

International

Curfew imposed in parts of Srinagar

SRINAGAR, India, Sept 20. Indian authorities imposed a curfew in parts of Srinagar today, the eve of a key phase of the Kashmir state elections, reports AFP.

Security was strengthened in the city, the focal point of separatist campaign which has claimed more than 15,000 lives since 1989, to prevent violence and protests before Saturday's polling in and around Srinagar. Federal border guards ringed the downtown Jama Masjid, the city's oldest mosque, to foil a proposed march by the powerful all parties Freedom Conference who oppose the elections.

"We have to see that no gathering takes place here, outsiders will not be allowed. Special security arrangements have been made to check any attempt by militants to disrupt the elections," said district police chief VK Singh.

Israel okays expansion of settlements in WB

JERUSALEM, Sept 20. The Israeli government has given preliminary approval to the construction of thousands of new homes in Jewish West Bank settlements, an official said Thursday, reports AP.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called the move "provocative and hostile" and a threat to Middle East peace.

A government committee approved plans Wednesday night to build about 3,000 new homes in the West Bank, said Peter Lerner, a spokesman for the Israeli military government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The plans need final approval from Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

The news follows the disclosure on Wednesday that Mordechai had given final approval to the construction of 1,800 homes in the Kiryat Sefer settlement.

US Mideast Coordinator Dennis Ross said that the United States considers settlement building a "problem" that

Parliament in Japan may be dissolved Sept 27

TOKYO, Sept 20. Japan's Parliament is likely to be dissolved on September 27, Minister of International Trade and Industry Shunpei Tsuchihara told reporters today, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto agreed on Thursday with the leaders of the two junior parties in his ruling coalition to convene an extraordinary session of parliament on September 27, which was widely expected to lead to an early general election.

"It is very probable that the parliament will be dissolved at the beginning of the session," Tsuchihara said.

Politicians, in frequent leaks to the media over the past two weeks, have said Hashimoto would dissolve parliament on the first day of the session and hold general elections on October 20.

Mediators struggle to forge accord Differences between Muslim, Serb leaders emerge

PALE. BOSNIA, Sept 20. Divisions between Serb and Muslim leaders have already begun to emerge in Bosnia's peacetime collective presidency only a day after election results were announced, reports Reuters.

International mediators are struggling to forge an agreement about where the three-member presidency should meet, the wording of an oath of office and other basic issues.

The Serb member of the newly-elected collective presidency, Momcilo Krajsnik, said on Thursday he wanted joint institutions to work but staked out positions in clear opposition to his Muslim rival, Alija Izetbegovic.

Krajsnik finished second in the presidential voting behind Izetbegovic, who will serve as the chair of the presidency after winning the largest number of votes in Saturday's polls.

The hardline Serb nationalist told a news conference he rejected a ruling by international election organisers that Izetbegovic should serve a two-year term as chairman.

"You have noticed that one of my partners in the president has already shown bad will and tried to represent himself as the chief of a body in which he is only first among equals," Krajsnik said.

The Serb leader insisted the post should rotate between the three members every eight months.

He also said the three members should discuss whether the candidate with the most votes should hold the post first in the rotation.

AP adds: NATO on Thursday called for removal of a Bosnian Serb police chief who fired a shot when challenged by a peace force patrol.

River treaty with India Communists in Nepal take to street

KATHMANDU, Sept 20. Over 1,000 Communists held demonstrations carrying burning wooden torches Thursday, chanting anti-India and anti-government slogans to protest a river treaty between Nepal and India, witnesses said, reports AFP.

The demonstration was organised by the extreme left National Democratic Front-Nepal (NDF-N) to protest the Indo-Nepal Mahakali River Integrated Development Project Treaty (MRIDP) signed by the prime ministers of the two nations in February.

The project is intended to harness the waters of the Mahakali River, which makes part of the border between India and Nepal. It would involve using the river's waters for generating power and for irrigation.

