

SPECIAL FEATURE

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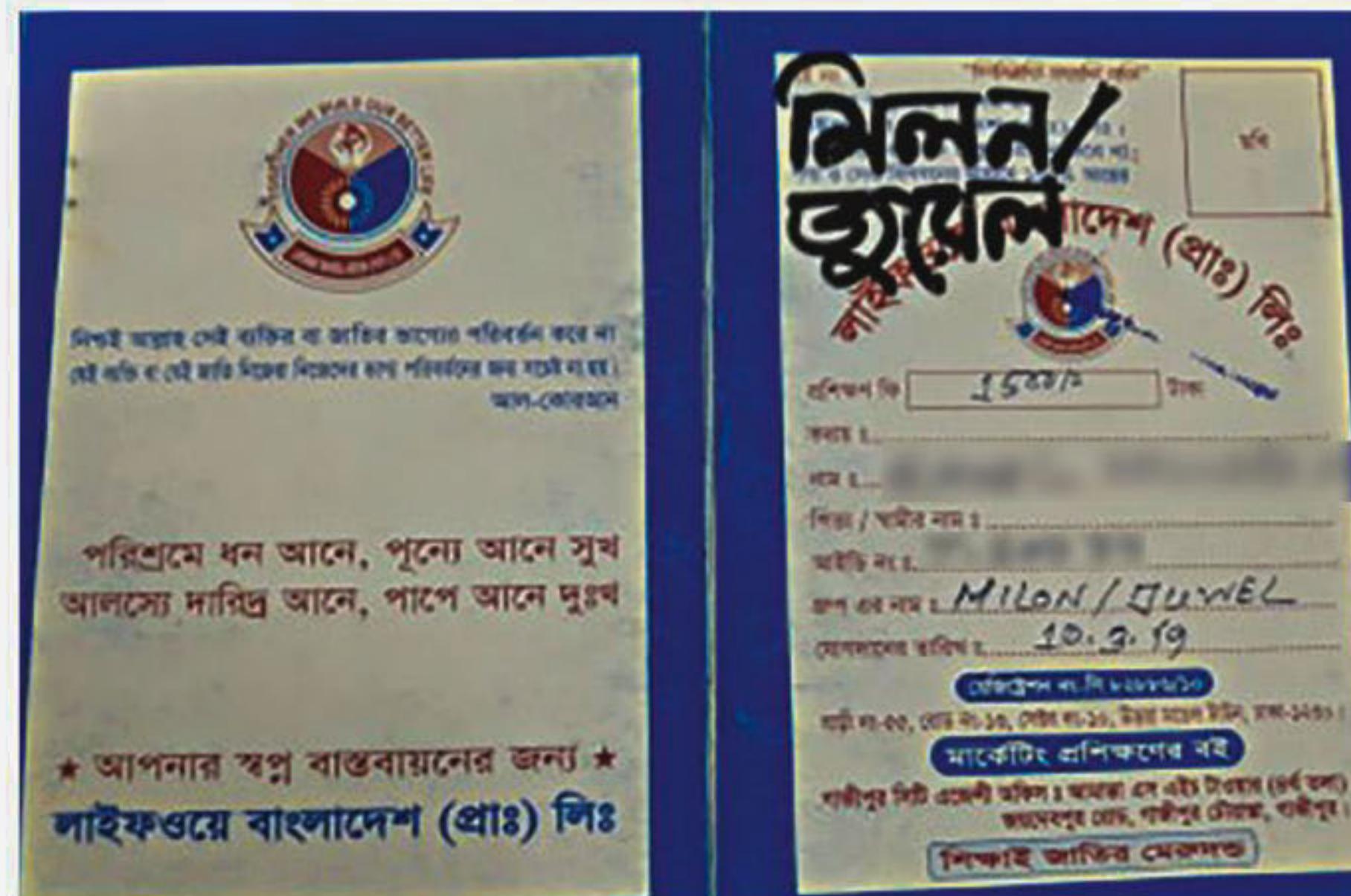
According to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC)—the sole authority to facilitate the formation of companies and keep track of all ownership related issues prescribed by the laws in Bangladesh—Lifeway Bangladesh (Pvt) Limited was registered under the Companies Act 1994 in 2010. As per the memorandum, the company was registered to carry on the business of general trading/multilevel marketing/direct sales marketing/network marketing and home-based marketing of electrical and electronic goods. But later, after approval of the Multi-Level Marketing Control Act 2013, Lifeway again applied for a license to operate MLM business in the country in 2014, but it was rejected by the RJSC.

On the other hand, Selim Fakir, the zonal executive director (Uttara) of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and KM Rahatul Islam, the chief executive officer of Gazipur City Corporation (GCP) state that Lifeway Bangladesh (Pvt) Limited didn't take any trade license from the DNCC and GCP.

But what happened when someone paid the money and joined the job?

