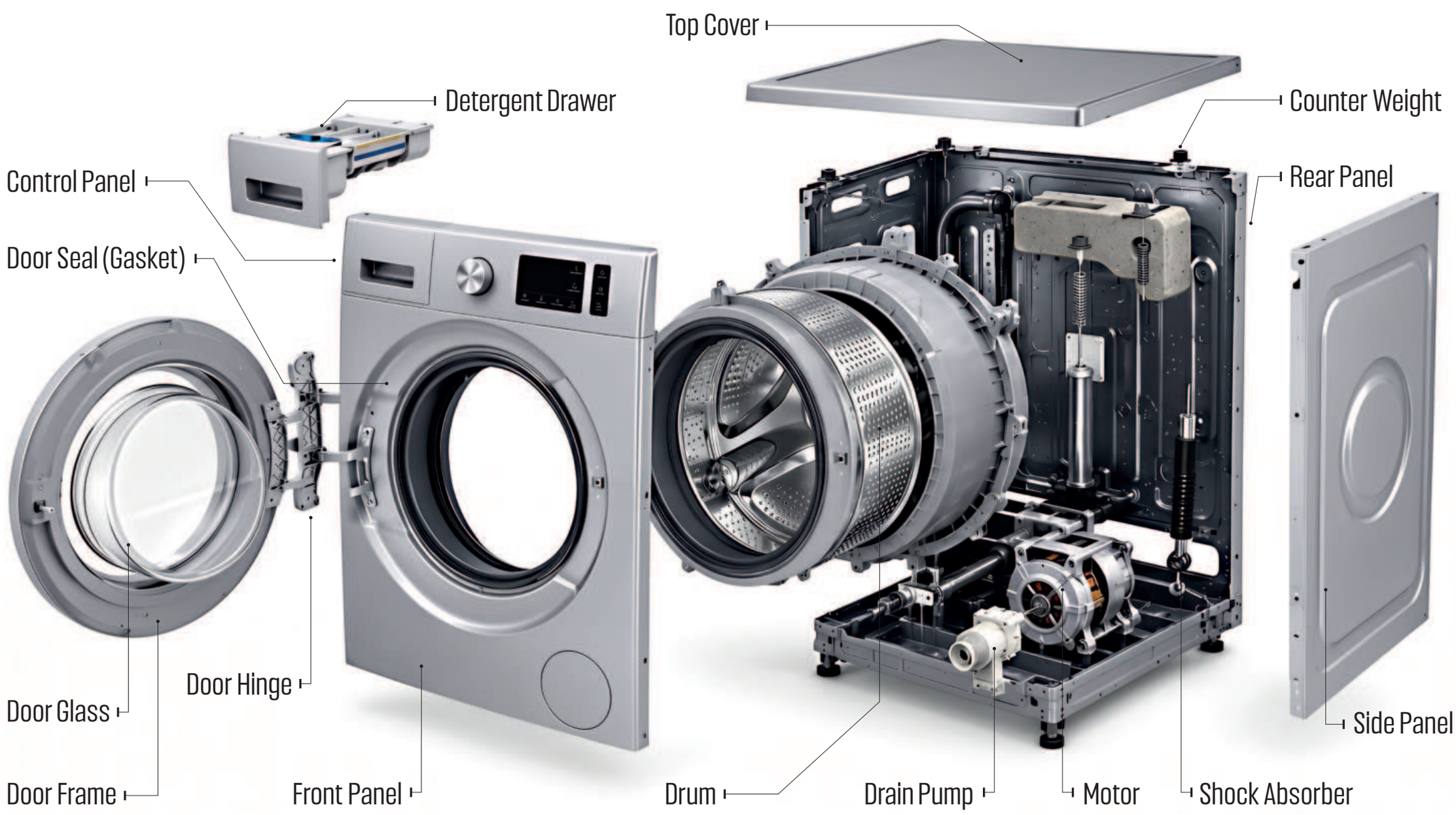
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S4 SUPPLEMENT



The eight-step LAUNDRY DANCE

TAHSIN MONON

Rayan has a system. At the end of a long day, he takes off his clothes and leaves them on a chair, alongside the rest of the week's laundry. When the pile becomes impossible to ignore, he calls a pickup service a few blocks away.

