

SPOTLIGHT

"A pa, please come in," a young man gesturing to his small print and copy shop in Nilkhet's Bakushah market. "What do you need—term paper, project report, master's thesis, internship report, research monograph? Just name it," he asks swiftly.

"I need to prepare my term paper," I answer as I enter the shop.

Pushing a chair towards me, the man asks: "What is your topic?"

"I need a supply chain management system report of a corporate organisation," I reply.

"No worries. What company do you want: Grameenphone, Unilever, Pran-RFL or ACI?"

When I say Unilever, the man starts checking his computer's files and opening documents one after another to find it among thousands of others. Soon enough he finds something that fits my requirements.

After showing me the first two-three pages of the report, the man asks: "Is this okay? We will change the cover according to your details. You just have to check the 'table of contents' part. If it doesn't seem okay, I'll show you another one," he says, before adding with a measure of pride: "We have 4,000-5,000 topics."

When asked where they get these copies, he informs: "Most of the time from people who come to us to print and bind their papers. We keep a copy of their work. Besides, we have our own people, who prepare these reports on a regular basis."

This is a very normal scenario in Nilkhet, where illegal businesses selling readymade papers abound. Over time this business has become very popular among a large number of students. Rather than engaging in research and critical thinking in preparing a term paper, many students choose the easy way out to pass their exams. The illegal businesspeople of Nilkhet, meanwhile, have not only been profiting from, but facilitating, the students' dereliction of their academic duties and the waste of their intellectual abilities.

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use, you have to pay at least Tk 300. On the other hand, the customised report costs a bit more, as it takes time and hard work. "We cannot sell the customised copies for less than Tk 3,000," says the staff of Moni Computers. The medical case reports are sold at Tk 15,000-16,000.

When asked who the main customers of their products are, a number of shop owners inform that students of different public and private as well as national universities are their major clients. Students who are busy with jobs and cannot manage time to do research or field work, come to them at the eleventh hour.

For example, Mahbub Hossain (not his real name), a student of Dhaka College, who came to Bakushah market to prepare his master's thesis, explains that he has a 9-5 job in an ad firm and given his hectic schedule, it is difficult for him to manage time for academic work. "I know it is not the right thing to do, but I have to do it to at least obtain pass marks."

Tanvir Ahmed from Tejgaon College offers this justification: "We have to submit a

