *de facto* frontier that runs through the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

The cross-border action inflicted significant casualties, the Indian army's head of operations told reporters in New Delhi, while a senior government official said Indian soldiers had crossed the border to target militant camps.

The Indian announcement followed through on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's warning that those Delhi held responsible "would not go unpunished" for a Sept. 18 attack on an Indian army base at Uri, near the Line of Control, that killed 18 soldiers.

The strikes also raised the possibility of a military escalation between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan that would wreck a 2003 Kashmir ceasefire.

Lt General Ranbir Singh, the Indian army's director general of military operations (DGMO), said the strikes were launched on Wednesday based on "very specific and credible information that some terrorist units had positioned themselves ... with an aim to carry out infiltration and terrorist strikes".

Singh said he had called his Pakistani counterpart to inform him of the operation.

India's disclosure of such strikes was unprecedented, said Ajai Sahni of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi, and sent a message not only to his own people but to the international community.

"India expects global support to launch more focused action against Pakistan," Sahni told Reuters. "There was tremendous pressure on the Indian prime minister to prove that he is ready to take serious action."

## SHARE MARKETS FALL

The border clash also comes at a delicate time for Pakistan, with powerful Army Chief of Staff General Raheel Sharif due to retire shortly and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif still to decide on a successor.

Share markets in India and Pakistan fell on India's announcement. India's NSE index closed down 1.6% after falling as much 2.1% to its lowest since Aug. 29, while Pakistan's benchmark 100-share index was down 0.15%.

India announced its retaliation at a news conference in New Delhi that was hurriedly called, only to be delayed, as Modi chaired a meeting of his cabinet committee on security to be briefed on the operation.

"The prime minister is clear that this is exactly what we should have done," a senior government official told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "Informing the world about the surgical strike was important today."

U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice spoke with her Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval, before news of the Indian cross-border operation broke, the White House said.

Rice discussed deepening collaboration between the United States and India on counter-terrorism and urged Pakistan to combat and delegitimize individuals and entities designated by the United Nations as terrorists.

## INDIAN SOLDIER CAPTURED

Pakistan captured an Indian soldier on its side of the disputed Kashmir border, military officials in the two countries said on Thursday.

“It is confirmed one soldier from 37 Rashtriya Rifles with weapons has inadvertently crossed over to the Pakistan side of the Line of Control,” an Indian army official said in New Delhi.

He said such incidents of people including civilians crossing the frontier by mistake have happened in the past from both sides and those who strayed are returned.

Two officials based in Pakistan’s Chhamb’s sector said the Indian soldier with weapons was captured at 1.30 pm local time on Thursday.

Exchanges of fire took place in the Bhimber, Hot Spring, Kel and Lipa sectors in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and lasted about six hours, the Pakistani military said earlier.

An Indian army officer in Kashmir said there had been shelling from the Pakistani side of the border into the Nowgam district, near the Line of Control, and the exchange of fire continued during the day.

There were no casualties or damage reported on the Indian side of the frontier.

Both India and Pakistan claim Kashmir in full, but govern separate parts, and have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947, two of them over Kashmir.

Tension between the South Asian rivals has been high since an Indian crackdown on dissent in Kashmir following the killing by security forces of Burhan Wani, a young separatist leader, in July.

They rose further when New Delhi blamed Pakistan for the Uri attack, which inflicted the heaviest toll on the Indian army of any single incident in 14 years.

India has been ratcheting up pressure on Pakistan, seeking to isolate it at the U.N. General Assembly in New York and winning expressions of condemnation from the United States, Britain and France over the attack.

China, another of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and a traditional ally of Pakistan, has urged dialogue between the two antagonists.

On Wednesday, officials from several countries said a November summit of a the South Asian regional group due to be held in Islamabad may be called off after India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan said they would not attend.