

BSF OPENS HOTLINE IN DELHI TO TALK TO PAK. RANGERS

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In anger:BSF men raise slogans against Pakistan early this year as their colleagues were killed in firing from across the border.PTI

The Border Security Force (BSF) has opened a new hotline in Delhi to communicate with the Pakistan Rangers. It was set up last month after the BSF was unable to reach its counterpart through the existing hotline in Jammu on a June night when four BSF personnel were killed. This year, 12 BSF personnel had been killed along the 192-km International Border in Jammu, the highest death toll in five years.

A senior official told *The Hindu* that BSF officials could not call their counterparts across the border in Sialkot as all calls to and from Pakistan are barred after 10 p.m. in Jammu and Kashmir.

After large-scale ceasefire violations in 2015, the BSF and Pakistan Rangers put in a system to resolve through effective communication any flare-up on the border. At least 14 hotlines were activated along the Pakistan border from Gujarat to Jammu. A hotline between the Directors-General of Military Operations (DGMOs) also exists.

Around 10.30 p.m. on June 13, in Ramgarh sector along the Jammu border, the Pakistan Rangers fired indiscriminately at a BSF team led by Assistant Commandant Jitender Singh who had rushed there to rescue some troops who had previously come under fire. Mr. Singh and his men were overseeing some construction work along the fence to strengthen the defences when they were attacked. "That night, the officer in Jammu desperately tried to reach the Brigadier in charge of Pakistan Rangers in Sialkot but calls to Pakistan are barred at night. We wanted to raise the instance of unprovoked firing. The bodies could not be retrieved till the next morning as it was certain that the reinforcements would also be fired upon," a senior government official told *The Hindu*.

The hotline in Delhi is handled by a BSF officer of the rank of Deputy Inspector-General (DIG).

It was in the wake of this incident that the BSF asked the Pakistan Rangers to open another hotline between their headquarters in Delhi and Islamabad. There are other communication lines available at the sector commander-level also.

"Lack of communication cannot be an excuse for Pakistan to escape responsibility for the unprovoked firing when a ceasefire is in place. The new hotline was set up with the objective of recording each and every incident with their headquarters as we are not sure who calls the shots in Pakistan," the official said.

The killing and mutilation of BSF head constable Narender Singh on September 18 was also reported from the Ramgarh sector. As reported in *The Hindu*, it was a joint search party of the BSF and Pakistan Rangers that located the mutilated body of Singh 30-40 metres inside the Pakistani territory after a 10-hour search.

On June 13, the Army headquarters sent a revised communication to the BSF reiterating the 2003 ceasefire pact signed between India and Pakistan.

On May 29, the DGMOs agreed to fully implement the ceasefire pact in “letter and spirit” to stop border skirmishes in J&K.

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