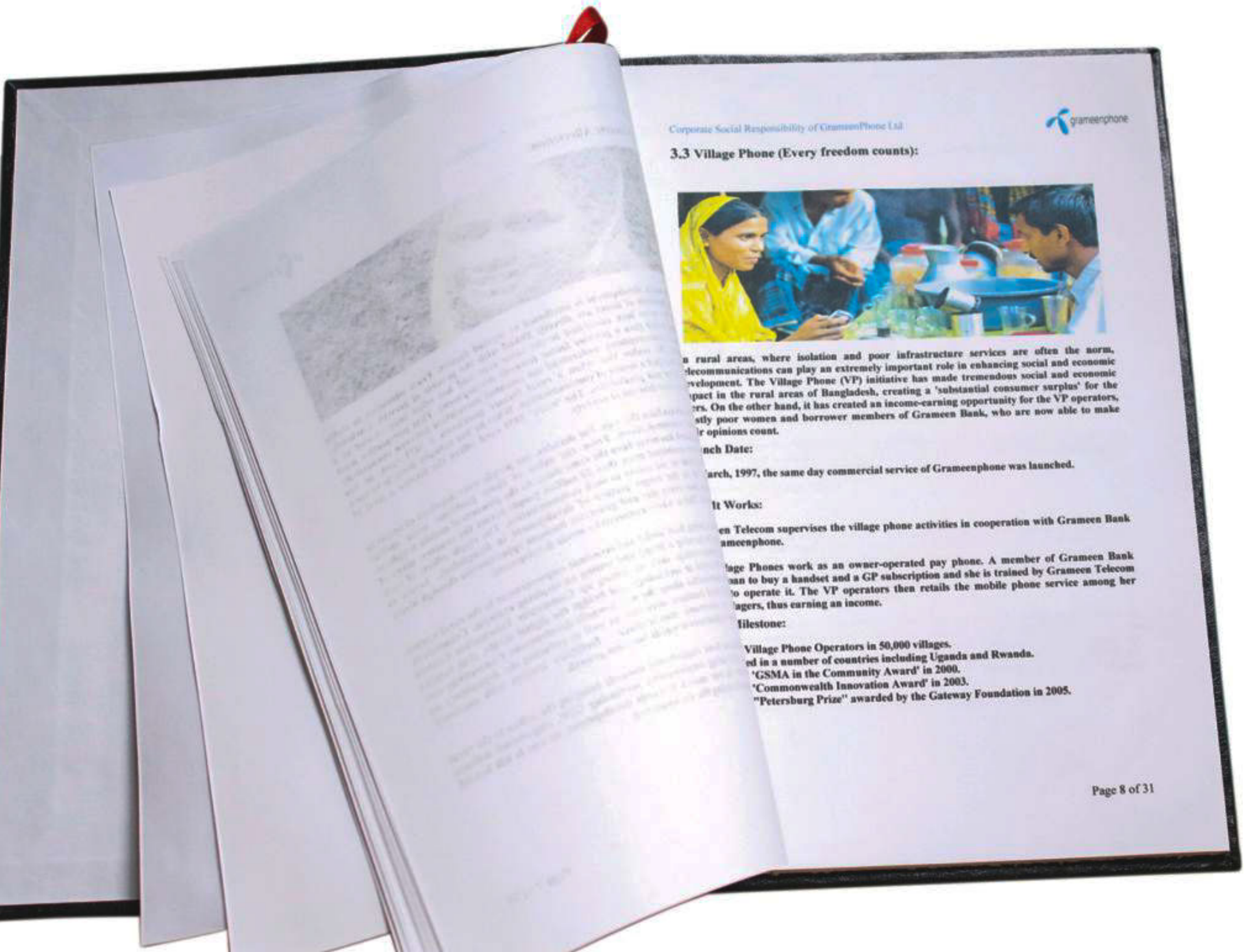
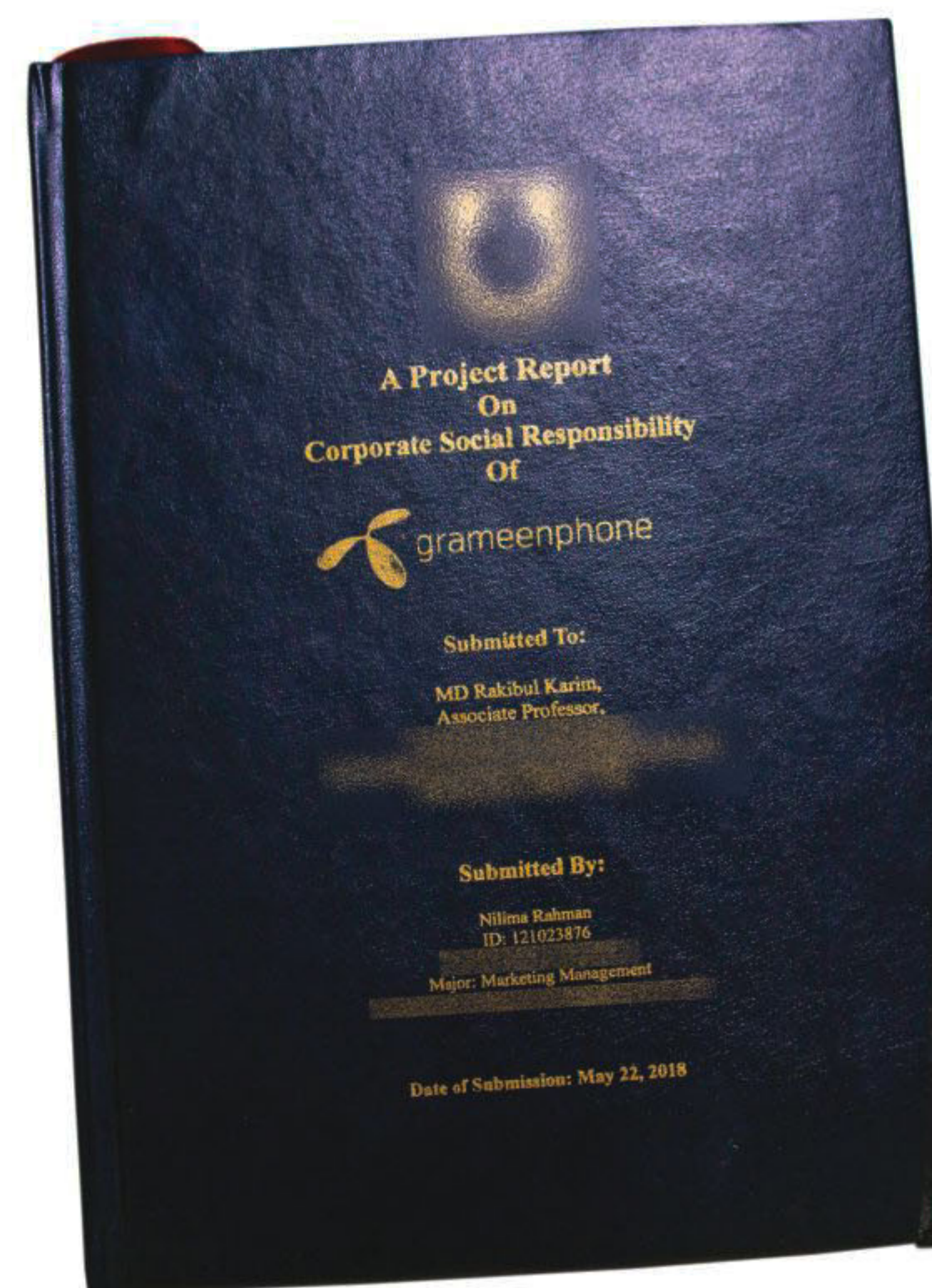
