

From Japan with love

Octogenarian helps 100 village girls achieve education dreams

AZIBOR RAHMAN with ANDREW EAGLE

At home in Japan, 88-year-old Hiroko Kobayashi still teaches ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging. With more than 40 years experience in the subject, and also an experienced professional photographer, she surely has an eye for artistic beauty. Yet in Jhenidah and Panchagarh districts it is a different form of beauty for which she is held in high regard: her generosity. Of her own initiative, the octogenarian financially supports around 100 Bangladeshi girls to complete school and college.

"I study civil engineering in Jessore Polytechnic Institute," says Soma Rani Das from Raigram village. "If it wasn't for this kind-hearted woman, if she had not stretched out her hand I would have to drop out. I'm so grateful." Soma is one of the 45 recipients of Hiroko's scholarship from Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila. Others hail from Buda upazila in Panchagarh.

"I'm in the final year of my master's degree at Jessore Women's College," says another recipient, Jhumur Khatun from Balakandapur in Kaliganj. "I study because Hiroko made it possible."

The bridge of learning that Hiroko has constructed between Japan and Bangladesh has a history that dates back to 2003, the year Hiroko first arrived in

Bangladesh to complete a placement with Japanese non-government organisation Hunger Free World. During that year, Hiroko came to learn that a student, Khadiza Khatun from Mostabapur village in Kaliganj, had committed suicide for not having enough money to appear in her Higher School Certificate exam.

According to those in Kaliganj who know her, Hiroko was also born into a poor family and studied through financial crises, very often relying on loans to complete her education. Thus Khadiza's tragedy must have resonated, and Hiroko decided to take concrete action.

"Her main objective is to uplift female students," says scholarship in-charge Hafizur Rahman. "Cherishing women's empowerment since her own childhood, she wishes to stand beside those students who come from economically disadvantaged families."

The only condition for scholarship recipients is that they promise not to marry until they are well-established. She also hopes they will, in turn, help poor students from coming generations after they find solvency and an income of their own. "Hiroko visits Bangladesh every March," says Hunger Free World director Anjuman Aktar. "She says she will run the scholarship programme for as long as she lives."



Japanese national Hiroko Kobayashi among the school and college girls who receive financial support for their education from her. The photo was taken at the office of Japanese NGO Hunger Free World at Jhenidah's Kaliganj upazila recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Acquittal sparks call for apology

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allegation made by the World Bank against me is a complete lie.

"I am a victim of a conspiracy by the World Bank and a vested quarter in Bangladesh ... my family was harassed. I had to quit the position of the minister."

In a statement, he added that the construction of the bridge got delayed because of the local and international plots.

Qimiao Fan, country director of the WB, said the global lender takes very seriously the allegations of fraud and corruption impacting the projects financed by it.

He said once a World Bank investigation is concluded, it shares findings with the national authorities to deter-

and individuals.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina vowed to build the bridge using the country's own resources. Accordingly, the construction work was inaugurated in December 2015. The government hopes it would be open to public in 2018.

On Friday, the issue of Padma bridge graft conspiracy came back to the public domain with the ruling of Justice Nordheimer.

The RCMP originally charged five people in the case, but charges against two of the accused -- Mohammad Ismail and Abul Hasan Chowdhury -- were previously dropped, wrote the Globe and Mail newspaper.

The case against the remaining three accused -- former SNC vice-president

always maintained that the allegation was baseless.

"The verdict [of the Canadian court] has again proved that the government was right. All credit goes to the foresightedness of the prime minister because she had taken a bold stance," he said.

The adviser also said the Bangladeshis with responsible positions who had contributed to flare-up of the corruption rumour should at least admit their mistake to the prime minister and apologise.

The corruption allegation involved about \$30 million to \$40 million.

Sajeeb Wazed Joy, ICT adviser to the prime minister, also criticised the WB, saying the evidence was fabricated by the development lender.

"I had seen the evidence myself

Mushy leads resistance

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Bangladesh were not bowled out yesterday and the day might have ended on a relatively better note than how it started, but the fact remains that Bangladesh's top order missed out on scoring on a flat deck.

They eventually finished on 322 for 6, but it was a total that they reached courtesy of their middle and lower-middle order batsmen. Shakib Al Hasan scored 82 while Mushfiqur and Miraz were unbeaten on 81 and 51 respectively.

In contrast, six Indian batsmen comfortably crossed the 50-run mark during their first innings and yet the visiting top order failed to make any mark whatsoever.