A vote is due in Parliament Friday on whether to ratify the treaty, and there are doubts about whether it will be possible to gain the majority required.

The main opposition the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist (NCP-UML), which holds the key to voting with 88 parliamentary seats, regards the treaty as against Nepal's interest and has vowed to oppose it.

If that happens, it will be impossible for the treaty to muster the two-third vote from members of both houses of parliament it needs. Although in opposition, the NCP-UML holds the largest number of seats in parliament.

Russia favours enlargement of UNSC to 20 members

MOSCOW, Sept 20. Russia in favour of the enlargement of the United Nations Security Council to 20 members, Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Sidorov said Thursday, cited by the Interfax agency, reports AFP.

However, no pronouncement was made on how many countries Russia would like to see as permanent members. "We prefer not to detail our point of view on this subject at present," said Sidorov.

An expansion from the present 15 to the proposed 20 countries "would in no way damage the position of Russia as a great power, because Russia is, and will remain, a permanent member of the Council and therefore has special prerogatives, according to the United Nations Charter," Sidorov said.

Boy gets new jaw after 10 yrs of closed mouth

MELBOURNE, Sept 20. Surgeons said Friday they have successfully opened a boy's jaw that had been fused shut in an accident a decade ago, reports AP.

A falling tree smashed the jawbone of Phillip Sakis, who lives in a remote village in Papua New Guinea, when he was four-year-old.

Too far away from physicians who could have set the bone properly, Phillip, now 14, lost the ability to open his mouth, even to eat.

His father chipped off a front tooth so he could use a straw to suck in fluids and mashed food.

A private charity paid for his operation, which was conducted two weeks ago at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital.

Physicians said his jawbone had been reconstructed. About two centimetres (one inch) was cut from either side of Phillip's jaw and pieces of bone from a rib was grafted on to make hinges.



Former star cricketer-turned politician Imran Khan (R) waves in response to the slogans being chanted by supporters wishing him to become prime minister of Pakistan during a rally in Karachi on Thursday. Khan entered politics this year by launching his own party 'Tehrik-i-Insaf' (Justice Movement). — AFP/UNB photo

Russian PM, Chechen leader may meet Monday

MOSCOW, Sept 20. Chechen separatist leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev might travel to Moscow next week for talks with Russia's national security chief Alexander Lebed, a Russian news agency reported Thursday, reports AP.

A meeting between Yandarbiyev and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin may also take place as early as Monday, Interfax said, quoting a senior official in Moscow as saying negotiations "are being actively prepared."

Lebed engineered a peace agreement last month that envisages a Russian troop pullout and promises the Chechens a referendum on their republic's status in five years.

A spokesman for Lebed, Alexander Barkhatov, would not confirm or deny the report, while officials close to Chernomyrdin said the premier has not invited Yandarbiyev but may join the talks if he arrives, Interfax reported.

