

Morshed Khan's visit to India Dhaka, Delhi need to recognise the reality

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan's visit comes at a time when bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh have nosedived following New Delhi's accusation of terrorist presence and illegal immigration.

India appears to have shaped a new approach -- based on toughness and loud diplomacy -- to dealing with Bangladesh. Indians, however, are divided over the desirability of such a strategy.

One of the factors responsible for India's firm stand is Dhaka's refusal to address New Delhi's security concern arising from the presence of northeastern Indian insurgents and terrorists in Bangladesh and illegal immigration from the country, say officials here.

What has frustrated India is Bangladesh's pointblank denial of the problems.

During political and official level contacts with Bangladesh over the last three years, India has given extensive documentation on illegal immigration and terrorist presence in Bangladesh.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman was given a list of terrorist-training camps and another list of 88 terrorists during his visit to New Delhi in December 2001. The lists were again presented at a meeting between the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) last October.

India recognises that it is not practical to deport all 15 million

Bangladeshis -- a figure given by Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani -- and that economic compulsion is the driving force behind migration to India.

India also accepts that the 4,000km porous border between the two countries does not help check illegal immigration and the border management needs to be enforced by both sides.

The problems can be resolved if Bangladesh stops switching to 'denial mode', said the officials.

India expects that Bangladesh speaks in a constructive fashion. New Delhi's judgement is that Dhaka has not responded positively

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to India's concern.

The officials point to the joint communiqué signed by the two countries during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to New Delhi in 1992, which spoke about the problem of illegal immigration and say Dhaka cannot deny the disappearance of the issue now.

Khan's visit to India at the invitation of his counterpart Yashwant Sinha opens the window to a fresh approach by Dhaka and an opportunity for the two countries to recognise the ground reality.

A consensus between the Centre and the states, which was not found in the past, toughened India's stand. In the past, West Bengal sus-

pected any attempt to detect, deport and check illegal immigration from Bangladesh.

But a recent meeting of chief ministers, including Buddhadev Bhattacharya of West Bengal, decided that illegal immigration should be seriously tackled.

It became clear at the meeting that even if the idea of deporting all Bangladeshi immigrants is not workable, India will no longer put up with the problem and take tough measures against fresh immigration, say the officials.

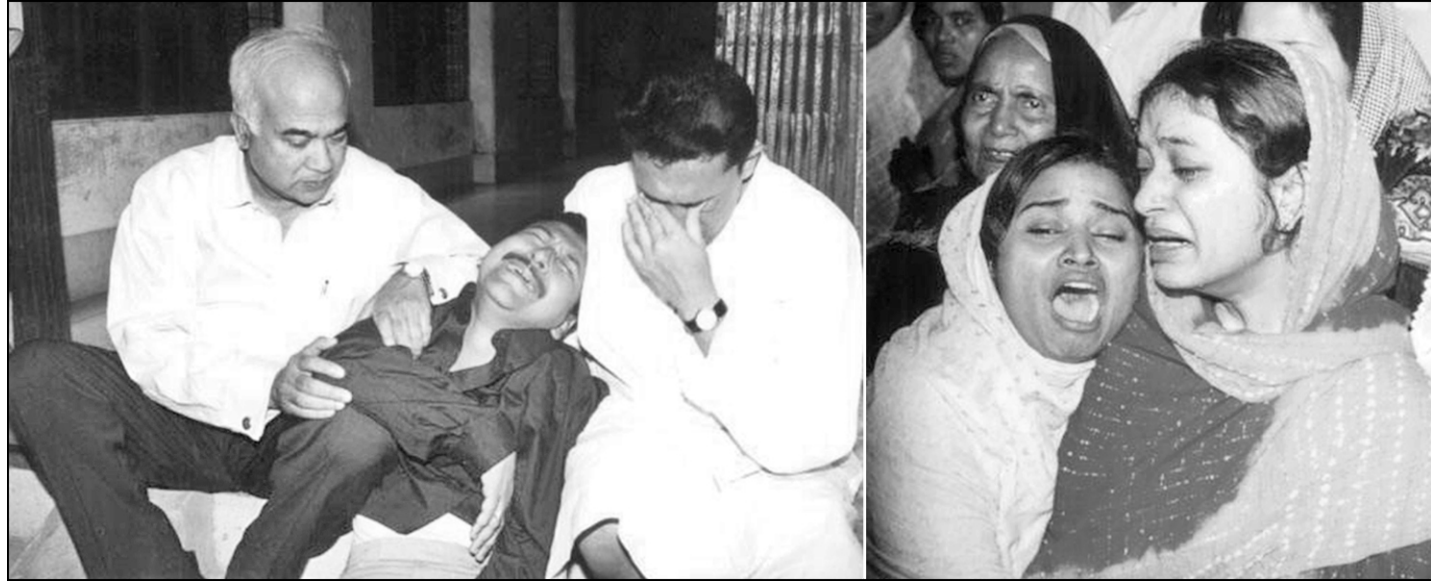
Some foreign policy analysts feel India must be ready to engage the Khaleda Zia government in talks and not get bogged down in impatience and frustration that sometimes characterises bilateral ties.

