

India warns Pakistan over Kashmir strikes

US senators want 'bigger' role for UN

AFP, New Delhi

India told Pakistan yesterday to stop its shelling in disputed Kashmir, warning it will make such attacks "unaffordable", as the death toll from this week's cross-border violence -- the worst in years -- rose to 17.

Defence Minister Arun Jaitley accused Pakistan of instigating the tit-for-tat shelling that began on Sunday and has forced tens of thousands of civilians living on both sides of the border to flee their homes.

"If Pakistan persists with this adventurism, our forces will make cost of this adventurism unaffordable for it," Jaitley told journalists in New Delhi.

"Pakistan should stop this unprovoked firing and shelling if it wants peace on the border."

The Pakistani army yesterday confirmed five more civilians had died on its side of the disputed northern

Kashmir region and eastern Punjab province, doubling the toll to 10.

Seven civilians have died in India. Regional police chief Rajesh Kumar told AFP that firing from both sides had continued into the early hours of the morning.

"Tens of thousands of people have fled their homes," he added.

The nuclear-armed neighbours have traded blame for the cross-border strikes, which began during Eid-ul-Adha celebrations in the predominantly Muslim region.

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said his country was "fully capable of responding befittingly to Indian aggression" but urged India to exercise caution.

"We do not want the situation on the borders of two nuclear neighbours to escalate into confrontation," he added.

US Senators Timothy Kaine and Angus King said they are "concerned" over the rising tensions at the India-Pakistan Line

of Control, reports TheHindu.

Speaking to journalists in New Delhi yesterday, the senators raised some eyebrows by also suggesting that the United Nations could play a "bigger role" in the conflict. "I welcome the comments of the UN Secretary General calling for diplomatic efforts and dialogue to end the worrying situation between India and Pakistan," said King, referring to a statement from UN Secretary General's spokesperson Stephanie Dujarric asking India and Pakistan to "resolve their issues".

While the UN Secretary General stuck to India's stated position on a bilateral resolution to the LoC with Pakistan, the US Senators may have stepped out of line by calling for a greater role in the dispute, adding "As a promoter of peaceful resolution of disputes the UN does a good job and in that sense their participation should be welcomed."

Bahrain activist to face trial over tweets

AFP, Dubai

Leading rights activist Nabeel Rajab is to remain in custody and go on trial from October 19 on charges of posting tweets deemed insulting to authorities, the prosecution said yesterday.

A general prosecutor, Hussein al-Buali, said Rajab was charged with "publicly insulting government institutions," after the defence and interior ministries lodged complaints over his comments on Twitter.

Shiite Rajab, who heads the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, was released in May after serving two years in jail for participating in unauthorised protests.

In one tweet, Rajab charged that Bahrainis allegedly joining Islamist extremists in Syria were originally members of the Sunni-ruled kingdom's security forces.

US official downplays Cuba's invitation to summit

AP, Panama City

A senior State Department official said Wednesday that the US is prepared to welcome Cuba for the first time to a region-wide summit but wants heads of state to focus attention on the communist government's human rights record.

At the urging of Latin American leaders, host country Panama plans to invite Cuban President Raul Castro to the Summit of the Americas in April. Cuba was excluded from six previous summits because Washington said it didn't meet the region's standards for democracy and U.S. lawmakers, led by Republican Sen Marco Rubio of Florida, are urging Panama to reconsider its invitation this time around.

The deputy assistant secretary of state for Latin America, John Feeley, played down the significance of Cuba's likely participation. Speaking to journalists in Spanish during a stop in Panama on Wednesday, Feeley said that "it's not so important the guests at the table but the meal that's served."

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa boycotted the last summit in Cartagena,

Colombia, over Cuba's exclusion and several of his leftist allies have threatened to sit out the next gathering of 34 regional heads of state if Cuba isn't invited to attend.

The Washington-based Organization of American States, which organizes the summits, suspended Cuba shortly after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution.

Feeley's remarks were the strongest yet by a US official since Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela took office in July and reversed his conservative predecessor's objection to Cuba's attendance at the summit. Last month he sent his vice president and foreign minister to Washington and Havana to discuss the matter.

Feeley said that if Castro does participate it will be important that he learn from the experience of other countries in the region where democracy has prospered.

President Barack Obama is expected to attend the summit and Castro's presence could set the stage for an uncomfortable encounter between leaders from the two former Cold War enemies, but Feeley said what is more "uncomfortable is the basic lack of human rights in Cuba" that the US won't shy from denouncing.

Palestinian unity government holds first Gaza meeting

AFP, Gaza City

The Palestinian unity government held its first ever meeting in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip yesterday as its rival factions presented a common front ahead of a major donors' conference.

