

## Talk about Gaza Crisis

The fighting between Israel and the Islamic group of Hamas began in October 2023 and it is feared that the fighting will be prolonged. More than 20,000 lives were lost in the Palestinian autonomous region of Gaza in three months, and about 1.9 million people, or 90% of the population, have been displaced, with food and medicine in short supply due to the blockade by the Israeli military.

There are some movements appearing in Ehime to convey the humanitarian crisis in Palestine, hoping for a ceasefire as soon as possible. In early December 2023, a roundtable talk was held in Masaki Town, south of Matsuyama. Maher Hassan, aged 52, had planned this event hoping that people in Ehime come to learn about Gaza and Israel.

He is from Egypt and works at a shipbuilding company in Imabari, Ehime, after studying at Hiroshima University graduate school. Rie Okawa, living in Masaki Town, a former Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer, cooperated with the event. Mr. Hassan explained the history behind the war. He claimed that negotiations must urgently begin so as to stop the ongoing genocide and to permanently lift the siege of Gaza. He hopes that Japan will take action worldwide as a peace-loving country.

On January 16th, an academic lecture was held by the Faculty of Economics of Matsuyama University, with the theme of "What is happening in Palestine now?" About 100 people, including students, citizens, and international students, attended the lecture. Muhammad Hussein, aged 35, an Indonesian journalist and human rights activist gave an online lecture from his country. He lived in Gaza for more than 12 years and fled back to Indonesia about a month after the fighting began.

He pointed out that even before the fighting began, Gaza's border had been closed off by Israel, and many children were suffering from hunger due to shortages of water, food, electricity, fuel, and medical supplies. The attack by Hamas (which triggered the fighting) was an act of their resistance, not out of blue. They had no choice but to do that in order to get the world's attention because even the United Nations was not doing anything to them. Professor Maki Iwasaki at Matsuyama University emphasized the importance of deepening knowledge by obtaining information from both perspectives of the Israel and Palestine.

(January 12, 17, Ehime Shimbun)

## Sending Breaking Athletes from Ehime to Paris to the World

Breaking, or break dance, has been attracting attention since it was designated as an Olympic sport for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Over the past five years, more and more new break dance schools have opened in Ehime.

Breaking originated in the United States. The athletes improvise combinations of various skills such as the headspin, the shoulderspin, and posing in a one-handed handstand freeze in time to music. They take turns performing with their opponent, competing in terms of technique and expressiveness.

“Drip” in Matsuyama, the first club specializing in breaking in Ehime, has about 20 students enrolled ranging from elementary school to high school. Some of them go outside Ehime, such as the Kansai region to win competitions. Their coach, Tokio Koshimizu, hopes that they could hold a separate competition in Ehime if the number of B-boys and girls keep increasing in the prefecture, thanks to the effects of the Olympics.

Breaking is popular in Europe and America, and is referred to as an urban sport because it can be easily enjoyed on the street in the city. However, break dancers in Ehime emphasize they could succeed even in the rural areas if they work hard. They are hopeful that it will not end up as a temporary trend, but that it will take root in Ehime.

(January 12, Ehime Shimbun)

## Four Banks in Shikoku to Advance Women in Leadership

The Shikoku Alliance, consisting of four regional banks, plan to focus on advancing women in leadership and held a workshop for female leaders to improve their business skills.

The Shikoku Alliance consists of the Iyo Bank Ltd. (Ehime), the Hyakujushi Bank, Ltd. (Kagawa), the Awa Bank, Ltd. (Tokushima), and the Shikoku Bank Ltd. (Kochi). This workshop has been held annually since 2019, although it was suspended during the pandemic.

The workshop was held in Matsuyama on December 21 and 22, and attended by five people in their late 30<sup>s</sup> and early 40<sup>s</sup> from each bank, 20 in total. They learned how to motivate and encourage their team members.

Ms. Mizue Morichika, an attendee of the workshop, said that it was a very meaningful opportunity for female managers to share concerns understood only among women, and she hoped that the outcome of that workshop would help bring her team members to a higher level since she enjoys her team members’

growth.

Mr. Yosuke Takagi, a manager of human resources in the Iyo Bank Ltd., who was in charge of organization of this workshop, said that it aimed to enhance their management skills by sharing problems with people who are in a similar position in other banks, and gain new perspectives that they should be taken to use in their daily work.