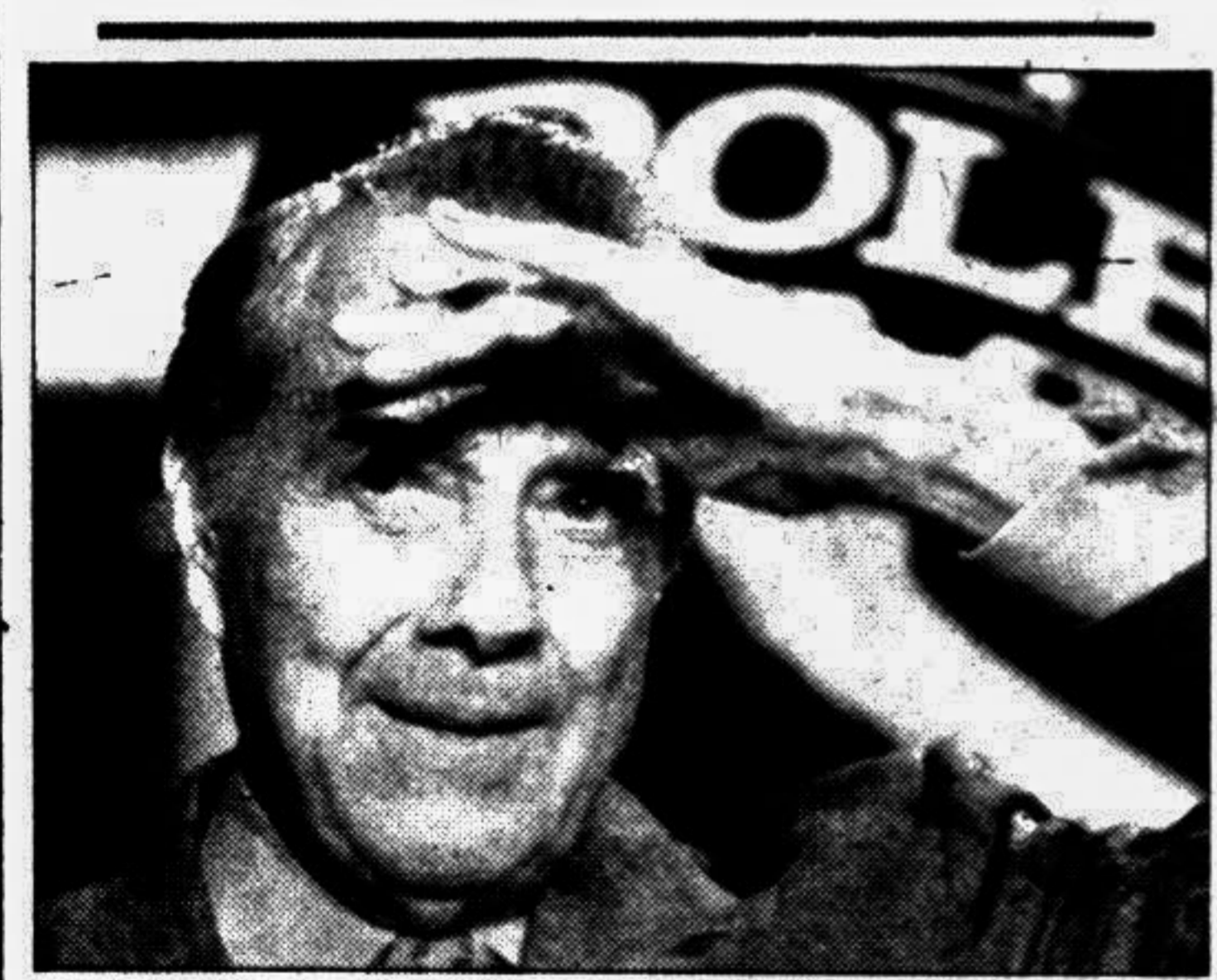
Yandarbiyev first came to Moscow in May when he met with President Boris Yeltsin and signed a peace agreement with Chernomyrdin. That accord collapsed, as did many others in the now 21-month war.

Lebed, whose deal four weeks ago has held the longest despite some snags, appears to be searching for a clear sign that government leaders are backing him. The retired paratrooper general, who so far has personally carried the principal burden of peace talks in Chechnya, may fear that if the tentative peace collapses, he will take the blame.

He urged Chernomyrdin on Wednesday to join talks with the Chechens. The prime minister, who has been giving mixed signals about the peace process, said he will participate "if necessary, as that's my duty."

Lebed was in Chechnya earlier this week to arrange a renewal of the Russian pullout, which was halted by Russian commanders over a prisoner exchange dispute with the rebels.

US Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole looks out into the audience during a campaign rally in Las Vegas, NV, on Thursday. Dole was back out on the campaign trail one day after falling off a stage in Chico, CA, on Wednesday.



US Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole looks out into the audience during a campaign rally in Las Vegas, NV, on Thursday. Dole was back out on the campaign trail one day after falling off a stage in Chico, CA, on Wednesday. — AFP/UNB photo

Road mishap claims 17 in Kashmir

AT least 17 people were killed and 55 injured Thursday when an overloaded bus overturned in the Himalayan state of Kashmir, the Press Trust of India said, reports from New Delhi.

