

Ichigo Ichiye: Once in a Lifetime

14th February, 2017. Time: 8:20 pm.
When the plane of Malaysian Airlines touched Bangladeshi soil, many things changed in their lives. Why won't they change? They had just returned representing their country, Bangladesh for 7 days in a rummy country, Japan, the land of rising sun.



The program was called “JENESYS-2016” (SAARC 2nd Batch- Energy) organized by JICE or “Japan International Cooperation Center”. The main objective of this program was to make us familiar with the Japanese culture, witness their technological development and teach us about their energy sector. This year, nearly 150 students and youths from 8 SAARC countries (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Afghanistan) participated in the program.



Our journey started on 5th February at night. Dhaka - Kuala Lumpur. After 8 hours of transit there, we landed at Narita Airport of Japan in the evening of 6th February. We were received coldly by the freezing air of Japan and warmly by the JICE members led by Harumi Mori San. We

had a long journey, which is why we didn't have any activities that day. From the airport we were escorted to “Narita View Hotel”. Though an unstated excitement was running through my mind from the moment I stepped on foreign soil for the first time in my life, the first few hours seemed quite dull to me before plunging into sleep. But little did I know that the next 7 days would be the best days of my whole life!

Our first morning in Japan started with a wakeup call. We all got dressed and moved to the breakfast table quite early in the morning.



Our health condition was checked up first followed by the buffet breakfast with all the participants of the JENESYS-2016. After that we had a lecture on Japanese history, culture and economy given by Professor Hideo Kimura. We were really amazed hearing about the rich ancient history of the Japanese people and the journey of the recovery from the devastation of the.

Second World War to the peak of the world. After the lecture was finished, we traveled by bus to a place for our lunch. We were served with the famous traditional food, Washoku. Having our lunch, we reached the “Shin Minato Clean Energy Center”. There we came to know how energy is produced by burning the household trashes and how the environment pollution can be pushed to the least through these energy plants. We also came to know about how careful Japanese people are about their environment and how responsible they are about dumping their wastes. Finishing the visit there we were taken to do a little shopping. Then we returned to our hotel and had our dinner there.



The next day followed almost the same routine as before. Health condition check... breakfast...only the difference was, we checked out with all our belonging after the breakfast and started our journey to Kamogawa city of Chiba Prefecture. On our way we paid a visit in “Seibu Disaster Control Center”. We had first-hand experiences of different disasters like storms, earthquake, fire etc. there. We were taught how to protect ourselves during intense wind in a storm, how to use a fire extinguisher at the time of fire, how to evacuate a building attacked by fire and how to take shelter at the time of earthquake. We had our lunch that day in an Italian restaurant. After the lunch our journey to Kamogawa continued. We met the deputy mayor of Kamogawa city and heard about a lot about Kamogawa’s population, its economy and agriculture and about the scenic beauty of this city by the





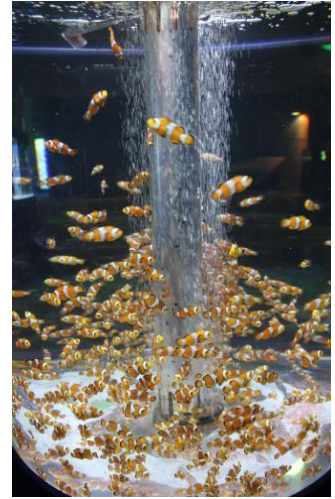
shore of the mighty Pacific. After the courtesy call we did a photo-shoot there and moved to our new destination, “Kamogawa Grand Hotel”. This hotel had a traditional style. The rooms were like the traditional rooms of Japanese home. We had the indescribable beauty of the Pacific just in front our hotel.

Our next day started at a new place, Kamogawa. Being done with the breakfast in our hotel we paved our way to “Min-nami no Sato” through the continuous drizzling rain. Min-nami no Sato was a local product’s market combined with community center. First we had a small lecture about the natural resources of Japan and energy produced from them. There we came to know Japan had little natural resources of their own. They import mostly their raw materials for producing electricity. But still the electricity availability in Japan is 100%. This proved how highly developed the infrastructure was. Besides we were also taken to a small hill to see how charcoal was produced from wood. We were fortunate enough to see some traditional Japanese artifacts and crafts in the community center. Finishing our visit there



we went to “Kamogawa Sea World”, where we had one of the most beautiful times of our whole trip. We had a rare experience of watching the killer whale and dolphin show. Freezing weather... drizzling rain all over our head... stunts done by the whales in front our eyes... how exciting could it ever get! The heavenly beauty of the aquaria containing hundreds of aquatic organisms just opened our eyes towards the astonishing diversity

beneath the waters we see. Being bewildered, we returned to our hotel that day quite early. We sat by the ocean for a long time. The serene coast wind made us all thoughtful about the heavenly time we were spending. However, we returned to our room, had our dinner and ended the splendid day with a sound sleep.



