

Tk 4 billion embezzled with e-Movie app trap

Rashidul Haque Rusho, Ekattor TV, 10 March 2023

A syndicate has stolen billions of takas from about 40,000 people in 16 districts of the country through an app called e-Movie Plan. An investigation by Ekattor Television revealed that this syndicate of domestic and foreign collaborators stole at least Tk 4 billion in one year and disappeared. The entire amount is believed to have been smuggled abroad.

One of their victims is tea-seller Taifur Rahman. He has been selling tea in this shop next to Rajshahi Agricultural Development Bank for 30 years. Despite the low income, his normal life was going on. Last December, Taifur heard about an app called e-Movie Plan from a customer of the shop. He heard that if one deposits money in the app, it returns a profit amount several times better. That too in dollars.

After making some profit at first, he took a loan and invested Tk 100,000. Since then, there was no trace of that app.

Taifur said, 'I lost almost a hundred thousand takas.'

Not just Taifur, hundreds of young people in the area are in trouble by investing money in the e-Movie app. One of the, furniture dealer Jewel Rana Titu, has lost around Tk 5 million.

He said, 'I downloaded the app and registered with my ID card. Five more users joined the app through me. I transacted Tk 17,500 through Bkash. All the transactions were done through Bkash. They provided me with some dollars. It was displayed on my account.

'Then they instructed me to purchase a Hollywood ticket. They told me, if I buy a ticket, I will receive a profit within 24 hours. In fact, I received profits every day initially. Maybe they did this to gain our trust.'

A special team of Ekattor Television investigated where in Rajshahi this app was active. They found a list.. There were names and addresses of 32 representatives from 16 districts of the country including Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon.

Based on this list, Rashidul Islam, identified as e-Movie's Rajshahi City Partner, was found in the Koerdara area of the Rajshahi metropolis.

Rashidul, who works in a non-governmental organization, said he met Ajmul Huda Manik through work in the same organization. He got involved with the e-Movie app through Manik.

Rashidul said, 'Company started a system of deposit funds. The fund will exist for 25 days. I will receive a profit of 360 per cent on my deposit within these 25 days. I deposited US\$ 3,500. Then Manik told me that if I use the fund system, the company will take us on a trip to Hong Kong.'

Talking to various people including Rashidul, it was evident that the number of e-movie app users had spread like an infectious disease in different areas of towns and villages.

The situation in the Narikelbaria area of Ward No. 30 of the Rajshahi City Corporation was even worse. Young to the elderly, everyone was addicted to the app.

One young kid in the condition of anonymity told us, 'Almost everyone in our neighbourhood started using the app. After that, we also got hooked and deposited money.'

Another adult user said, 'The app had spread to such an extent that there was no one left to use.'

Users were lured by the prospect of profit. One user told us, 'Users were told if they keep their money in the app for 21 days it will be doubled.'

These victims said that they were introduced to the app by local grocer Shafiqul Islam. There were 368 users under him.

According to Shafiqul, after contacting Manik, a person named Raihan who he knew through the e-Movie app, called him from abroad on WhatsApp and started contacting him as a city partner.

Shafikul said, 'Someone named Mu Zi Li contacted me from Hong Kong. She used to talk in Chinese. One Bangladeshi man named Rayhan helped me to communicate with her.'

Many victims were also found in the Premtali Union of Godagari Upazila. We learned the names of Shihab, Taufiq, Omar Farooq and Mithu.

One shopkeeper said, 'Shihab and Toufique bought motorbikes. One bought a Yamaha R15 and the other bought a Suzuki. They also built houses for themselves.'

One victim's mother told us, 'I struggled to earn my bread. I wanted my children to have a good life. That was why I gave him my hard-earned money so that they can live a good life. That was my purpose.'

Since the closure of the app, Shihab, Taufiq and Farooq have disappeared. But we found Mithu.

He told us that, 60-70 per cent of people living in the area used the app.

Through our investigation, we found out that people who first got hold of the app in every area were in contact with a person named Ajmul Huda Manik.

While searching for Manik, we got to know that he was a city partner of e-Movie. He lived with his family in a house in lane no. 3.5 in Shiroil Colony in Rajshahi.

He opened an office in a room to manage the e-Movie activities. But that office was closed, and Manik went missing.

We contacted him on the phone. An annoyed Manik said, 'The problem was with the app. There was a problem with the server. Did I take everyone's money? Or did I ask everyone? Then why did you need to call me?'

Manik's paternal home was in Pakuria village of Manda upazila in Naogaon district. His father told us that Manik did not come home for several months.

Manik's father Dr Hormotullah Prang agreed that he heard about his son's mischief and said, 'I heard he embezzled Tk 540 million. I do not know whether it is true or false.'

We talked to the victims in Rajshahi, Naogaon, Natore, Chapainawabganj, and Sirajganj. None of them knew who the original owner of the app was.

One user said, 'He deposited USD\$ 7,000 in my mobile.' Another one loaned USD\$ 5,000 and deposited.

'People sold their cows and farming land (to arrange money)', added another victim. Another person told us that he encouraged 50 people to join the app.

A program was organized with city partners and big investors in a five-star hotel in Dhaka on January 7.

Three men and one woman from abroad participated in that program. They introduced themselves as e-Movie's Vice President, Asian Country Director and Public Relations Officer respectively.

One of them was Michael, who used to come to Facebook Live often to introduce customers to the various offers of e-Movie.

According to the hotel authorities, an individual, not an organization, rented the seventh-floor conference room with cash. However, the authorities refused to reveal his name.

After analyzing the social media accounts of the victims, we found out that many people lost millions through the e-Movie app.

The app's campaign was run from a page titled 'Voice of Spirit'. It was managed by Sadek Ali from Abdulpur in Natore.

Sadek Ali was found after a short search at Abdulpur Junction station.

He admitted that through him some villages including Abdulpur used the e-Movie app.

Sadek said, 'I have collected 2000 users. All of them deposited Tk 2000 each. Musabbir was the person who took care of all this.'

We could not find Mosabbir after visiting the offices of various city partners in Dhaka, nor did we find the office of e-Movie.

Our investigation showed that at least 40 thousand people in 16 districts of the country lost at least Tk 4 billion through this app.

Cyber security expert Tanvir Joha thinks that this embezzled money is already laundered to a foreign location

He told Ekattor, 'There is no possibility of this money staying in the country. There is a reason why. When you are involved in agent banking, the dollar amount can be seen in your mobile phone balance. Which implies, there is an interconnectivity.'

Office In-Charge of Chandrima Thana of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police, SM Masud Parvez, said, 'We will investigate with the help of our cybercrime unit and other diligent cybercrime units of the police.'

A syndicate has been deceitfully using this building of Banglamotor in the capital for the last year by falsely stating it as the main office of the e-Movie Plan app. All of the Tk 4 billion they

grabbed, went out of the country. The ringleaders are not Bangladeshis. But it will not be difficult to track them down if law enforcement agencies remain vigilant.