Police said the accident occurred near the town of Bari-Pattan in the southern district of Doda no further details were available. The injured have been admitted in hospital in Jammu, the winter capital of the northern province, police said.

Blast kills 2 in Guwahati

A school girl and soldier were killed yesterday in a car bomb attack aimed at a senior police official, Indian police said, reports from Guwahati, India.

A spokesman said Naga militants detonated a powerful remote-controlled device in the town of Imphal in Manipur as the state inspector-general of police Christopher Doungel was being driven past. "This is the fourth attempt on Doungel's life," the spokesman said, adding: "a Sotwahl girl hit by splinters also died on the spot."

Clinton to visit Australia in Nov

President Bill Clinton will visit Australia after the US presidential election in November, the Australian government announced Friday, AP reports from Canberra.

Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer said Clinton is to visit from November 19 to November 23, prior to an Asia-Pacific leaders' summit in the Philippines.

9 students drown in India

Nine teenage students drowned in southern India while trying to immerse an idol of Ganesha, the elephant-headed Hindu god of luck and wealth, after a festival, the United News of India said yesterday, reports from New Delhi.

Police said the students, aged between 16 and 18, drowned in a lake in Karnataka Wednesday. They did not give further details. Hindus immerse clay idols of the pot-bellied deity in lakes and rivers at the end of the Ganesha festival.

China blasts Taiwan's bid to regain UN seat

BEIJING, Sept 20. China today denounced Taiwan's attempts to regain a seat at the United Nations and warned its efforts were doomed to failure, reports AP.

"It is time that the Taiwan authorities stop dreaming of participation in the United Nations," Xinhua said in a signed commentary.

Taiwan's proposals of "parallel representation have been designed to create two China in the United Nations and in the international community and they are doomed to failure," it added.

Seventeen of the 30 nations that afford diplomatic recognition to Taiwan asked the UN General Assembly on Wednesday to include Taiwan's readmission on the agenda for the upcoming assembly meeting.

But the motion failed, as did similar attempts in July and August.

"The Taiwan authorities' attempts to divide the motherland will in no way benefit our Taiwan compatriots. What they are doing runs against the fundamental interests of the Taiwan people," the article warned.

The government of the people's republic of China also represents the rights and interests of the Taiwanese people at the United Nations. It is useless to deny the fact, it added.

Taiwan split from mainland China in 1949 after the defeated nationalists fled there after a bloody civil war, but the island maintained China's UN seat as the republic of China until 1971 when recognition finally moved to Beijing.

Chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh resigns

ITANAGAR, Sept 20. The Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, today tendered his resignation and that of his council of ministers to the state governor, Mata Prasad following differences between the state Congress and the central leadership, reports PTI.

Apang, the longest serving Congress chief minister in the country, called on the government along with his cabinet colleagues to tender the resignations, a Raj Bhavan press release said.

The release said the governor had accepted the resignations and had requested Apang and his cabinet colleagues to continue as the caretaker ministry till a new government was formed.

The Arunachal Pradesh Congress committee has split with one faction led by Talar Doye calling itself the 'Arunachal Congress' and the other led by Tadak Dulom, whose appointment by the AICC as the APCC president sparked off the ongoing crisis.

The legislature wing of the party under the leadership of Apang has joined the Arunachal Congress, party sources said.



A Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) peshmerga buys a Kalachnikov magazine at the Erbil market on Thursday, in the Iraqi Kurdistan. KDP Kurd leader Massud Barzani has promised the United States to help keep President Saddam Hussein out of northern Iraq, despite his new alliance with Baghdad, a diplomatic source said in Ankara. — AFP/UNB photo

2 Israeli troops killed in clash with Hezbollah

SIDON, Lebanon, Sept 20. Two Israeli soldiers were killed and three wounded today in a clash with Hezbollah in south Lebanon, triggering Israeli shelling in which a woman was wounded in her home, security sources said, reports AFP.

