India launches strikes on Pakistan, Islamabad vows to 'settle score'

NEW DELHI/ISLAMABAD- India and Pakistan exchanged heavy artillery along their contested frontier on Wednesday, after New Delhi launched missile strikes on its arch-rival in a major escalation between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

Dead were reported on both sides. Pakistan said Indian strikes had killed at least eight people, and India said Pakistani artillery fire had killed three civilians along the de facto border in contested Kashmir.

New Delhi announced it had carried out 'precision strikes at terrorist camps' at nine sites in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and in Punjab state, days after it blamed Islamabad for a deadly attack on the Indian-run side of the disputed region.

The Indian army said 'justice is served', with New Delhi adding that its actions 'have been focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature".

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif accused Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi of launching the strikes to "shore up" his domestic popularity, but said that Islamabad had struck back.

"The retaliation has already started", Asif told AFP. "We won't take long to settle the score."

Islamabad reported eight civilians -- including one child -- killed in the strikes, and AFP correspondents in Pakistani-run Kashmir and Punjab heard several loud explosions.

In Muzaffarabad, the main city of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, troops cordoned off streets around a mosque Islamabad said was hit by a strike, with marks of explosions visible on the walls of several homes.

AFP