



A worker processes human hair for use as wigs and hair extensions among others at Boikhola village of Shalikha upazila in Magura, getting paid Tk 500 on an average for delivering every two kilogrammes per day. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Hair trade brings solvency for hundreds in Magura

AZIBOR RAHMAN, from Magura

Hundreds of traders in Magura and its neighbouring districts are making a good income from both human and animal hair.

These hairs are collected from barbershops, farms and individuals to manufacture wigs, hair extensions, handicrafts and others.

Many local traders have become financially solvent by providing this raw material to consumers in Dhaka while others are exporting hair to China, earning the country great sums of foreign currency.

During a visit to Boikhola village of Shalikha upazila in Magura, this correspondent found that around 10 local hair traders are enjoying good business by selling their product at high prices.

Around 500 collectors from Magura and its adjacent districts roam from village to village in the region purchasing human hair from barber shops as well as going door-to-door.

Many women in the region retain hair that fall out from the scalp when being combed, as each kilogramme (kg) can be sold for between Tk 1,500 and Tk 2,000 to hawkers.

After collecting this hair, traders process it for sale to apparel or wig manufacturers. Each labourer employed at this stage earns Tk 500 for processing two kg of hair per day.

Alauddin Mondol, a collector based in

DISTRICTS IN FOCUS

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Boikhali village who deals in groundnut, chanachur and hair, said he earns about Tk 20,000 per month by selling roughly seven to eight kg of the material at Tk 5,000 per kg.

Another trader, Amirul Islam, said he sells five kg to six kg per month for about Tk 15,000. "Although this job is difficult, it is very profitable," he said.

Trader Jashim Uddin of the same village said he has been in the business for 12 years now.

Soon after being allured to this highly profitable venture, he was able to upgrade

from a tin house to one made of bricks. He has since also purchased a motorcycle and some six bighas of land for about Tk 4 lakh per bigha.

At present, he is also rearing sheep for their fleece.

"If the hair is longer in size then so too is its price," Jashim said.

He can sell 10-inch hair strands for Tk 8,000 per kg, 20-inch strands for Tk 19,500 per kg, 22-inch strands for Tk 33,500 per kg, 24-inch for Tk 36,000 per kg and 26-inch for Tk 49,000 per kg.

Another trader, Insan Ali, said 10 years into the business, he was leading a happy and prosperous life with his two sons, daughter and wife.

Earlier, he only had 20 decimals of land for his living space but success in hair trading has helped him build a brick house and purchase one acre of arable land for Tk 15 lakh.

Ikram Ali, another trader in the village, echoed the same, adding that the industry provides a good number of housewives, female students and jobless youths an opportunity to earn up to Tk 500 per day by processing hair.

Amanur Rahman and Shawkot Mollah, two hair traders based in Dhaka's Uttara, said they purchase hair from Magura and export it to China.

Shatakali upazila Chairman Anwar Hossain Jhantu said some hair traders of Boikhali village were now solvent.

"It is a good initiative for them," he added.

CPD POWER AND ENERGY STUDY

Coal to clean power transition: How countries responded at COP26



KHONDAKER GOLAM MOAZZEM

UK COP26 Climate Presidency announced Global Coal to Clean Power Transition Statement on November 3. It is a major political non-binding statement where countries are invited to make their commitments on how to phase out coal-based energy use both at home and abroad and promote clean energy use.

Contrary to expectations, the majority of countries did not come forward instantly to sign the statement – only 47 countries have inked the statement till November 5. The major countries that struck the agreement include Canada, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, France, the Maldives, Nepal, the Netherlands, Korea, and Britain.

Among the major coal producer and coal user countries, Indonesia and Vietnam signed the statement. China, Australia, India, Japan, and the US are yet to sign it. It is expected that the countries will come forward to sign the statement in the coming years.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh did not turn up to sign the agreement though it has shown a strong political stance against coal power at the COP26.