A spokesman for the Iranian-backed Hezbollah charged that the shelling, the heaviest since Israel's operation "grapes of wrath" in April, was a violation of a ceasefire accord to spare civilians.

The flare-up came as Israel kept a close watch on Syrian troop movements in Lebanon for the past several weeks amid heightened tension surrounding the stalled Middle East peace process.

Hezbollah guerrillas ambushed an Israeli army patrol on a hilltop near Aakmata village.

Democracy remains elusive as Kuwait returns to prosperity

KUWAIT, Sept 20. As the sky darkens and the day's scorching heat fades into soft breezes, hundreds of men sitting on carpets spread over a parking lot launch into a political discussion laced with criticism of the government, reports AP.

Five years after the Gulf War, and at a time of renewed tension with Iraq, public debate is active in the streets and in a revived parliament. Democracy, however, remains a distant ideal in a land where the emir and his family have the final say on all key issues and only 15 per cent of the citizens are eligible to vote.

Kuwait's economy has recovered from the war. Oil wells are pumping a healthy 2 million barrels of crude a day, restoring a comfortable lifestyle to a land where virtually all manual labour is done by foreign workers who easily outnumber the Kuwaitis.

Along the Gulf beachfront in the capital, where the Iraqi troops were once encamped, there are now manicured parks and new restaurants, including some foreign chains.

But beneath the smooth hum of prosperity, some Kuwaitis feel they haven't realised the democratic reforms they had hoped for after the US-led coalition drove out the occupying Iraqi forces in 1991.

Kuwait's emir, Sheikh Jabar al-Ahmed al-Sabah, restored parliament in 1992, six years after it was dismissed for its criticism of his government.

Now, the parliament — the only such legislature in the conservative Gulf — passes the budget, influences government policy and even has initiated corruption probes of ministers. It holds new elections October 7, Islamic conservatives, who hold 19 of the 50 seats, compete with Western-educated liberals in a battle to take the emirate in different directions.

Some see the legislature as a steam valve that has prevented the kind of extremism seen in other Muslim states.

"The reason we don't have this violent approach is because all different political groups are represented in the National Assembly," Abdullah al-Shayeb, parliament's political adviser, said over tea and dates in his office in the bone-white parliament building.

"You only resort to sabotage or underground movements; violence and terrorism when your voice cannot be heard," he said.

But others note that parliament's powers remain limited, and that the body cannot overrule the emir.

The al-Sabah family has ruled Kuwait for more than 200 years and holds virtually all the important posts in the government.

Women do not have the right to vote. Overall, only 100,000 of the 650,000 citizens can cast ballots due to a restrictive system that requires male citizens to prove Kuwaiti ancestry back several generations.

Political parties are banned. "Instead there are 'movements' with politicians affiliated informally with one another."

The issues in the second post-Gulf War elections, economy and security, are debated in "diwanias," the men-only gatherings that have existed since ancient times.

At a recent diwaniya, intense wafted through the balmy air as hundreds of men in the parking lot-turned outdoor meeting hall listened to Abdul Rida Asiri, a Kuwait University political science professor and candidate for parliament.

Asiri spoke of the need to diversify the economy, which is 90 per cent dependent on oil.

Men wearing traditional white robes and bowing head dress nodded in agreement. Cellular phones went off softly in the crowd, sounding like crickets calling to each other in the night.

Another speaker complained of Kuwait's high defence expenditures, which are hampering efforts to create more jobs.

To strengthen its military, Kuwait is spending 30 per cent of its budget on some of the world's best military hardware, and hopes to double its troop strength to 40,000 in a few years.

Kuwait is also still picking up much of the tab from the Gulf War, spending 70 billion dollars of its 100 billion dollars in overseas reserves, and borrowing billions more. To refill the coffers, Kuwait plans to begin charging for services like medical care that were free for decades.