The gathering came more than three months after the government was sworn in following a landmark reconciliation deal between Fatah and Hamas.

Palestinian prime minister Rami Hamdallah crossed into Gaza yesterday where he visited some of the areas of the Strip worst-hit by a 50-day Israeli military operation against Palestinian militants.

He later gathered with his ministers at the Gaza property of president Mahmud Abbas, an AFP correspondent said.

"What we have seen today is dreadful and painful, and it has become clear to us that the rebuilding (of Gaza) is at the top of our list of priorities," he said.

The conflict, which ended on August 26, killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and 73 on the Israeli side, mostly soldiers.

It left 100,000 Gazans homeless. Earlier Hamdallah told reporters that

rebuilding Gaza would require a functioning unity government.

"We are facing a humanitarian and moral duty to our people in Gaza," he said after entering Gaza via the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing.

"We have put the years of division behind us, and the most important priority of the government is to guarantee a return to normal life for Gazans and unity with the West Bank."

The cabinet's composition was agreed in June between bitter rivals Fatah, which dominates the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority (PA), and Hamas, which remains in de facto control of Gaza.

But yesterday's meeting was its first in the besieged coastal territory, and the first that its Gaza-based ministers could attend, after Israel blocked their travel to the West Bank to be sworn in.

Egypt will host a donors' conference on financing the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip on October 12.

The Palestinians have called for more than \$4 billion in aid to rebuild Gaza's infrastructure and provide humanitarian relief to the blockaded coastal territory, which is one of the most densely populated areas of the world.



Indian activists of Delhi Youth Congress shout anti-Pakistan slogans during a demonstration against the clashes on the Line of Control as they try to march towards the Pakistan Embassy in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Quarantines for Ebola mount in Spain

AFP, Madrid

Worries over the worldwide spread of Ebola grew yesterday after three more health workers were quarantined in Spain and North America threw up border controls at main ports of arrival from the plagued African states.

The United States and Canada announced new screening measures at major airport hubs to check travellers for symptoms of the deadly disease, and pressure grew for other nations to follow their lead.

The Madrid hospital treating infected Spanish auxiliary nurse, Teresa Romero, also announced her condition had worsened yesterday.

Romero, the first person known to have been infected with Ebola outside of Africa, has said she may have caught the deadly virus after touching her face with an infected glove.

Car bomb kills 12 in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

A car bomb blast on a busy street of Baghdad's largest Shiite neighbourhood killed at least 12 people, Iraqi police and medical sources said yesterday.

The bomb, which exploded near a cafe in Sadr City late Wednesday, also left at least 33 people wounded, the sources said.

The sprawling northeastern district is hit by suicide, roadside and other bombs almost every week.

According to the United Nations, more than 1,110 people were killed in acts of violence across Iraq last month.

While the bloodshed has been mainly on the frontlines where federal, Kurdish and allied forces battle the Islamic State jihadist group, blasts and executions in Baghdad continue to take a heavy toll.

Iran hails 'constructive' talks with UN nuclear agency

AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday it held "constructive" talks with a visiting delegation of the UN nuclear watchdog seeking to resolve outstanding issues in Tehran's disputed atomic programme.

Tero Varjoranta, deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, led the team which held talks Tuesday and Wednesday on two final points on which the IAEA is still seeking explanations from Iran.

The two questions focus on concerns that the Islamic republic's nuclear activities had military dimensions.

"During these two days, all the bilateral issues were discussed, in particular, how to carry out the agreed measures and the ways forward were discussed," said Iran's ambassador to the IAEA, Reza Najafi.

"These negotiations were constructive in terms of content. They were also direct," he said, quoted on the state television's website.

The Vienna-based IAEA said that the "technical meetings" did not resolve the two outstanding issues.

"The Agency and Iran will continue dis-

cussions on these measures" at a date to be confirmed, the body added in a statement yesterday.

The IAEA disclosed in September that Iran had failed to meet an August 25 deadline to provide information on five points meant to allay fears it was developing nuclear weapons.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

One of the IAEA's questions centres on Iran's purported experiments with large-scale high explosives.

Under an agreement reached in November 2013 with the IAEA, Iran has already responded to 16 of the 18 issues the agency identified as relevant to its nuclear activities.

Satisfying the IAEA's concerns is considered crucial to a hoped for conclusion by November 24 of a comprehensive nuclear agreement with the United States and other world powers.

In a letter to the IAEA, Najafi said the delay was due to the "complexity" of the issues and that allegations of nuclear-orientated experiments lacked credibility and any solid proof.



Protesters march during a demonstration in Mexico City on Wednesday demanding justice in the case of the 43 students that went missing in Iguala, Guerrero state, last September 26, after a clash with local police.