What is in the statement?

The statement specified four commitments on coal power generation and clean power promotion. In the background, the statement clarified that coal-based power generation is the single most important reason for temperature rise and recognises the imperative to scale up the deployment of clean power.

The four commitments are: (a) rapidly scaling up deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures to be carried out through the support from the Energy Transition Council (ETC); (b) rapidly scaling up technologies and

policies to achieve transition away from unabated coal power generation by 2030 for major economies and by 2040 for other economies through the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA); (c) ceasing issuance permits, new construction and new government support in favour of new unabated coal-fired projects through initiative such as No New Coal Power Compact; and (d) strengthening domestic and international effort to provide a robust framework of financial, technical and social support to affected workers and sectors and communities.

The statement, if agreed by countries under their nationally determined contribution framework, could well be facilitated by phasing out coal and could ensure a strong footing of clean energy. Each of the commitments has been backed by international institutional arrangements, which could extend support to aspired countries to fulfil their commitments.

For example, the ETC will work at least till 2025 to support countries in eight areas: developing integrated energy planning; developing bankable and utility-scale renewables; supporting countries in coal and fossil fuel transition to retire coal plants; developing policy and instruments to attract more private investment



OPINION

for clean energy; upgrading domestic grids to integrate renewables; accessing technologies for renewable energy; and supporting just transition through social dialogue mechanism that would help create new and quality jobs for coal-dependent regions.

Similarly, the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) is working on securing commitments from governments and the private sector to phase out unabated coal power. At the same time, it encourages a global moratorium on construction of new unabated coal-power plants, shifting of investment from coal to clean energy, and achieving coal phasing out in a sustainable and economically inclusive way.

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

Chinese delivery riders on the edge

AFP, Beijing, China

Handing over a piping hot meal at exactly the time promised, Chinese food delivery driver Zhuang Zhenhua triumphantly tapped his job as complete through the Meituan app -- and was immediately fined half of his earnings.

A glitch meant it inaccurately registered him as being late and he incurred an automatic penalty -- one of many ways, he said, delivery firms exploit millions of workers even as the sector booms.

Authorities have launched a crackdown demanding firms including Meituan and Alibaba's Ele.me ensure basic labour protections such as proper compensation, insurance, as well as tackling algorithms that effectively encourage dangerous driving. But more than a dozen drivers told AFP there has been little change on the ground.

Often the only way to complete orders on time is to "go really fast... speed past red lights, drive on the wrong side of the road," Zhuang said.

"At the beginning, (the app allocated) 40 to 50 minutes to complete an order -- now for an order within a distance of two kilometres, with the same distance and time as before, we are given 30 minutes," he explained.

The coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdowns sent demand for meal delivery services soaring: the sector is now worth 664 billion yuan (\$100 billion), according to a report from the China Hospitality Association.

The nation's competitive app-based services have expanded into nearly every aspect of modern life, with digital-savvy consumers used to instantaneous service and fast delivery due to a ready flow of cheap labour.

But after years of unrestricted growth, China's Big Tech is coming under fire from Beijing with Tencent, Didi and Meituan all targeted over anti-monopoly rules.

Earlier this year, Alibaba was fined a record \$2.8 billion after an investigation found it had abused its dominant market position.

There is mounting public concern over the amount of data handled by popular apps, including food delivery platforms, and Chinese authorities have directed the cyberspace watchdog to look at how algorithms are used by tech conglomerates.

Shortened delivery times have also caused more accidents in recent years, amid promises of swift service.

Globally, the sector is facing scrutiny over its treatment of predominantly freelance workers, who endure low pay, few employee rights, and are often hired through agencies to avoid providing benefits.



REUTERS/FILE

A worker drives a truck carrying a container at a logistics centre near Tianjin port in Tianjin, China.

