

The lucrative enterprise of grabbing



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NOTED physicist a victim of land grabbing," screamed the headline on the City Page of *The Daily Star* on June 19. The story details how an old man ran from door to door to free his land from the ugly clutches of grabbers.

In another report in the *Daily Ittefaq*, we learnt how a woman grabbed all the properties of an expatriate man by forging his signature and personal information. She earned his confidence by doing some minor jobs for him, and when he trusted her with renewing his passport, she came up with her masterstroke. Collecting full information provided in his passport, she prepared some false documents and claimed ownership of most of his properties. A clever act of grabbing, indeed.

In this daily, we have also read a report on how there was an onslaught of grabbing on the Meghna River. The report elaborated on the fact that the river custodians turned a blind eye to "influential grabbers" filling up the Meghna foreshore. These are big grabbers in tuxedos who sit next to you in the club of elites.

Chattogram used to boast of thousands of beautiful hills all over the district, but today hundreds of them are gone. In the name of numerous *prokolpos*, the hills have been levelled to the ground and occupied. If you look at the 100-year-old maps of the country, you will notice many small rivers and canals crisscrossing the landscape. Most of them have been devoured by the influential grabbers lurking under the shadow of the powers that be over the century.

Dhaka city once had about 10 major canals – all are gone now. The official

record says they have been grabbed by some influential people. We believe these influential people were and still are more powerful than the government. The cat-and-mouse game of grabbing the land on the two sides of Buriganga River has taken a legendary proportion by now.

One must recognise the fact that grabbers in Bangladesh have taken the

Analysing the success of these hard-working and innovative people, I strongly suggest that, instead of a BCS university, as suggested by an eminent teacher, someone open a university to impart theoretical knowledge as well as practical training on how to grab things: anything, from your mobile phone to 100 acres of government land, private land or a

prominent one among them. In both the urban and rural areas, life revolves around land. A man in love with his land would not hesitate to kill or die for it. In this connection, we may suggest including Leo Tolstoy's short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" in the syllabus of the institute. Added to that should be the wisdom of Niccolo Machiavelli, who said, "But above all he must refrain from seizing the property of others, because a man is quicker to forget the death of his father than the loss of his patrimony."

These enterprising humans are active in our rural areas, too, with a dredger to grab sand from the bottom of the river or earth-cutter to cut the top soil of agricultural land in broad daylight. You don't care if in the process the land loses fertility and water gets stuck in the ditches. When you have cut the top soil of about 200 acres of land and sold it to the local brickfield owner, your attention turns towards the village road with four feet of elevation waiting to be devoured. Since it will be difficult to cut the entire road in daytime, you wait for midnight. Your attention will soon turn to the riverbanks.

When a nosy reporter goes to the local administration to collect information regarding the grabbing of a pond or a hill by the blessed ones, they usually say, "No, no, no, no. No such thing has come to our notice. How can anyone fill up an entire pond or cut down a hill when we are sitting here (read: sleeping)? We shall send someone to inspect. We shall definitely take stern action against anyone doing any mischief." The reporter comes back knowing what to expect when he will visit the office next month.

What about the blessed ones who can vanish millions from the vaults of the banks like the mercurial Harry Houdini? When we are hounded by our banks for the monthly credit card instalment of Tk 600, lo and behold, the blessed ones will get another sanction of, say, Tk 15 crore, even though he has not paid a single instalment of interest on his first loan worth Tk 20 crore!



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enterprise to the highest level of creativity and perfection. They began as small-time snatchers, but worked hard to become big-time grabbers. They have shown the world how to put paws on anything that is worth a dime. Therefore, the enterprise should be given due recognition and enlisted as a legitimate commercial activity. Since you cannot stop these highly enterprising people with laws, you'd better come to terms with them. Commercial banks should come forward to finance these "business activities" with loans to the tune of, say, Tk 4,000 crore. That's peanuts to some.

house, a hill or even half of an entire river, graveyards, cremation sites, playgrounds, sand, earth, toilets, skeletons, ponds, canals, riverbanks, forests, migratory birds and wild animals. Enrolment should be good, and very soon students from abroad would come seeking admission.

As resource persons, we should invite successful grabbers from different countries to deliver lectures on the art of the business. They would talk about why the tendency of grabbing things that belong to others is one of the strongest characteristics in humans, and why the insatiable hunger for land is still the most