Earlier, Sinha presented an outline of refashioning India's policy towards its neighbours at a seminar organised by the Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Sinha proposed a South Asian union to take the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) to a higher level, envisaging, among others, political overtones, free trade and economic integration.

The thrust of his vision was on economic diplomacy that should not be held hostage to disputes of other nature.

What remains to be seen is whether Sinha is able to take with him other ministers whose cooperation is essential to put in place his new neighbourhood policy.



Former minister Mosharrif Hossain (left) consoles a relative of the slain office secretary of district Awami League (AL) Faruque Ahmed Siddiqui and relatives mourn Mohammad Solaiman, secretary of the Burishchar Union AL, who was also killed at Hathazari in Chittagong Wednesday night.

Remains of all 7 Columbia astronauts identified: NASA

AFP, Washington

The remains of all seven astronauts killed aboard the space shuttle Columbia have been positively identified, NASA said Thursday.

"We are comforted by the knowledge we have brought our seven friends home," said Bob Cabana, director of flight crew operations at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

The bodies of astronauts Rick Husband, Willie McCool, Michael Anderson, David Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark and Israeli Ilan Ramon were identified through DNA testing at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

Ramon was buried Tuesday in Israel. The bodies of the others will be released to their families, the National Aeronautics and Space

Administration said in a statement. The seven died February 1 when the shuttle broke up on reentry into the Earth's atmosphere just 16 minutes before landing.

An intense search for debris is under way in the southwestern United States as investigators search for clues to the disaster. Preliminary findings indicate temperatures on the shuttle's left side spiked in the minutes before it broke up, creating drag on the left wing that caused a loss of control.

Two days before the end of Columbia's 16-day mission, a NASA engineer raised the possibility of a catastrophe caused by the over-heating of landing gear, which he said was likely to result in a potentially disastrous tire blowout on re-entry.

In an internal memorandum

dated January 30 made public late Wednesday, engineer Robert Daugherty considered the possibility that a piece of foam which broke off the shuttle's external fuel tank on liftoff and hit the left wing could have seriously damaged the door of the wheel well.

A panel of outside experts appointed by NASA said a buildup of plasma -- the super-heated gas that normally engulfs the shuttle on re-entry -- in the shuttle's left wheel well could have caused the severe damage that resulted in the loss of the spacecraft.

That theory tended to discount one which earlier suggested the accident was caused by the loss of one or more of the ceramic tiles forming the shuttle's heat shield.

"Heat transfer through the structure as from a missing tile would not be sufficient to cause the temperature indications seen in the last minutes of flight," the accident investigation board said in a statement.

"Additional analysis is underway, looking at various scenarios in which a breach of some type, allowing plasma into the wheel well area or elsewhere in the wing, could occur."

