the two workers.

"What's the problem? Why are you holding those men?" asks the man softly, identifying himself as Lal Mia.

As the young man tries to explain, Lal Mia suddenly grows agitated. He announces to the crowd that he owns the land in the water and has to fill it up.

"If anyone opposes the move he should come forward now," he says sternly.

The crowd suddenly grows silent as if an unknown fear has gripped them. Lal Mia rushes back to his car and comes out with a set of documents and holds the bundle up with his right hand.

"These are my ownership records, shall I now call the police?" he asks.

By now most of the people have silently dispersed and the young man stands there helplessly alone. The story of this young man standing alone against the might of Lal Mia and the sarkari bin-men ends that day with Lal Mia leaving the area victoriously.

Along the 17-kilometre stretch of the river Buriganga, hundreds of similar cases are sprouting every day. The sheer helplessness of the young man who rose to stop a river gobbler is reflected among many people in the old part of the city.

Mohammad Ghias Uddin Chowdhury Johnny is a civil engineer and lives in Shaheed Nagar by the river Buriganga. He says he is frustrated over the speed in which the river is being grabbed and polluted.

"The only way to stop such theft is to create a strong vigilance immediately and enforce the wetland protection law. These people may somehow own the river, but we should never allow them to fill it up, no matter how strong they are."

Johnny is a young professional who feels deeply for the river that has served the people for generations.

"You see most industries which are polluting our rivers are doing it not because they cannot afford to install effluent treatment plants but because they are taking total advantage of our lawlessness year after year," Johnny says.

Land is a very sensitive issue in this metropolis. Every police station in the capital has been instructed by headquarters to handle each land-related claim very cautiously. The reason behind such instructions was simple.

According to top police officers, in the past, powerful land-grabbers used the police so rampantly that the incidents of police getting involved in land-related deals became known nationally through media reports.

"Now if you walk into a police station and complain about someone filling up the river, the usual reaction is: please give us a written complaint we shall investigate the matter," says