It was a combination of some good bowling from the hosts and some poor decisions made by the Tigers batsmen that led to their dreadful start.

The day began in the worst possible fashion when Mominul Haque and Tamim decided to go for an unnecessary double, which led to Tamim getting run out in the 17th over.

That wicket seemed to have affected Mominul a lot because he was partly to blame for the run-out as he had stopped while running. The left-

hander never managed to take off from there and, with Umesh Yadav reversing the ball beautifully, the diminutive batsman was eventually trapped in front in the 25th over.

Yadav's morning burst was the reason Bangladesh lost three quick wickets. He was swinging the ball both ways and beating the batsmen with pace.

There were a number of occasions when his fierce deliveries ricocheted off the pads or took the outside edge for boundaries. The pressure he built helped Ishant Sharma attack from the other end and he got rid of Mahmudullah Riyad with one that swung on to his pads in the 35th over. Riyad reviewed the decision, but replays supported the umpire's call.

At 109 for 4, Bangladesh needed a partnership and the two senior-most campaigners got together to revive the visitors.

Shakib and Mushfiqur counterattacked after lunch and put together a century stand.

The wicket was a lot easier to bat on after the morning session and the batsmen, especially Shakib, attacked the bowlers at will. The batsmen never seemed threatened.

However, Shakib, while trying to keep up with his positive intent, went down the track against Ravichandran Ashwin, a bowler he was dispatching for boundaries quite comfortably until then, and looped to the mid-on fielder.

Shakib departed for 82 and that wicket brought Bangladesh back to square one and they had to rebuild.

Sabbir Rahman joined Mushfiqur, but failed to negotiate the turn. Ravindra Jadeja toyed with Sabbir for a few overs before trapping him in front two overs before tea.

After tea, Bangladesh's strategy changed. The boundaries dried up and both Mushfiqur and Mehedi tried to merely stay at the crease for as long as possible.

There was nothing on the wicket and that helped the duo to carry on their merry way. They put in an unbeaten 87-run stand and helped Bangladesh revive the innings once again.

Mehedi reached his first international half-century by cutting Ashwin behind point. It was a timely knock from a player who had an average below three prior to this Test.

Mushfiqur's resolute stance led him to an unbeaten 81.



"Those people who took sides against Bangladesh are unpatriotic. They also owe Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Awami League government and all the people whose reputation they hurt an apology. Indeed they owe Bangladesh an apology."

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ECONOMIC AFFAIRS ADVISER TO THE PRIME MINISTER



"The World Bank takes allegations of fraud and corruption impacting bank financed projects very seriously. Once a World Bank investigation is concluded, we share findings with national authorities to determine whether or not there was a violation of national legislations."

QIMIAO FAN
WORLD BANK COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR BANGLADESH, BHUTAN AND NEPAL

mine whether or not there was a violation of national legislations. The status of referral actions is published in the annual report of the Bank's Department of Institutional Integrity.

"How each referral is handled is always left up to each national authority," said Qimiao.

The issue surfaced in Bangladesh in 2011 when the foreign funding for the project became uncertain after the WB ringed alarm over an alleged corruption attempt in the country's largest infrastructure project.

The key donor backing the bridge project with a \$1.2 billion fund commitment first suspended the credit.

To get the loan revived, one minister resigned, one secretary was sent to jail and one adviser to the prime minister was sidelined, among a number of measures taken in Bangladesh.

The issue lingered for two years. But nothing seemed to have worked. Later in June 2012, the WB cancelled the credit, saying it had proof of corruption conspiracy involving Bangladesh officials, executives of a Canadian firm

of energy and infrastructure Kevin Wallace, former SNC vice-president of international development Ramesh Shah, and Bangladeshi-Canadian businessman Zulfikar Ali Bhuiyan -- ended Friday when Judge Nordheimer acquitted all three.

In October 2014, a Dhaka court acquitted all seven government officials, including former bridges division secretary Mosharraf Hossain, who were accused of corruption in the bridge project. The same year, the ACC also cleared them of the graft charges.

Economic Affairs Adviser Mashhur Rahman, whose name came up in the allegation, told The Daily Star that the verdict of the Canadian court would further brighten the image of Bangladesh.

The former bureaucrat's name was included in the "Ramesh Diary" that is believed to contain the names of people to be benefitted from the financial felony.

He did not face any court charge. Mashhur said the government had

during the whole episode. It was quite clearly made up as there were no concrete details -- just one anonymous source who was never revealed, even to the Canadian court," he said yesterday in a post on his Facebook account.