Abbas held

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revolver along with 23 bullets.

Killer Abbas, son of Shahabuddin, is a notorious criminal of the capital. As per police records, he is accused in five murder cases, five cases of attempting to murder, and several other cases of extortion and grabbing of property.

He has been branded as Killer Abbas for his record as a murderer. He is also accused in the murder of Azzad on the CMM's court premises.

Top police officials took Abbas to the DB headquarters at the Minto Road for interrogation. He will be produced before the court today.

Of the 23, police have so far arrested Titon, Khorsheed Alam alias Rasu, Freedom Sohel and Kamal Pasha alias Pasha.

Another most wanted criminal, Mohammad Alauddin, was beaten to death by a mob in Rampura.

The government published a list of 23 most-wanted criminals of the city on December 24, 2001, and ordered police to immediately arrest them in its bid to improve law and order situation.

The home ministry also announced an award of Tk one lakh for co-operation with the law enforcement agencies or information leading to arrest of the top eight criminals, and Tk 50,000 for the rest.

US steps up anti-Taliban offensive in Afghanistan

AFP, Bagram Air Base

US-led forces in central Afghanistan yesterday appeared to be stepping up their bombardment of extremists in a remote mountain valley after a fresh pre-dawn offensive in the area.

Colonel Roger King, a spokesman for the US military, said coalition warplanes continued to pummel cave hideouts in the Baghran valley area of Helmand province, where a US Special Forces patrol was ambushed Monday.

He said troops taking part in the operation, code-named Eagle Fury, claimed to have routed rebel fighters, believed to be loyal to the hardline former Taliban regime, from one village in the Lejay area of Baghran.

Meanwhile, residents in southern Afghan capital of Kandahar reported a heavy deployment of US vehicles, troops and helicopters heading towards Helmand from a US airbase on the outskirts of the city.

"US Special Forces continued operation Eagle Fury in Helmand province south of Lejay yesterday, with troops clearing dozens of caves," King told reporters Friday at Bagram air base near Kabul, the US military's headquarters in Afghanistan.

He said fighters had fled from one village, Robatak, where large amounts of empty ammunition cases, rocket tubes and rocket propelled grenade launchers were discovered.

"It is estimated enemy personnel may have taken refuge in the caves along the ridgeline to the east and west of Lejay.

King said coalition warplanes dropped four 500 pound bombs and fired several hundred rounds of ammunition at the caves at around 3:30 am (2300 GMT Thursday), destroying at least three.

He said there had been no reports of civilian or coalition casualties, although a full "battle assessment" was to be carried out later Friday.

Obituary

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was buried at the Islamic Center Graveyard there.

His Qulhwani was held at the mosque of the Islamic Center yesterday and the second Qulhwani will be held at Janakantha Bhavan in Dhaka on Monday next.

Khan, popularly known as 'Barda' to his family circle and Khan Bhai to the expatriate Bangladeshis in the US, was the advisor on international affairs to the daily Janakantha. His youngest brother Atiqullah Khan Masud is the editor and publisher of the newspaper.

Hardliners

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Police, particularly in Bombay, stepped up security for Valentine's Day, in what is now becoming an annual drill.

"It's an annual feature for us now. We obviously cannot protect every shop, but the big ones have been given security," Bombay joint police commissioner Javed Ahmed told AFP.

As of midday, no violence linked to Valentine's Day was reported.

US carrier group commander fired over 'affair'

REUTERS, Washington

The US Navy on Thursday dismissed the commander of the USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier battle group, among the forces being prepared for possible war with Iraq, because he had an "improper relationship" with a woman naval officer.

The US Navy Seventh Fleet, based in Yokosuka, Japan, said Rear Adm. Steven Kunkle was moved to another post because of a loss of confidence in his ability to command.

Kunkle was given a letter of reprimand on Wednesday before being dismissed by Vice Admiral Robert Willard, commander of the US Seventh Fleet, a Navy spokesman said.