A North South University student living in a bachelor home in Mirpur, Rayan measures his laundry routine in steps: two from his bed to the chair and six from the chair to the door. Two days later, his clothes return clean, crisp and ironed.

Would he trade this arrangement for a Western-style laundromat, where customers wash their own clothes in shared machines?

"Over my eight-step dance with my dirty laundry? I don't think so," he says.

Dhaka has plenty of laundry services. Yet self-service laundromats, a familiar sight in many Western cities, are hard to find here. This reporting could not identify one currently operating in the capital. Why has the idea not caught on?

LAUNDRY AT YOUR DOORSTEP

There is, however, a business in Mirpur called Hour Laundromat. Despite the name, customers do not operate its machines themselves.

Abdullah Al Mamun, one of its four partners, says the idea was to adapt the Western laundry model to local needs. Laundry takes up time, especially for working people and nuclear families. For decades, he says, washing machines and detergent have been the main tools for making the chore easier.

Hour takes the task out of customers' hands altogether.

Customers book through WhatsApp. A delivery worker collects and weighs their clothes, checks for stubborn stains and fabric issues, and labels the items. The clothes are then washed, ironed and delivered to their door. Automated messages let customers know when their laundry reaches the facility and when it is ready.

Prices are based on weight rather than the number of items. Mamun says Hour was the first to introduce this system in the local market. Regular delivery takes one to two days, which he sees as a selling point. Customers in a hurry can use a walk-in service that takes two to three hours.

Those waiting at the shop can have tea or coffee and use free Wi-Fi in the lounge.

Even the name carries a small joke. Mamun says "Hour" is meant to sound like "our", giving the service a homely feel.

TURNING INTEREST INTO BUSINESS

Mamun has found that getting people to understand the service is part of the work.

Hour has spent heavily on digital advertising, he says. Plenty of people are curious, but not all become customers. The idea of paying by weight, in particular, can take some explaining.

In a city where laundry can be collected from the doorstep, doing it yourself may be a tough sell

Walk-in customers pose another challenge. They see what look like ordinary domestic washing machines and are not necessarily interested in using them themselves. For Hour, the attraction is having someone else take care of the laundry.

Sometimes, that means handling an unusual request. Mamun recalls one customer bringing in a five-foot teddy bear for a wash.

The business has yet to break even, he says. It was set up in October 2024 and began operations in June 2025. It now has one outlet in Mirpur and also serves business clients. Alongside its four partners, Hour has one investor.

THE FAMILIAR LAUNDRY ROUTINE

Students such as Rayan may seem like natural customers for a pickup-and-delivery service. Waniya has less need for one.

A consultant at a law firm, she lives in Uttara, where domestic help does the family's laundry in a washing machine at home.

Some items still leave the house. Bed sheets, window curtains and sarees go to the corner laundry, which her family has used for as long as she can remember.

Would she try a laundromat?

"Depends, actually. If they are easily accessible then maybe, but it will still be once in a while," she says.

Mamun says households like hers are harder to win over. When domestic help is available, a professional laundry service struggles to compete on convenience and cost. He believes it can offer a better wash, though. In his view, traditional neighbourhood laundries tend to focus more on ironing than washing.

These habits help explain the shape of Dhaka's laundry market. People generally pay someone to wash, collect, deliver or iron their clothes. Taking them somewhere to use a shared machine has not become part of that routine.

There is also competition among the growing number of pickup-and-delivery services. Rayan says he switched to one for better care of his clothes and free delivery on orders above seven kilograms. He feels traditional laundries can be rough on fabrics, another reason for his choice.

WOULD DHAKA DO ITS OWN WASHING?

Two customers and one operator cannot speak for an entire city. But their experiences suggest that having the work done matters more to these customers than having access to a machine.

For Rayan, the eight steps between his bed, the laundry chair and the door are enough. Waniya already has domestic help and a trusted neighbourhood laundry. Neither has much reason to make a separate trip to wash clothes.

Mamun has not ruled out opening more neighbourhood branches. That will depend on Hour meeting its targets and finding enough demand. For now, he wants more people to know about the service and first-time customers to return. He believes those who have tried it may come back when they need their clothes cleaned in a hurry.

