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Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Clashes Leave Many Dead

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Border clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan killed at least 13 people and wounded more than 80 others Friday in a disputed area, officials said.

A Pakistan army spokesman said the fighting erupted after Afghan forces fired at a government census team near the southwestern border town of Chaman.

Army spokesman Major-General Asif Ghafoor said several Pakistani soldiers escorting civilian enumerators were among the wounded. He added that Pakistani troops returned fire and closed the busy Chaman border crossing with Afghanistan.

Pakistani hospital and security officials in Chaman say the death toll on their side is at least nine civilians, including women and children, while more than 40 have been wounded.

The Pakistan military also has confirmed that both sides have agreed to a cease-fire, and a meeting between border officials from the two sides is expected to take place.

Ongoing dispute

General Ghafoor insisted that Afghan border forces have been “creating hurdles” in attempts to conduct a census in two divided villages, Killi Luqman and Killi Jahangir, along the border.

“This was done despite the fact that Afghan authorities had been informed well in advance, and coordination was carried out through diplomatic and military channels to conduct the census,” explained General Ghafoor.

An Afghan regional police chief, General Abdul Raziq, confirmed to VOA the fighting left four of his border guards dead and wounded 37 people, including 14 security forces. He added that the clashes have stopped, and border officials from the two sides are scheduled to meet late Friday afternoon.

The police chief said that Pakistani authorities were warned beforehand against conducting any activity in the divided villages, saying they are part of Afghanistan.

“We had alerted our border police and also warned Pakistan that if they undertook any activity [in this area] it would cost them a big price,” Raziq insisted.

Despite the warning, Pakistani troops and military vehicles tried to enter the divided villages early Friday morning to “occupy our land,” but they were prevented from doing so, he added.

General Raziq went on to assert that the two villages, with a total population of around 15,000 people, are located at the “zero point of the Durand Line and a large number of them are enrolled in the Afghan border force.”

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif condemned what he said was the grave incident of firing by Afghan forces, and he termed it as most unfortunate.

Action demanded

The foreign ministry summoned the Afghan Charge d’ Affairs in Islamabad and strongly protested over the “unprovoked” firing and demanded Kabul take immediate action against those responsible for starting it.

“The unprovoked firing from the Afghan side not only led to the loss of precious lives and injured many, but has also disrupted the census in areas on the Pakistan side of the border and caused damage to properties,” a ministry statement said.

Thousands of travelers use the Chaman border crossing to move in both directions, and it also serves as a major trade and transit route for landlocked Afghanistan.

Afghanistan disputes portions of its nearly 2,600-kilometer border with Pakistan, which is known as the Durand Line. The frontier was established in 1896 when Britain was ruling the Indian subcontinent.

Islamabad dismisses Kabul's objections over the demarcation and maintains Pakistan inherited the international frontier when it gained independence from Britain in 1947.

Bilateral relations have deteriorated in recent years over mutual allegations and counter allegations that Pakistani and Afghan spy agencies support militants conducting terrorist attacks in both countries.