

THE PURSUIT OF HAIR

One man's struggles with hair fall and assorted troubles

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Hair loss is a malady that has troubled man throughout history. As the sad comb-overs accrue more patches of scalp through its thinning mass, many of us have scampered to crisis mode. "Prevent at all costs!" the brain said, and the heart followed suit, but the body kept shedding those precious strands. Even Julius Caesar, self-made dictator of ancient Rome, and history's first knife-rack, was troubled by his thinning hair despite being the lover of Cleopatra, allegedly the most beautiful woman in the world at that time. Historically, the measures advised to these panicked, balding men were not pleasant. Ebers Papyrus, an ancient Egyptian medical text, offers a solution that requires the ingredients: "fats from a hippopotamus, crocodile, tomcat, snake and ibex; porcupine hair boiled in water and applied to the scalp for four days; and the leg of a female greyhound sautéed in oil with the hoof of a donkey". Yeah try asking your *kacha-bazar* when the next shipment of hippo fat is arriving. Where some see despair in hopelessness, others see commerce and profit. Many hawkers and quacks have concocted potions and lotions to prey on the credulousness of their ill-fated customers. These snake-oil salesmen scour the streets of every city in all parts of the world, and in Dhaka, the snake-oil is sold with a side of formalin.

My good friend and compatriot of many food adventures, Teko bhai, had been losing hair recently. It has caused him much tension which resulted in more hair loss. He decided he must do everything in his power to prevent from growing bald, at least till he finds an agreeable person to marry and seals the deal. There are many attractive bald men in the world. Most of those men also happen to have ripped, perfectly toned bodies. I looked at Teko bhai's perfectly convex gut, a result of aunty's delicious *korma polau* on weekends, and the frequent burger sprees on weekdays. Teko bhai was going to be many things –

an attractive bald man was not one of them. And so, in the race against a rapidly declining hairline, we started our journey to find the elusive cure to man's oldest problem. To our older compatriots who could not prevent it, you shall receive closure, and to our younger readers, play close attention as we pass the hairy baton of knowledge.

We first took to the good people of the internet. The information age is of no use if it cannot stop a man from dying alone. We posted in a Bangladeshi forum only to receive this short, yet sweet, reply: "*Apnar tak mathar ekta sobi pathaile koite partam*" (If you send in a photo of your bald head, I may be able to help). Although a tempting offer from user, OjanaPothik93, we decided against sending any photos. No matter how nice and smooth your head, do not send photos over the internet to strange men. One more thing, there are no good people of the internet.

The internet was full of trolls, so we took to the streets to find our solutions the old fashioned way. Teko bhai was losing hope in the matter already;

OjanaPothik93 really got to him. I made him a slideshow

screen, I was thinking of a way to fix this problem.

The truth was that most, if not all, of these miracle cures were nothing but scams. I tried to tell Teko bhai that no way can a single medicine cure baldness, hepatitis, and malaria. He just pointed to his head and said, "Look, I have almost nothing to lose." He was not wrong. Over the next few weeks, Teko bhai tried many a "herbal" solution, which is code for anything remotely homemade. Eggs, *kakrol* juice, *lebu pani*, *aamloki* – he applied it all. None of it really worked. Or if it did, it was nowhere near as miraculous a return of hair as that of Wayne Rooney. Our options narrowed, and our hopes dimmed. There was the option of wearing a wig, and after a couple weeks of rubbing enough food ingredients to feed a small army, Teko bhai decided it was worth a shot.

We arrived at a wig shop in Rampura and entered a discreetly positioned second-storey (and grade) shop above the dusty streets of DIT road. "*Tak Aji Dheke Jak!*" it said. The man who welcomed us into the shop is worth mentioning. He wore a checkered brown shirt with the top two buttons unbuttoned, some slender khakis, and sandals. The reams of his shirt below his collar framed an impressive forest of the thickest chest hair I have ever laid eyes on. His chest was only second place to his head and face which was also covered with thick strands of rough, black hair. He was an incredible, and to Teko bhai,

an enviable specimen.

"*Keshobaan ek bhodrolak*", Tekobhai muttered awkwardly.

The man/hairball sat Teko bhai down at the parlour, which was accentuated with wigs of various obsolete hairstyles and garish hair colours. I was convinced all the wigs in the shop were foraged from his body. The man presented many a wig, and none looked particularly genuine or hygienic. The fake hair was too full of life, too shiny. It had the artificial polish of a seasoned Bollywood actor, and none of the dreary deadness of being contact with Dhaka's air for decades. Teko bhai bought one of the wigs and took it home. His cousin, a 10-year-old, saw it and would not stop calling

of Jason Statham's pictures to keep his spirits up. While he was slowly caressing his phone

Teko bhai out on his "*porchula*". The kid was right, Teko bhai's wig looked like Shahrukh Khan's hair from the '90s escaped the silver screen and sought refuge on a rotund Bangladeshi's head in the next century. Our attempt was yet again defeated, by candid comments of a 10-year-old.

The next option was hair transplants. Teko bhai was a middleclass man, but if he could get his hair back, he swore to eat only tree bark and save every coin. We went to a shop in Dhanmondi that did this rare procedure. There were two options, a cheaper option of hair regrowth laser treatment, which was BDT 1500 per session. The other one was robotic hair transplant and the prices for this treatment was sky-high. For 400-500 follicles it would cost BDT 55000. That was BDT 110 per follicle. I told Teko bhai that 10 hairs were going to cost over a 1000 taka. He rose up and walked straight out of the shop. I called an ex-patient of this shop to ask him about his experience. His name was Mr. Munna. He said, "I poured most of my earnings down that crap-shoot. Don't make the same mistake unless you have money to burn." Teko bhai was devastated.

I did not see Teko bhai for a while after that. I was distracted by life, and a couple of weeks went by. One day however, I saw him at the Flexiload shop. He was wearing a sleek, black cap. "Teko bhai!" I asked, "Did you finally give up on the baldness cure?" He looked peaceful now, not erratic and stressed. "No I haven't given up; I'm still eating *aamloki* every night. But, I have come to accept my condition," he said sincerely. "You see I realise that we are all fighting uphill battles in some way or the other – too short, too fat, no hair, or like that guy at the wig shop, too much hair. You can't control what you got, but the first step to happiness is to accept yourself." And with that, he walked away home. I was quite surprised at the candid philosophy from the balding man. I went home and it was not before a few days that I cracked the mystery of the new and improved sagely Teko bhai. He had met someone. A coworker who was interested in him, regardless of his hair. I guess in the fight against male-pattern baldness, the trick is a healthy dose of self-acceptance.

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