PHOTO: AFP

Protests held for missing Mexicans

AFP, Mexico City

Tens of thousands of people held protests in Mexico on Wednesday, joining tearful families of 43 missing students demanding their return amid fears a police-backed gang executed them.

Crowds gathered from Mexico City to the violence-ravaged state of Guerrero, where the students disappeared, and as far south as Chiapas.

Parents of the victims traveled from Guerrero to head a march of thousands of people in Mexico City, tearfully holding up pictures of their sons, and signs reading "we want them back alive."

The young men disappeared on September 26 after municipal police officers working with a gang shot at buses seized by the aspiring teachers and took several of them away in patrol cars.

Ukraine border monitoring weak: US

BBC ONLINE

International monitoring of the Russia-Ukraine border is "grossly inadequate", the US says, urging a bigger mandate for the OSCE security organisation.

The complaint came from the US Ambassador to the OSCE, Daniel Baer. Nearly 300km (186 miles) of the border is beyond Ukraine's control, he said.

Russia denies Western allegations that it is sending troops and armour into Ukraine to help pro-Russian rebels. Fighting in and around Donetsk has left a 5 September truce looking fragile.

Since 26 September the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been monitoring the ceasefire. The combatants were supposed to establish buffer zones, but in many places that has not happened.

Several big convoys of Russian lorries have taken supplies to rebel-

held areas without any border checks. Russia says they only carried humanitarian aid, but neither Ukraine nor Western observers are sure of that.

The OSCE's chief observer, Paul Picard, said his team was discussing the possibility of going to other border checkpoints in areas no longer controlled by Ukraine.

"The current [OSCE] observation mission has access to about 1km of the international border," Daniel Baer complained.

The mandate of the OSCE mission on the border must be expanded, he said. Currently it only has access to checkpoints at Gukovo and Donetsk on the Russian side of the border.

Since April the heavily armed separatists have been controlling the eastern Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as much of the border.

"We call on Russia to engage immediately with Ukraine and the OSCE to implement monitoring and verifica-

tion of the international border as agreed in Minsk, to include restoring Ukrainian control over its side of the border, and a heavy weapons-free buffer zone on either side of the border," Baer said.

He also urged Russia to fulfil its other Minsk commitments, namely to use its influence with the separatists to end truce violations, withdraw all military personnel and equipment from Ukraine and release all hostages.

A senior adviser to President Vladimir Putin said the Russian leader may meet his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko at an Asia-Europe (ASEM) summit in Milan next week.

The meeting, on 16 or 17 October, could include German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande, according to the aide, Yuri Ushakov.

The last Poroshenko-Putin meeting was in the Belarusian capital Minsk in August, where they agreed on the ceasefire conditions.

Dutch state to appeal for Srebrenica ruling

AFP, The Hague

The Dutch state will appeal a court ruling that found it liable for the deaths of over 300 Bosnian Muslim men and boys during the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, the defence ministry said yesterday.

Three months ago judges ruled that Dutch UN peacekeepers should not have expelled the more than 300 victims from a UN base at Potocari near Srebrenica in mid-July 1995 after it was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces during the country civil war.

Families of the victims had sued the Dutch government over the killings, accusing the Dutch peacekeepers of failing to protect almost 8,000 people slaughtered by ethnic Serb forces just a few months before the end of the Bosnian war.

Zuckerberg aims to get India online

AFP, New Delhi

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg said yesterday his social media network wanted to help India's new prime minister connect remote villages in the country of over 1.2 billion to the Internet.

Zuckerberg, who will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi today, said India had huge potential, with only around 243 million of its people currently online.

"With more than one billion people still to be connected, India is just at the beginning. It is not only a challenge for Facebook but for everybody," he told a conference in New Delhi.

"Tomorrow I'm meeting the prime minister. He is committed to connecting villages online and we are excited to see how Facebook can help."

Zuckerberg is on a two-day visit to India aimed at promoting the internet.org app, which allows people in underdeveloped areas to access basic online services.

"We believe that connectivity is a human right and one of the fundamental challenges

for our generation," said Zuckerberg.

He denied accusations he is seeking to create a monopoly in access to online content in the developing world, saying mobile operators were free to decide which services they included, and did not have to include Facebook.

He said the app, which Facebook launched in Zambia earlier this year in cooperation with Samsung and other partners, will not be available immediately in India.

"India is such an important country with so many people that we didn't want to start here with the risk of not doing well," said Zuckerberg.

One of social media's main challenges in India is that many different languages are used across the country, and Zuckerberg said Facebook was now "focusing on content in local languages".

Zuckerberg is an American computer programmer and Internet entrepreneur. As of April 2013, Zuckerberg is the chairman and chief executive of Facebook, Inc.

