

Floral offerings for the deceased loved ones.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

camphor, burial shrouds for men and women, rose water, coffins, washing materials for the dead, everything that one needs to be buried."

But how do these businessmen feel about their trade? Karim says, "I take it as my profession. I believe that I am also doing a religious service. I make all the arrangements for the Muslims in their final journey. It's an unusual line but obviously a charitable act, if you think of it." Besides burial products, many people come to offer floral wreaths and incense to put on the graves of their loved ones. These shops also keep a constant supply of fresh flowers and incense sticks in their store. Sahid says, "We never bargain with our customers. We offer our goods at a minimum price."

But the price list shows that even during your final journey you will be in need of wads of cash. What happens to those who can't afford a huge amount of money or who have no relatives in this city to bid them a good farewell? The government usually runs a facility in the graveyard to bury any unattended or unidentified dead body with the proper ritual at the government's expense. But like other government facilities in Bangladesh, it does not always work the way it should be. Some non-profit organisations like Anjuman Mufidul Islam fund the final passage of these unfortunate people.

Shahid shares such a sad story. His shop is situated near Jurain grave yard. In his words, "One day I heard that a dead body had been left unattended near the courtyard of the graveyard mosque. It was covered with a jute robe. I opened it and saw two corpses in it, a beautiful young woman and a new born child. Probably the mother and the child both died during the delivery. Police were called and after all the official formalities they learned that the government stock of burial materials was exhausted and everyone was thinking as to what should be done with the corpses. At that time we, the four shop owners of the area, provided everything free of cost and had completed the ritual with due solemnity. We often do this whenever we come across such a situation." The story tells us how helpless in this earth we are, but it also shows that some people like Shahid still have humanity left despite living in this mechanised world.

In Jurain graveyard, along with many poor deceased people, the burnt bodies of Tajrin garment workers were also buried. Upon entering, you'll see the graves covered with marigolds. You will start to wonder if the poor relatives of the deceased come here every day. Shahid says, "I don't think their poor family members would have the ability to do it. There are some local boys who buy flowers for these unfortunate victims and put bouquets of flowers on their graves every week. They are our constant customers but they will not agree to talk with you as they want to remain anonymous."

If we think with our heart, we will be able to realise that we are nothing more than a moment in this billion year old earth. Any day we will have to become Karim or Shahid's customer. For the final journey, Karim and Shahid might help us with their products but for the life hereafter we should do some good deeds like boys who place flowers on mass graves.

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