



# Throwaway hair earns a living

Entrepreneur Arzina Akter Khushi shares her story of success with The Daily Star

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**R**ABEYA, Karina and Parvin weave discarded hair into wigs. They are from poor families but they are closely attached with the fashionable hairpieces that made them able to earn Tk 1,800-2,000 a month.

Like them, around 50 women of the remote Mostalipur village in Chatmohar upazila have been doing the same under Arzina Akter Khushi, the pioneer of the village in this field.

Khushi received training from Gazipur and later started this business with eight women of her neighbouring houses in 2009. Her husband, Al-Amin, managing director of

Hair Fashion in Gazipur, inspired Khushi for this venture.

She established a small factory in her house last year. She trained every worker on making wigs before employing them at her factory. Now there are 12 knitting tables, each of which accommodates four women.

"I started this business to be self-employed as well as to empower the ultra-poor women of my village," Khushi said adding "I found some trained women working in my husband's factory when I visited the place last year. Then I thought about the poor women in my village who are living in hardship. I returned to my village after receiving training and started to train the poor."

"At the early stages, there was poor response from the village women. But my workers were in my support all the time. They inspired other women to join them. After a few months, many women came to me and showed their interest to be a part of my factory."

Around 100-150 wigs are manufactured in the factory every month. Now she is working on expanding production.

"The village women are not so professional but they are sincere and working hard to maintain their families. Each of them can make five to six wigs per month," Khushi added.

"Approximately four to five days are needed to complete weaving a wig with net frame, each wig needs 15 to 16 hours in total," a woman worker said.

"I work here after finishing with family chores. This is a



A woman makes wigs at the factory owned by Arzina Akter Khushi in Pabna.

good opportunity for my family because I am adding something to the family income. We are now better off compared to before," said Najma Khatun, a worker of Khushi's factory.

"I now dream of educating my children," Khatun added.

Khushi said they buy discarded hair from beauty-parlours and hairdressers at Tk 6,000-7,000 per kg. Each wig

needs 100-150 grams of hair. The hairs are needed to process with chemicals at first before weaving them into net frame, she said.

At completion, each wig costs Tk 1,000-1,200. Hair Fashion buys each of them at Tk 1,400 and does the rest of giving final touches, packaging and marketing. "We earn Tk 20,000-25,000 monthly from

this small factory."

"Our product is mainly exported, mostly to India. Hair Fashion deals with the selling side of operations. We are proud to be contributing to the country's forex earnings," Khushi added.

"When I started this business many people criticised it but that has changed now. I am happy because the poor and

neglected women of my village are provided with a job. I hope to expand the business to accommodate all the ultra-poor women of the village," Khushi said.

Ruhul Amin, chairman of Hair Fashion, said they employed the poorest women of the village to turn them into income generating members to their families.

*I started this business to be self-employed as well as to empower the ultra-poor women of my village: Arzina Akter Khushi*



Arzina Akter Khushi

## Wigs on pages of history

STAR BUSINESS DESK

**I**N ancient Egypt, both males and females wore wigs made either from human hair, sheep's wool or vegetable fibers, depending upon their social status. There were a number of benefits for Egyptians from shaving their heads. First it was more comfortable in the hot Egyptian climate not to have hair. Secondly, a baldhead helped avoid the danger of an infestation of lice, which was a problem at that time. However, it appears that Egyptians preferred having "hair" which resulted in the creation of wigs that gave the appearance of hair. The new wigs also protected the Egyptians' baldheads from the brutal sun. Wigs became part of daily wear for the Egyptian people indicating a person's status as well as their role in a society or politics. In Women's wigs were adorned with braids and gold, hair-rings and ivory ornaments making them more stylish than men's wigs. Ultimately, the more elaborate and involved the wig was, the higher the social rank.

Other ancient civilisations whose citizens wore wigs were the Greeks, Romans, Assyrians, and the Phoenicians. For the Romans, in particular, wigs were often made with hair from slaves. During the Roman Empire wealthy Roman women often wore elaborate hairpieces to greatly increase the volume and effect of the hairstyle.

In contrast, the people of the ancient civilisations in the Far East, including China and Japan, rarely wore wigs except by actors performing in the traditional theaters of China and Japan (Noh or Kabuki)

and by certain types of female entertainers such as the Japanese geisha or the Korean Kisaeng.

The word "wigs", itself, is taken from "periwigs" which was the name of the particular long, curly wigs that became popular after Charles II was returned to the throne in 1660. Some historian attribute popular fashion status of the periwig to Louis XIII. The periwig simulated real hair and was primarily used for adornment or to cover the loss of real hair. Having become a tradition of the English Court, the periwig is still seen today



in modern British courts. The history of wigs in France stretches back to the reign of Louis XIII who went prematurely bald. To disguise his baldness he began wearing elaborate wigs. Historical records indicate that the first independent wig-makers' guild was created in 1673. The wig now enjoyed the most noble of pedigrees from the seventeenth-century French courts of Louis XIII and Louis XIV and it became a fashion icon that was integral to the aristocratic world of power and display. The mistress of