(January 6, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

#### Dogo Onsen Honkan Reopens on July 11

The Dogo Onsen Honkan, designated as the Important Cultural Asset and has been under construction for preservation, repairs and to boost strength against earthquakes, will fully reopen on July 11, 2024. It was announced on January 4 by the city of Matsuyama. It will be completely closed from June 18 to July 10 for the final preparations for reopening.

Dogo Onsen Honkan is a public bathhouse built in 1894 - 1924. The city allocated about 2.6 billion yen for the work for the project. The whole construction period was divided into phases and the construction has been in progress while keeping the building partial open. The construction has gone so well that the reopening will be about a half year earlier than planned.

The city held several art events to reduce the negative impact on tourism during the construction period. The exterior during the construction was also well considered. A large drawing by Osamu Tezuka, a manga artist, was used on the roof of the tent covering the building.

Mr. Katsutoshi Noshi, the mayor of Matsuyama, said that it would be the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dogo Onsen Honkan in April, and that it should be continuously changing to attract many people not only in Japan, but also from all over the world, to Dogo.

(January 5, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

#### Newly Released "Globe-Trotter Travel Guidebook: Shikoku"

*Shikoku*, the 11th book in the domestic series of *Chikyu no Arukikata* (Globe-Trotter Travel Guidebook), has been published. The series is known for its abundance of useful travel information. The Shikoku edition contains information on 95 cities and towns and includes a suggested route across the four prefectures. "We've created a 'Shikoku Travel Encyclopedia' that is useful for rediscovering the charm of local places and neighboring prefectures," declared the publisher.

Production manager Yuriko Shimizu noted, “Shikoku's popularity has increased after the globally recognized travel guidebook Lonely Planet ranked it sixth among the ‘top 10 regions to visit in 2022’. So Shikoku is recognized once again as an area that Japan should be proud of.”

Shikoku (guidebook “Chikyu no Arukikata”) published by Gakken, 2420 yen  
(January 3, Ehime Shimbun)

### Mottainai Spirit: Selling Local Imperfect Veggies

The greengrocer “Kumayama Deli Lab” in Tobe, which sells non-standard vegetables from Kumakogen that are not made available for distribution because of their appearance, has gained popularity by offering them at half the market price. They purchase the non-standard vegetables at a low cost from farmers, selling them as is, and also process them into pickles and side dishes so nothing is wasted. Store manager Yumiko Higaki is expecting an increase in the number of customers who are interested in non-standard vegetables.

As you drive along Route 33 from Matsuyama City, you can see a banner on your right near the Tobe Town Hall with an illustration of vegetables and a large message saying *Mottainai* (wasteful). Deli Lab, which opened in September 2021, was established by Kumayama Co., Ltd., which has been selling fruit and vegetables in the Misaka Pass (Route 33) and other areas since 1979.

It was Yumiko Higaki who noticed the non-standard vegetables when she went to Kumakogen three years ago to buy vegetables. She happened to see farmers were discarding vegetables in the field because they didn’t look good, even though there were no problems with the quality. She wanted to make the most of these vegetables, and when the company decided to open a new store in Tobe, she lobbied to let her handle the processed products. The company agreed.

The store usually has about 20 types of processed products, including pickled vegetables (200 grams/486 yen), cucumbers pickled in mustard (150 grams/380 yen), and peach and apple jams (230 grams/734 yen).

Popular items are daily side dishes such as curry, coleslaw, and vegetable gratin (all 150 grams/213 yen). The menu is based on the vegetables available on the day and cooked in-store. Some customers come just to get the daily side dishes.

Non-standard vegetables are obtained when farmers ask the staff to come and pick them up, so the types and quantities on display at the store are different each day. However, in the third year of operation, the business is going well. Higaki says, “We want people to pay more attention to these processed products. We

also want people in urban areas to know the benefits of non-standard vegetables.”

She is now considering selling them online.

Closed: Thursdays

Open: 10 am to 6 pm (5 pm in winter)

Inquiries: 089-962-7771 (Kumayama Deli Lab)

(December 30, Yomiuri Shimbun)