"Kunkle, who commanded the USS Kitty Hawk Battle Group, was relieved Feb. 13 by Willard following non-judicial punishment proceedings here during which it was determined that Kunkle had engaged in an improper relationship with a female naval officer," the Seventh Fleet said in a statement.

It gave no further details of the relationship.

Commander Matthew Brown, a spokesman for the Seventh Fleet, said Kunkle was relieved of his command because Willard "no longer had confidence in Admiral Kunkle's ability to lead his forces in an effective manner."

Kunkle was temporarily reassigned as commander of US Naval Forces in Japan, Brown said. Kunkle assumed command of carrier group in September 2001.

The Kitty Hawk, with its 75 warplanes, was ordered to the Gulf region on Feb. 7 to join four other US carriers as part of the large US military buildup for a possible war with Iraq.

The ship's mission has not been affected by the change of command, Brown told Reuters.

"The Kitty Hawk battle group remains at sea. It remains en route to the Central Command area as directed," Brown said. "There is no impact on the battle group as far as their orders or their future operations."

The spokesman said Kunkle was flown off the 1,069-foot (324-metre) Kitty Hawk last week during the investigation into his conduct and that the ship's chief of staff, Captain Dick Corpus, was put in command until Kunkle's replacement is named.

The decision to remove Kunkle came 10 days after the Pentagon said its Inspector General's Office was investigating Gen. Tommy Franks for alleged abuse of office.

Franks, who is to set to command US forces in any war with Iraq, is under scrutiny following allegations that he allowed his wife to sit in on classified briefings and that she received perks like a bodyguard and the services of a woman soldier to help with errands.

2 Saudi pilots

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created the TSA, authorizes the government to bar anyone found to be a threat while working in the industry, according to the report.

The Saudi "airmen's certificates" were revoked last month without public notice, the paper said.

Saudi Arabia has been criticized for not doing enough to curb fund-raising for terrorists purposes.

Fifteen of the 19 hijackers who took part in the September 11 attacks were Saudi nationals.

Dinajpur blasts

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approach it. They snatched the camera of local freelance journalist Mizanur Rahman Lulu when he attempted to take a snap.

Some sources claimed that and some leaflets of Jamiatul Mudarresin, an association of madrasah teachers, were recovered from the house. But the Officer-in-Charge of Kotwali thana said they did not yet find any clue that may suggest involvement of any political party or religious organisation in the incident. "They (those responsible for the incident) are miscreants", he told this correspondent.

A three-member CID team of bomb experts came from Dhaka yesterday and started investigation, police said.

Police arrested injured Badal, Hafez Habibur Rahman, an imam (who leads prayer) of Khetipara Ahle-Hadith mosque and Faruk Hossain, a teacher of Hazrat Aayesa Siddique (R) Girls' Madrasah in the area.

Local people also alleged that madrasah teachers and students from other areas used to frequent the house, owned by one Sohrab Ali who is now on Hajj pilgrimage.

A case has been filed under Section 4 of the Explosives Act.

Gulf region

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Indonesians, mostly domestic workers, live in at-risk neighbouring countries like Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan, although only 83 live in Iraq, an official said.

The Philippines government in Manila said it has readied plans to evacuate an estimated 100 Filipinos who live in Iraq, possibly by relocating them to other countries like Jordan, officials said.

However, they say that only a few were expected to take advantage of the government evacuation plan as many of those in Iraq are working with the United Nations, which has its own evacuation arrangements.

South Asian nations have rallied to the cause of their citizens and diplomats. On Monday, Colombo reported it had formed a task force to coordinate the airlift of the estimated 1,000-1,500 Sri Lankans who live in Iraq and a further 170,000 from Kuwait.

India's national carrier Air India said on Tuesday it was ready to air lift to safety the estimated 50,000 Indian migrant workers who live in Kuwait.

Pakistan pulled non-essential diplomatic staff and diplomats' families out of Baghdad last week, but has made no plans to evacuate either the remaining diplomatic staff or the 42 Pakistani civilians still in Iraq. Information Minister Sheikh Rashid said.