A self-service laundromat would ask customers to make that trip and do some of the work themselves. For people used to having their laundry collected from the doorstep, it may be a hard sell.

For now, at least, the eight-step laundry dance seems difficult to beat.

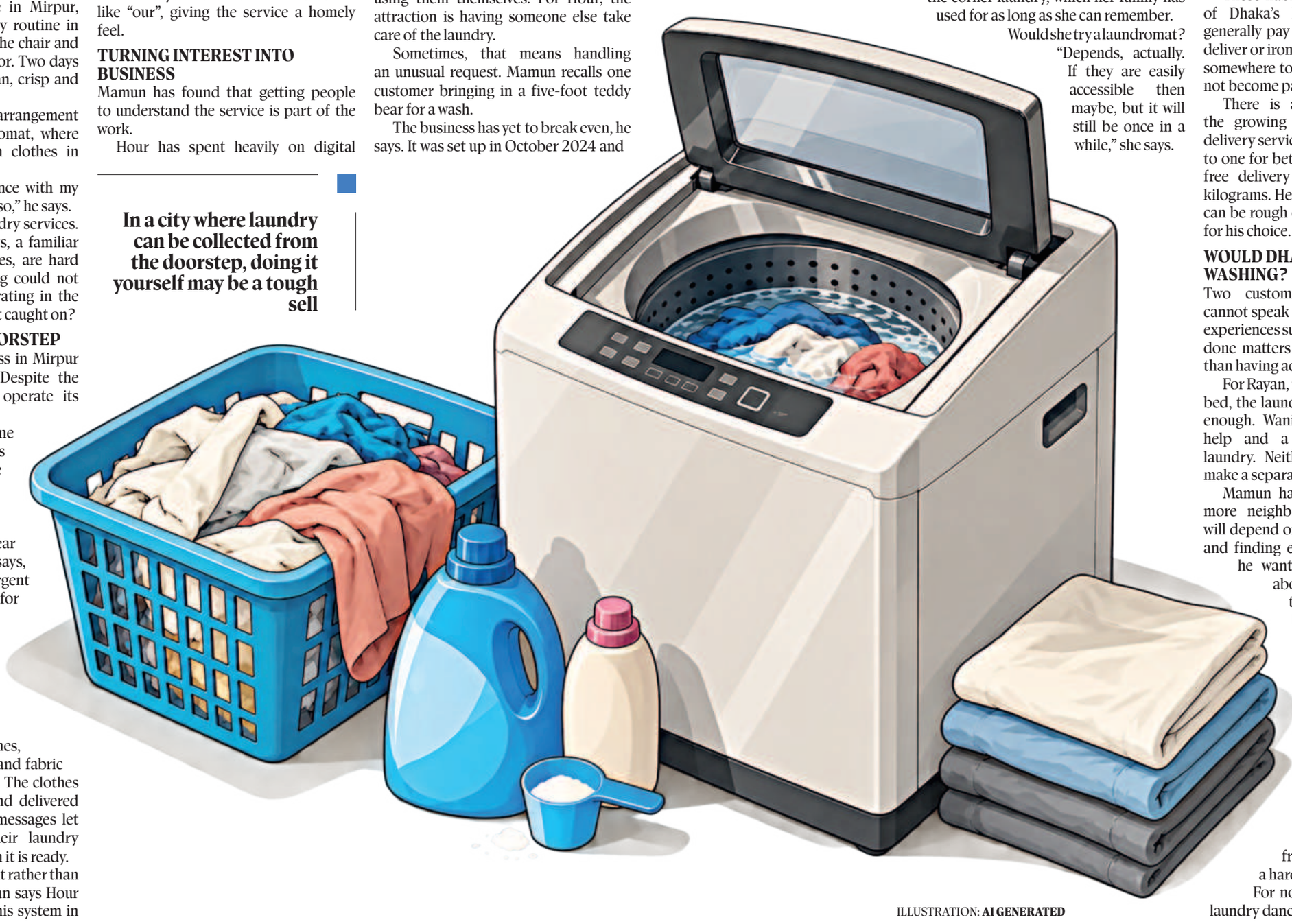


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