The Last Rites

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN



Karim and his products for the final journey. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Abdul Karim, a man in his early sixties, sits lazily in his old shop. The fragrance of camphor, sandalwood and agar wafts in the shop and its surroundings, creating a mystic ambience. For shops like Karim's, the mysticism is an essential décor as his is no simple establishment. It's the place where you can get the carry-ons for your journey to the land of no return. Karim offers all sorts of equipment necessary for a good Muslim funeral. He specially sells the products that are essential for a quiet sleep in one's final resting place. With his complete package of 17 ritual items, he is the first person to welcome the guests of Azimpur graveyard.

Adjacent to the wall of the Azimpuir graveyard, one of the largest burial sites in Dhaka, his shop enjoys a constant supply of the deceased. Karim says, "I have been running this shop for around 40 years. Before me, my father ran it and my grandfather had established it. It's our ancestral business." Like Karim's, there are several other stores in the area adjacent to the large graveyards in Azimpur and Jurain.

The banner of these stores are a rather tell tale affair. The name of Karim's establishment is Shesh Biday Store (The Final Farewell Store). Their product is the same. Shahid, an owner of one of these shops says, "We offer everything, the perfumes,