"They are willing to stay there," Rashid told AFP.

Neither are there plans to evacuate the 45,000 Pakistani guest workers living in neighbouring Kuwait.

Offices

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Rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, however, charged high fares.

The Dhaka City Corporation's garbage cleaners were active during the Eid vacation, especially on Eid day. The rain on the Eid day also helped greatly to wash away the leftovers of sacrificial animals.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka himself supervised the cleanliness drive, and he moved around the city streets from 4pm till late night on Eid day.

Administration said in a statement.

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In an internal memorandum

Myanmar promises fair trial for arrested activists

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar's military government promised yesterday a fair trial for opposition activists arrested for plotting to blow up a prison and a railway station.

The 12 arrests announced this week have been seen as a sign of growing tension between the Southeast Asian country's ruling generals and pro-democracy opposition, led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

"The government regrets that a small group of political figures were recently arrested for violating national laws," a statement from the government spokesman's office said.

"They will, of course, be tried fairly in a court of law and are considered innocent until proven guilty."

Military intelligence said on Monday seven of those arrested were low-level members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) who were trying to spark civil unrest.

The NLD won the country's last elections in 1990 by a landslide but has never been allowed to govern.

Also arrested was Sai Nyunt Lwin, secretary-general of the Shan National League for Democracy, which was the second most successful party in the 1990 elections. The political affiliation of the other

four detainees was not given.

In an apparent conciliatory gesture, Friday's statement from the junta said it believed those arrested were acting on their own outside their own party structures.

"The government would also like to extend its thanks to the vast majority of political figures in Myanmar who are acting responsibly," it said.

The arrest of the 12 activists came as human rights watchdog Amnesty International urged Myanmar this week to scrap a raft of colonial-era laws used to lock up political prisoners.

They also come at a time of worsening relations between the military, in power for most of the past 40 years, and opposition.

Diplomats predicted a new era of reconciliation last May when Suu Kyi was released from 19 months of house arrest. Her release followed a period of intense international pressure and secretive UN-brokered talks between the opposition and the junta.

But there have been few signs of progress since then and the government and opposition have begun to criticise each other in public again after a pause of more than a year.

Saddam bans

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that would explicitly or implicitly authorise war. Britain is anxious to give any military force international legitimacy.

So far Russian, China and France, who have veto power on the 15-member council, as well as Germany, Syria and other members want to beef up inspections, triple the number of arms experts and send in UN security guards to "freeze" suspected sites.

Their reaction to the inspectors' reports will be immediate as the opposing sides confront each other in the televised 1515 GMT session with the French, German, Russia, Chinese and Syrian foreign ministers attending along with US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Chile, Mexico and Spain are also sending foreign ministers.

The United States and Britain hope to get the minimum nine positive votes required for adoption of a resolution and possibly risk a veto. France is conducting a similar lobbying effort in hopes a US move towards war will not get the minimum votes and spare it a veto.

A resolution could be circulated as early as this weekend but most diplomats believe next week is more likely.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said after arriving in New York on Thursday night that Russia is opposed to a new resolution on Iraq and that the world body needed to be united in any action it decided to take against Iraq.

He said a peaceful solution was still the best option.

"I believe there is no need at present in passing a second, a third or a fourth resolution on Iraq," Ivanov said in comments carried by the Itar-Tass news agency.

AL leaders

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The AL president, Sheikh Hasina, condemned the killing and held the cadres of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir responsible.

Killing became widespread after the four-party alliance came to power in 2001, said Hasina.

"The alliance government wants to annihilate Awami League by killing and torturing its leaders and workers," Hasina alleged in a message.

She prayed for salvation of the departed souls and demanded punishment to the killers.

One Farid Miah, 25, was beaten to death by a mob in Raozan Wednesday, adds BSS.

Police said the incident took place at Kachukain in Raozan at 2.30pm, as Farid and his gang tried to bully locals into selling animal hide at a cheaper rate.