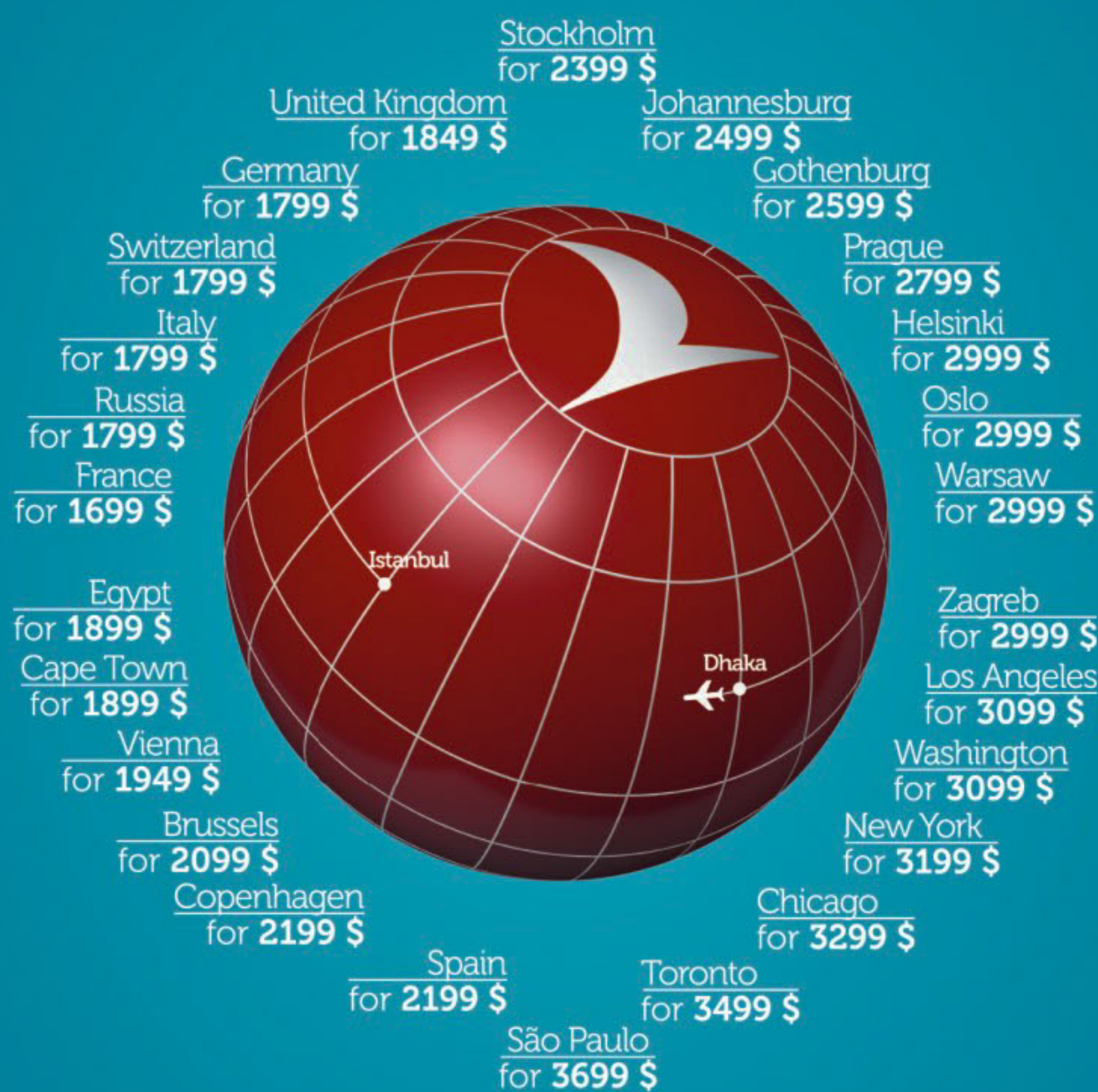
King Louis XIV wore her hair in a signature hairstyle called the la Fontange. It was a fashion look that was copied and with the help of hairpieces and false locks worn by numerous high upper class "wantabees". By the end of the Sun King's reign, wigs had spread well beyond the nobility of France. Kings at royal courts across Europe wore wigs, now a most essential feature of the European noble costume.

Another memorable royal who was known for her elaborate wigs was Queen Elizabeth I of England. Wigs were so widespread that virtually all the elite wore wigs or elaborate hairstyles during this time. It is not surprising that by the end of the 18th century the number of French master wigmakers had skyrocketed from the fashion centre of Paris to other European capitols and finally to provincial cities as well. In addition to the guild master wigmakers were thousands of journeymen wig makers and artisans traveling the European countryside producing wigs clandestinely. Eventually, wigs were no longer an exclusive luxury item, an exclusive marker of high birth or a status symbol worn by the privileged few. A shorter, less elaborate wig, called the bob wig, was very popular in Colonial America at the beginning of the 18th century.

By the end of the 18th century, young men began wearing their hair in a more natural state. Although the powdered look and the use of wigs continued, it was not longer a fashion look worn everyday but reserved for older, more conservative men and ladies who were being presented at court.

Details have been taken from the website of e-Wigs.

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