According to Rafiqul Islam, one of the cheated employees of Lifeway Bangladesh (Pvt) Limited, he was told he would be selling electronics, fabrics and ceramic products, but after his appointment, the company ordered him to undergo a training along with more than 300 newly appointed people. In his second week of training—they were being taught how to get rich fast—many of the trainees started asking when they would actually start working. Some of them had been receiving the training for more than six months, with no fixed responsibilities in reality.

"The trainers would tell us that we would be informed about our job soon. According to them, our first duty was to bring two people to the company with the promise of giving them jobs. They



মাসিক নথি					
নথি	কার্যবি	মোক	সময়	মাসিকের নথি	কর্তৃপক্ষের নথি
১	৩৪-০৩	৭:৩০	১/৩		
২	১৫-০৩	২:৩০	১/৩		
৩	১৬-০৩	২:৩০	১/৩		
৪	১৭-০৩	২:৩০	১/৩		
৫	১৮-০৩	২:৩০	১/৩		
৬	১৯-০৩	২:৩০	১/৩		
৭	২১-৩	১০			
৮	২২-৩	১০			
৯	২৩-৩	১০,১২			
১০	০১-৪	১০			
১১	১	১২			
১২	০৪-৪	১৫০০			
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also gave us a target to call seven unemployed people a day from our contact list, and tell them, 'Hello, how are you? I have been doing a job in a company run by the Bangladesh Army and doing great. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to call me,' remembers Rafiqul. "That's when I realised that I was trapped and that my recruiter had been duty-bound to persuade me to do this job. They didn't even allow us to talk to anyone outside the office. Whenever we needed to go outside of our residential facilities for anything, they appointed someone to guard us. There was a constant pressure to bring in new people," he shares.

According to Rafiqul, if anyone can bring in a job seeker who agrees to pay Tk 30,000-50,000 as a security fee, he gets Tk 3,500 as commission. There is no fixed salary—the more people a person can engage, the more commission s/he gets. The successful employees are taken to different parks for recreation so that the others also get inspired.

Later, on his 14th day at the job, Rafiqul made up his mind not to work for the company anymore and shared his decision with the authorities. But they gave him a 17-inch LED TV and a rice cooker, instead of paying back his money. The company made him sign an agreement stating that he had no objections to working with this company.

Rafiqul was lucky that he received something, at least. Out of the 10 other victims we interviewed, eight of them received nothing when they resigned from their jobs. Five of them were threatened with police cases if they spoke to others about what had happened to them at the company; one was threatened with a defamation case worth Tk 3 crore for ruining the reputation of the company by disseminating defamatory information among the employees; and one was blamed for stealing Tk 4 lakh from the company when he left.

Four of our interviewees also claim that the company introduced themselves as a company run by some army personnel. If anyone protests, the company uses the name of the Bangladesh Army, locally influential people or local administrations to threaten them with dire consequences. "After coming back, I angrily sent some messages to the person who took me there, but somehow the authorities saw everything I sent. After that, they called me and claimed that I had stolen Tk 4 lakhs from them, while leaving the office. Since I belong to a very poor family, my father became frightened and forbade me to contact them for the money we had paid," says Billah.

Although the company tried to scare the employees by mentioning their asso-

ciation with the Bangladesh Army or retired army generals, Lieutenant Colonel Abdulla Ibn Zayed, Director, Inter Service Public Relation (ISPR) Directorate, the media wing of the Bangladesh Armed Forces, says there is no scope for any army personnel to be associated with such fraudulent activities.

H Chakma, who claims to have been cheated by this company and threatened with legal action if he took measures against the company, informs *Star Weekend* that those who cannot find job seekers are eventually sacked from the office, empty-handed. If someone refuses to make such calls, the authorities misbehave with them and stop providing them with food. "That's why I left," he says. "They mostly target people hailing from rural areas with minimum education. Most of the people I knew came there by borrowing money from relatives, selling livestock or gold," he adds.

The question remains unclear: how is this company taking huge amounts of money every day, hoodwinking innocent job-seekers and dodging the local administrations and law enforcers?

Dewan Md Humayun Kabir, district commissioner, Gazipur, says that he is aware of the fraudulent activities of the said company. "We sent the case to the mobile court last year but it was dismissed due to lack of evidence. We are ready to take action through RAB if we receive specific information."

Meanwhile, last year on April 28, a team of RAB-11 arrested 28 members of this fraud company and filed a case with Uttara West Police Station. According to Gazi Alamgir, the investigation officer of the case, right now, the accused are out on bail. According to ASP Jashimuddin of RAB-11, this business is chiefly run by a dismissed army private. "We are aware that the company is cheating people with different names and forms. But since we don't have any specific information, we cannot take action," he says.

ASP Salahuddin of RAB-1, on March 16 last year, also arrested six persons involved with this company, but according to the duty officers of the Uttara West Police Station, the case is still under investigation.

Based on the experiences of dealing with fraudulent activities, ASP Salahuddin of RAB-1 argues that since the punishment is minimal for such fraudulent cases; the perpetrators can easily get bail from the court for such offenses and revamp their business in full swing. "This is why people must be more aware. News reports with special highlights can help them to know more about these fraudulent activities," he says.



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