The injured Akber Hossain, Zalal Ahmed and Mohammad Miah were admitted to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

US at fault, says Gorbachev

AFP, Moscow

Former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, who gave his tacit approval for the 1991 Gulf War, said yesterday that Washington was at fault for the current standoff with Baghdad.

"The UN administration seems to believe that the new world order should become an area of American control, where its interests will be a priority and the interests of others will be ignored," Gorbachev told Friday's issue of the state-controlled Rossiyskaya Gazeta daily.

"The situation will not change ... until America makes an effort and becomes more realistic," the former Nobel Peace Prize winner said.

"There is a need for deep change in America itself," said Gorbachev, adding that he believed the faults for the crisis "are not with Iraq."

"Ahead of us there are problems the solution of which will be... difficult," Ivanov said, adding the world community "should not split, but unite".

Much depends on what Blix says, with UN officials saying he will have many gray shades and speak about areas where Iraq has cooperated as well as where it did not.

Gyneacologist sentenced to death for sex crimes

AFP, Beijing

A court in eastern China sentenced a gynecologist and repeat sex offender to death for indecent sexual contact and sodomizing 16 of his patients over the last four years, state press said yesterday.

Dai Xinglie, a gynecologist in Ningbo city, Zhejiang province was recently convicted by a local intermediate court for the acts which the court ruled amounted to rape, the China News service reported on its website.

Dai, 63, "on many occasions engaged in illicit sexual contact and performed indecent sexual acts on many women against their will," the report, citing the court ruling, said.

"This behaviour separately constituted the crime of rape and the crime of forcible indecent acts toward women."

The crimes allegedly were committed between 1998 and 2002 when Dai took advantage of the patients who had sought him out for consultations and examinations on a variety of ailments.

The court ruling also took into account Dai's previous sexual convictions including a 10-year sentence for performing an indecent sexual act in the mid-1960s and a 13-year conviction for illicit sexual relations with a minor in 1984, it said.

"Even after Dai Xinglie was convicted on many occasions of raping minors, sodomizing minors and hooliganism, he did not harbour any remorse," the court ruled.

Human rights group Amnesty International has previously said it recorded at least 4,015 death sentences and 2,468 executions last year in China, but believes actual figures could be much higher.

Rajpunnah

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abroad, including foreign diplomats, are likely to attend the ceremony.

The cultural programme will include tribal sports, dance, music and drama.

The district headquarters has already taken a festive mood. Approach roads to the district town has also been renovated by the municipal authorities.

Poll violence

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supporters of a defeated candidate, Nazrul Kazi, put barricade on the Faridpur-Dhaka highway, disrupting movement of vehicles.

At one stage, the angry mob clashed with the members of the law enforcing agencies when the latter tried to remove the barricade. They hurled home-made bombs and fired gunshots at the law enforcers, according to locals.

Earlier, the clashes ensued when the supporters of 4-party alliance candidate Nazrul Kazi attacked the supporters of chairman-elect Bulbul Sarder (AL-backed) in the morning.

Police and BDR members fired several rounds of shots and managed to bring the situation under control after three hours at about 10.00am.

In Munshiganj, A young man was killed and 12 others were injured in post-poll violence at Uttar Fuladi village in Gazaria upazila on Wednesday. Abdul Baten, 28, who sustained stab injuries, died on the way to Bhaverchar Health Complex.

Police said supporters of a winning and a losing candidate clashed Wednesday afternoon, leaving 13 people injured.

Police recovered the body of a local Juba Dal leader from the river Shitalakhya at Muktarpur on the same day.



Christians celebrate a festival at a local church at Diang in Chittagong on Friday.

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the judicial service in 1983. He was transferred to Dhaka from Khulna a week ago.

The namaj-e-janaja of Hasib was held at Dhanmondi Eidgah, after the Eid prayer Wednesday. He was buried at his family graveyard in Dashpara village in Daudkandi, Comilla yesterday.

Hasib,