The next day we checked out of our hotel and went to “Kamogawa Mirai Solar”. It was a Photovoltaic Power Plant capable of producing 31.25 Mega Watt power. The technology in that power plant was so advanced that it would need only 3 people to maintain that huge power plant overall. We saw a sample solar panel in the plant and saw the vast space where many a solar panels were installed. After that we were brought to the most interesting part of our whole tour. THE HOME STAY PROGRAM!



First we met our host, the Shibasaki family, a couple of 83 and 77 years old. I was in a group of 20 participants from different countries like Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. We were brought to their home, a house on a hill in the middle of woods and greenery. Just as I saw in the movie “The Last Samurai”, at least that’s how it looked to me! The wooden house was upholding the heritage of the whole

nation of Japan in front of us. Their attire, utensils, fitments and the architecture all were studied by us on that very experience. Japanese people are very hardworking and they do not get old even their ages grow. I was amazed to see that the couple of such age was arranging everything for all 20 of us! They cooked our food, served them, made our table, cleaned them after our meal and made our bed. Through all of their work, they were so polite and humble to us. Not only the Shibasaki family but all Japanese are so polite that their politeness should be a magnificent example for the whole world.



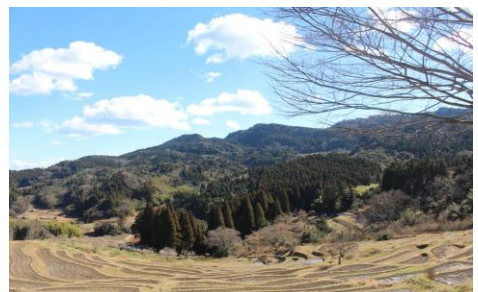
The first night of the home stay was quite a rough night. The temperature suddenly fell around to 1° Celsius. As most of us came from tropical countries it was hard for us to live through such freezing temperature. However that didn't remain as a big problem. Shibasaki family's cordiality was all that warmed us even in that cold. Though we didn't know much Japanese and they didn't know English so it was very difficult for us to communicate with them. We had only a booklet on Japanese conversations to communicate with them. But it never came in the way of their hospitality. An incident would make that clear. For our first dinner in their home, they served us with rice, fishes and curries. The Pakistanis are not much compatible with rice. They mostly eat bread. The family saw that the Pakistanis weren't eating the dinner. They might've understood then or not but the next day Mr. Shibasaki drove 3 km all by himself very early in the morning to the grocer to buy bread, butter and jam for all us. When we went to the breakfast table we saw they served rice for all us and bread for the Pakistanis. Later we were also given the diverse breakfast. It is truly said that language could not be a barrier if there is love.

That day we had an experience of farming activities in "Ohyama Rice Terrace". First we went to the rice fields and saw how they cultivate rice. Then we had a small lecture on the diversity of animals that were found in



that area. After that we were taught how to make rice cakes.

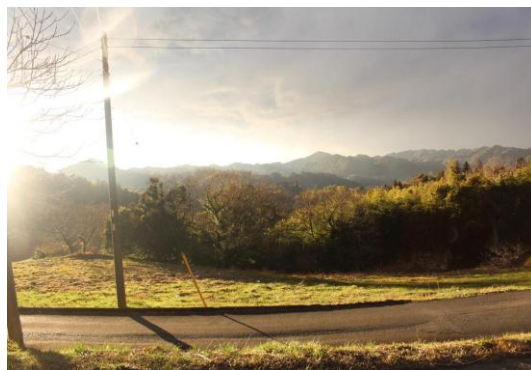
We grinded the rice, the peas and made our own rice cakes. Though they weren't as good looking as they really are, but they were very pleasing to all of us. Then we went to a local school where we learnt how to make handkerchief with only a





plain cloth and herbal elements. The school we went to was large and well-facilitated but it was abandoned because the area didn't have sufficient children to study in that school. Actually it depicted a lot about the population problem of the whole country. Japan is facing an acute shortage of young population in their country.