He said the WB came up with this plot against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in an attempt to discredit her.

"Those people who took sides against Bangladesh are unpatriotic. They also owe Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Awami League government and all the people whose reputation they hurt an apology. Indeed they owe Bangladesh an apology," he added.

The proposed 6.2km bridge will connect the capital with 16 southwestern districts and is expected to facilitate faster poverty reduction and economic growth for the entire country.

An estimate suggests that the economic growth will increase by 1.7 percent for the south-west region, and 0.6 percent for the whole country, said the WB in 2011.

DMCH wakes up

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not have the signature of a doctor, sources at the burn unit said.

He became suspicious and looked into the test reports of other patients there. He found them unclear and without any signature as well.

Chayan, a former student of Dhaka Medical College, then asked attendants of other patients how they had their tests done. They told him that one Shahid approached them and offered them to collect samples and have the

tests done in exchange for Tk 1,200-1,400 each.

Many took the offer since the building where tests are done is far away and because it would be convenient to have Shahid do the tests for them.

Shahid, who according to burn unit employees has been "working as a broker" at DMCH for the last six to seven years, was called in and asked to explain, which he failed to do.

The patients' attendants there then took him before the hospital director and

the hospital authorities later handed him over to Shahbagh police.

The DMCH formed an enquiry committee to look into the matter.

The six-member committee, led by DMCH Deputy Director Md Zakir Hossain, has been given 10 working days to submit its report.

Officer-in-Charge Abu Bakar Siddique said a ward master of DMCH filed a general diary in this regard. About 24 hours later, Shahbagh police released Shahid after having him sign a bond.

Long struggle pays off

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Resources Bureau of Qiqihar, complaining about the pollution, but during his dealings with officials, he was repeatedly asked to provide evidence that his village and the land he and his neighbors survived off of had indeed been contaminated.

"I knew I was in the right, but I did not know what law the other party had broken or whether or not there was evidence," the 60-something farmer recently told reporters.

The easiest thing to do would have been to hire a lawyer, but Wang and his neighbors could barely afford to put food on the table, so professional legal council was definitely not an option. But Wang Enlin would not give up so

easily, and even though he had only attended school until Third Grade, he decided to study law himself and find out what kind of evidence he needed to collect.

But even teaching himself law was a financial challenge, because Wang couldn't afford to buy the books he needed, so he spent every day reading law books at the local book store, and copying important information from them, by hand. The farmer would offer the shopkeeper bags of corn for letting him read the books in the shop.

In 2007, impressed by Wang Enlin's efforts to fight against a chemical company with assets worth over 2 billion yuan (\$290 million), a Chinese law firm specialized in pollution-related

cases, began offering him and his neighbors free legal advice. After checking all the evidence they had gathered in the previous six years, they also agreed to help the villagers file a petition to court.

Due to unknown complications, the trial against Qihua Group only began in 2015, but it was apparently worth the long wait, as Wang and the other villagers have recently won the first instance at the Angangxi District Court of Qiqihar. A judge ordered the chemical company to pay 820,000 yuan (\$120,000) in compensation to the residents of Yushutun village. They also have to get rid of all the liquid and solid waste they have dumped in the surrounding area over the last 16 years.



Holding Boro saplings, farmers stage a token strike in Boroikanda village of Mymensingh's Gouripur yesterday. Boro farmers from three villages of the upazila, including Boroikanda, were demanding power supply for irrigation this season.

Boro growers go on 'strike' for power

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manager of the samity.

At least 391 farmers of three villages have been dependent on the deep tube-well for their 200 acres of land since 2006. Fakir said the farmers are really frustrated as time is running out for transplantation of saplings.

"We are already late and the yield will be seriously hampered this season," Mannan said, adding that the samity runs no arrears with electricity

bills.

Al Amin, a farmer from Boroikanda, said he has two and a half acres of land and he is dependent on the deep tube-well. If he cannot begin cultivation now, it will be disastrous for him and his family.

"This is our livelihood," lamented the farmer.

Contacted, Prodhish Mandol, deputy general manager of Mymensingh Palli Bidhuth Samity-3, said a faction of the farmers'

samity lodged a case over the ownership of the deep tube-well recently and his office received a copy of the case lodged with a Mymensingh court.

After investigation, Gouripur upazila rural development officer yesterday submitted its report, which suggested that the present manager, Fakir, run the deep tube-well, Mandol said.

"Electricity connection would be available very soon," he added.