In the diwanias, America's latest spat with Iraq takes second billing to domestic issues. Kuwaitis have become used to the confrontations and feel confident that military presence here, will serve as their shield.

"We believe we are one of the safest spots in the world now," said investor Mansour al-Mubarak.

Other investors appear equally confident. Kuwait's stock market has been climbing amid brisk trading.

Any "mischief" by Saddam is in Kuwait's interest. Al-Mubarak said, because it would refocus American attention on the region and probably contribute to Saddam's eventual downfall.

Off the Record

Liz in trouble again

NEW YORK: Liz Taylor owes actress Cicely Tyson more than \$600,000 for firing her from a production, a jury ruled, reports AP.

In 1983, Tyson was under contract to Taylor's production company to act in stage and screen versions of "The Corn is Green," the 1938 Evelyn Williams play.

After critics panned the theater version, Tyson was fired for taking a night off to attend a Washington tribute to her husband, Miles Davis who has since died.

The show closed after less than two weeks.

Tyson sued, saying she was "improperly terminated" and Taylor still owed her \$607,000 plus interest on her contract.

"I'm relieved," Tyson said after the verdict Wednesday. "It's been a long time. I'm just glad it's over and the truth will always win."

Taylor did not show up for the three-day trial, and appeared before the jury by videotape. Her lawyer said an appeal was likely.

No doubt, this tidbit would make candy-lovers cheerful

SAN JOSE, (California): A California researcher said chocolate may act like red wine in reducing the risk of heart disease, although he acknowledges that more study is needed, reports AFP.

Andrew Waterhouse, a wine chemist at the University of California at Davis, found that chocolate contains phenolics, the same chemicals that act as antioxidants in laboratory tests of red wine.

"The pleasant pairing of red wine and dark chocolate could have synergistic advantages beyond their complementary tastes," he wrote in a letter to the British journal, the Lancet.

Some studies have shown antioxidants may guard against heart disease by protecting arteries from getting clogged with cholesterol, although it is not clear whether these chemicals in food act as antioxidants in the body.

The researchers found that four millilitres (1.5 ounces) of milk chocolate contain about as much pectinol as a glass of red wine. One cup of hot chocolate made with 2 tablespoons of cocoa has about three-fourths as much.

But Lois Gold of the University of California at Berkeley said, "there are better ways to get antioxidants that don't have so much fat. If you eat your fruits and vegetables, you'll get a lot more."

Shakur made music video depicting his own death

NEW YORK: About a month before he was gunned down, Tupac Shakur made a music video depicting his own death in a shooting and showing the rap music singer and writer being ushered into heaven, reports AP.

The video for "I Ain't Mad" which aired on MTV on Wednesday night, features Shakur being shot as he leaves a nightclub with a friend. Shakur was wounded in a drive-by shooting in Las Vegas on September 7 and died a week later.

"It's pretty spooky," MTV executive vice president Andy Schou said.

In the video, Shakur is greeted in a cloud-covered heaven scene by dead stars, including Jimi Hendrix, Nat King Cole, Miles Davis, Marvin Gaye, Sammy Davis Jr. and Redd Foxx.

Shakur's record label, Death Row, delivered the video to MTV just three days after his death.

"It is ironic — definitely a case of life imitating art." Death Row's George Pryce said. "It's almost as if Tupac had a sense of foreboding."

MQM activist killed in Karachi

KARACHI, Sept 20: An activist belonging to a breakaway faction of Pakistan's ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) was killed in a gun-battle with police today in the port city of Karachi, police said, reports Reuters.

They said Mohammad Habib, the MQM's Haqqi faction head for the Pak colony area, was killed in the western Orangi town area, while three of his colleagues managed to flee.

"A police party raided a house in Orangi where Habib was hiding, which resulted in an exchange of fire. Habib was killed in the gun-battle," a police official said. A kalashnikov assault rifle and bullets were found in Habib's possession.

Haqqi spokesman Younus Khan claimed Habib was killed in a "fake encounter."