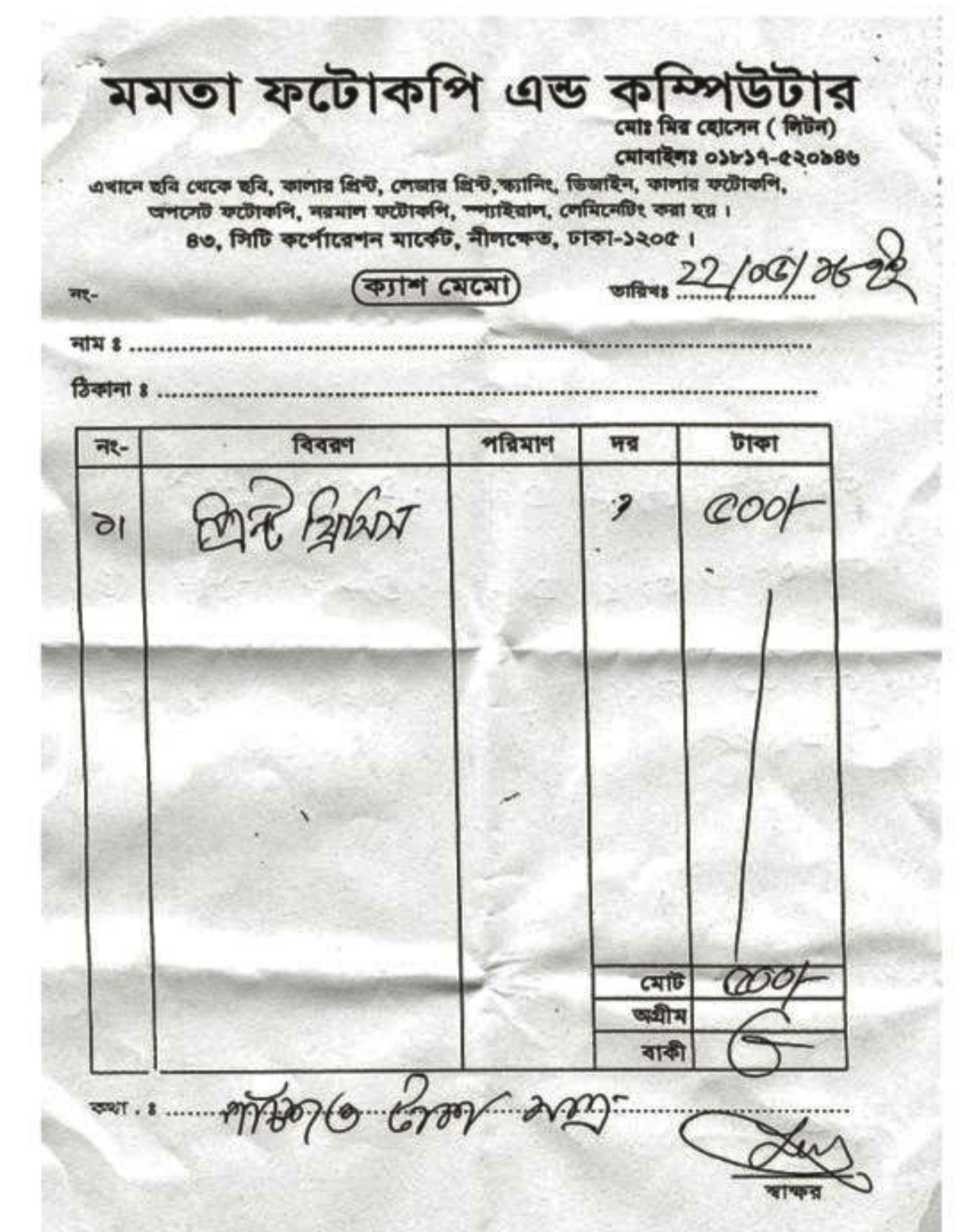