We returned home early that day. We had enough time to roam about ourselves. So we, Bangladeshis went to explore the hilly area. We went up the hill through the road and into the woods. Suddenly the light dimmed. We thought it would rain, so we came down. Before entering the home, we stood at an open space. There I saw the best scenery of my life! It was snow falling on a distant hill and it was coming right towards us! It fell on the hill... on the wide open field... on the trees... on the road... then on us. The moments felt like I accidentally had entered into a movie set and experienced all of that. I'd never seen snow fall in my entire life before that day. So it was naturally the best experience of my life. The heavenly feeling couldn't last for long. As the snowing intensified, we got back to the home. At night we sat with our hosts and enjoyed a lot, we



sang and danced with them. I presented them a wooden map of my country and some traditional fancy goods. Who knows, maybe that timber map is still decorating their drawing room...

We had to leave the host family the next day. There was a small farewell party at a place arranged for all the host families of the JENESYS Program. We rendered our gratitude to all of them. With help of our coordinator I delivered a speech in Japanese, telling them how grateful we were their

hospitality and love. We dedicated a Bangla song to our host families.

When the song silenced the entire hall, it really gave us a sense of pride as Bangladeshis. [Video link:

<https://www.facebook.com/hasnain.sezan/videos/vb.100000701454594/1427603973939637/?type=2&theater>]

After the outstanding experience of home stay for 2 days we returned



to our much known “Kamogawa Grand Hotel”. On our returning we had a workshop about the action plan we had to submit the next day in Tokyo in front of all the officials. Besides each one of us were given a paper to fill up and inform about our whole program and how we enjoyed, if we had faced any trouble or not or any sort of things that should be changed in the program. I was happy to hear that of all the 150 participants only my paper was submitted to JICE. Ending our workshop we returned to our respective rooms. We spent our last night in Kamogawa by preparing our action plan and chatting with our fellow participants late night.

The next day we checked out from the hotel and rode our bus to Tokyo. On our way we visited a museum on Tokyo Bay Aqua Line Tunnel. It is a 4.4 km bridge over the Tokyo Bay and the fourth longest underwater tunnel in the world. In the museum we saw the splendid architecture of the tunnel and how it was built. After that we were given time to see the tunnel and bridge. We rode up the bridge and saw the beautiful bay. We took a lot of photos there. Then again we started our Journey to Tokyo. Reaching there, we had our lunch at first. Then we went to the presentation hall. The ambassadors of each





SAARC countries were present in the hall along with the officials of JICE and the Japanese government. I was chosen to present the action plan on behalf of our team. When I stood in front of such dignitaries to represent my country, I was really nervous. But at the end of the presentation, we received the 'award' of best presentation

among the other countries verbally. Apart from receiving the personal appreciation from the ambassadors, it gave me an extraordinary feeling that we have done something to enhance the image of Bangladesh among Japanese and other participants from SAARC countries. This feeling cannot be achieved from anything else.

After our presentation, we were delivered with our certificates. Finishing other formalities there, we rode our bus again and went to a supermarket for doing shopping one last time in Japan. Then we had our dinner. Our accommodation for that night was arranged in

"Hotel East 21 Tokyo". We checked in, packed our bags, and then went to walk through the magnificent city of Tokyo. We took a small walk through the city streets and went back as we weren't allowed to roam about ourselves after 10 pm throughout the program. I passed my last night in Japan by having a chat with one of my friends there by the window in our room, watching the night of Tokyo. We slept late that night but



woke up very early in the morning and checked out. Our returning flight was at 10 am. By the time we boarded the plane and returned to our country via Kuala Lumpur again, you all have got the picture of how my days in Japan went.

It was a once in a lifetime opportunity or as the Japanese tell “Ichigo Ichie”. I am really grateful to the Japanese government and JICE for giving me the chance to have one of the best experiences of my life. Though several months have passed since my visit, I still reminisce the days that I have spent there. I remember each and every moment of the tour, each and every detail. When some remembrance of the tour comes to my mind suddenly, I often become a bit sad. It’s mysterious. Maybe these words are true indeed: “Memories are always depressing, whether they are of happiness or sadness.”