China's export growth slows in October

REUTERS, Beijing

China's export growth slowed in October but beat forecasts, helped by booming global demand ahead of winter holiday seasons, an easing power crunch and an improvement in supply chains that had been badly disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

However, imports missed analysts' expectations, likely pointing to the overall weakness in domestic demand. Outbound shipments jumped 27.1 per cent in October from a year earlier, slower than September's 28.1 per cent gain. Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast growth would ease to 24.5 per cent.

Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said the strong exports would help to mitigate the weakening domestic economy, and give the government greater room for manoeuvre on economic policy. "The government can afford to

wait until the year-end to loosen monetary and fiscal policies, now that exports provide a buffer to smooth the economic slowdown," he said.

Recent data has pointed to a slowdown in manufacturing. Factory activity shrank for a second month in October, an official survey showed, while growth in industrial output eased to the lowest since March 2020 - the first wave of the pandemic.

However, under heavy government intervention, some supply constraints have started to ease in recent weeks, including a power crunch that had been triggered by a shortage of coal, tougher emission standards and strong industrial demand.

Premier Li Keqiang said on Tuesday the government would take measures to support the industrial sector as the economy faces renewed downward pressures.

Imports jumped 20.6 per cent in October from a year earlier, accelerating from a 17.6 per cent

gain in September but well below expectations for a rise of 25 per cent.

Goldman Sachs data showed the value of crude oil imports grew 56.3 per cent year-on-year, up from 34.9 per cent in September, and the value of coal imports rose 292 per cent on-year, accelerating further from a 234 per cent gain in September, as the global energy crunch and post-Covid economic recovery drove up commodity prices.

China posted a trade surplus of \$84.54 billion last month, the highest on record. It was also above the poll's forecast of \$65.55 billion and September's \$66.76 billion surplus.

The world's second largest economy grew 4.9 per cent in the July-September quarter from a year earlier, the weakest reading since the third quarter of last year.

China's trade surplus with the United States was \$40.75 billion in October, Reuters calculations based on customs data showed, down from \$42 billion in September.

Startups eye post-pandemic tele-health revolution

AFP, Lisbon, Portugal

From mental health apps to a helmet that can shock a patient's brain remotely, startups at this year's Web Summit are betting on a major shift towards "tele-medicine" as the world emerges from the pandemic.

Using technology to treat patients virtually was a major theme at one of the world's largest tech conferences, which returned to Lisbon this week after Covid-19 forced it to move online in 2020.

"These days, most people use their phones for a lot of everyday needs -- why shouldn't healthcare be part of this?" said Johannes Schildt, whose company Kry lets patients book on-screen medical appointments.

"The pandemic has accelerated adoption of these new technologies," Schildt told AFP.

Sweden-based Kry, which operates in five European countries, is far from the only app designed to do away with the need to physically visit a doctor.

And not all of these startups focus on physical health. US-based Calmerry is among a growing number of e-counseling companies that offer video sessions with mental health therapists.

Most public healthcare systems offer limited access to such services, or none at all. With subscriptions starting at \$42 per week, Calmerry's co-founder Oksana Tolmachova said a key goal was to make therapy more affordable.

Other apps are taking a different approach to tackle the explosion in depression and anxiety seen worldwide during the pandemic.

Mental health chatbot Woebot also invites users to discuss their problems, but the replies come from artificial intelligence rather than a human therapist.

While some may be unnerved by the idea of pouring one's heart out to a piece of software, studies suggest that confiding in a virtual human could encourage people to open up.

Woebot's founder Alison Darcy, a clinical research psychologist, said the chatbot avoided the "baggage and social constructs" that come with human interactions -- worrying that the other person will judge you, for instance.

And given the dearth of trained therapists compared with the number of people who need help with their mental health, Darcy argued that AI is a valid tool for approaching the problem.

"We need to be throwing everything at helping people get well," she said.

Darcy does not believe chatbots should replace human therapists outright, and AI has been shown to have its limits when it comes to healthcare.