Over the years, the illegal business of selling readymade papers in Nilkhet, has become popular to a large number of students. PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

UNCHECKED

THE RISE AND RISE OF NILKHET'S CORRUPT ACADEMICS

NILIMA JAHAN



A project report bought for Tk 500 from Bakushah Market, Nilkhet.

group work, but unfortunately my teammates were not serious enough to prepare it. Now there's only two days in hand and one of our friends suggested that I come here [Bakushah]."

When asked if there is a risk of being caught by teachers, one of the students says, "If you are a public or private university student, you have to be a little careful while presenting it. But if you can go through it thoroughly several times, and present it to your supervisors with confidence, nobody can catch you."

"If you are a national university student, you don't have to bother at all. NU teachers don't have time to check this page by page," adds another student.

The shop owners also echo the sentiments of the students. As one of the employees of New Nishi Enterprise claims cockily, "Do you think the teachers have time to go through all these papers in detail?"

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dhaka Dr Md Akhtaruzzaman admits that there have been cases where students have copied or created their research work with the help of others, but, he claims, those instances are very few in proportion to the whole. "Our supervisors are very strict in this regard and they follow up with students from time to time. The copied or readymade parts are detected easily and disciplinary action is taken against those who choose to pursue the wrong way," he says.

However, when asked whether the University of Dhaka uses any plagiarism detection mechanism for digital documents, the VC answers, "there are many

also doles out punishments up to three years imprisonment and a fine of maximum Tk 3,00,000, for those who use the infringed copy, but again, the students are using such copies at their sweet will.

Mohammad Atiqur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge of New Market Police Station admits that such crimes do take place. When asked why such crimes are taking place in the open, he says, "Whenever we get any specific information about a shop conducting illegal businesses, we conduct raids. In fact, a few days ago, we filed a few cases against such illegal businessmen, under the Special Power Act."

The OC also adds that after conducting a raid, everything comes under control for a while, but a few days later, they resume their business in secret.

However, it is astounding that the police need 'specific information' to conduct raids against such illegal businesspeople, when they have been operating their businesses within a minute's walk from the New Market Police Station. This has become an open secret for a long time—does one really need to be a member of an intelligence team to uncover these?

Moreover, although teachers are more likely to disagree with the fact that their students have been engaging in buying readymade papers to get marks easily, the popularity of the Nilkhet academics and their invincible position itself shows the magnitude of the demand of these readymade papers. But, it is the responsibility of the teachers to keep a watchful eye on what their students are bringing in, in the name of their own ideas and thoughts. As they have failed to do so,

fundamental issues in a research that must reflect the student's own point of view and that those cannot be detected with any automated detectors."

Prof Moazzem Hossain, the principal of Dhaka College, also states that while they do not use any mechanism to prevent plagiarism, the department teachers, supervisors, and external bodies keep it in check. "If someone is caught with readymade papers, there have been instances when the students were given a zero mark for their paper," he says.

While teachers and university administration claim that sufficient action is being taken to prevent plagiarism, the booming business at Nilkhet suggests otherwise. It is clear that students are not only getting away with submitting recycled term papers but being rewarded with good grades for it.

Professor Nur-e-Alam Siddique, Associate Professor at the Department of Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, sheds light on how these readymade papers affect students.

"The purpose of the research or project work at the honours or masters level is to learn the research methodology and improve their skills but if they follow the wrong path they deprive themselves of the learning methods. Nothing can be sadder than that," he says.

Under Section 84 of the Copyright Act 2000, it is illegal to infringe the copyright of a work, publish it in any medium, sell or distribute more than one copy of it; one can be imprisoned for up to four years and fined up to Tk 4,00,000. At the same time, the law

students easily dare to submit purchased papers, because they know that they can get away with it.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus at the University of Dhaka also states that businessmen might try to promote their businesses, students might attempt to use unfair means, but it is the teachers who are the most important body here to supervise and monitor what their students are working on.

"If a teacher is observant and keeps a track of his/her students, s/he can easily detect whether their scripts reflect their own thoughts or not. The teachers must know the capacity of their students and they must give enough time while checking these papers, because they are fully committed to teach and guide students. Along with the professional responsibilities, it is the moral duty of the teachers to scrutinise the papers watchfully, otherwise they cannot be called a teacher anymore," he opines.

So, along with the law enforcers, it is time to focus on the responsibility of the teachers in ensuring that students hand in original work and other's intellectual properties are not infringed upon. Until then, students can purchase a thesis on topics ranging from the corporate social responsibility of Grameenphone to the Dhaka Stock Exchange for a mere Tk 300-400.