

### **The Emperor and Empress Visited Ehime**

The 76th National Tree Planting Festival was held on May 17 at the Ehime Prefectural Sports Complex in Matsuyama and other locations in Ehime, with the Emperor and Empress in attendance. The emperor stated in his address, "I hope that people will nurture their love for forests, cherish and protect them, and that the circle of activities aimed at creating healthy forests will spread widely from Ehime to the rest of the country and into the future." They planted six tree species in the ground, including pollen-free Japanese cedar. The Tree Planting Festival is a main event of the National Land Greening Movement and is held annually with the attendance of the royal couple.

This was the first time the event was held in Ehime in 60 years. It was also the Emperor's first visit to Ehime in nine years since attending the National Sports Festival for People with Disabilities in 2017. He acceded to the throne in 2019, so this was his first visit as Emperor. And he was accompanied by Empress Masako for the first time in 27 years since the opening ceremony of the Setouchi Shimanami Kaido in 1999.

The previous day, there was a welcoming atmosphere for their Majesties' arrival in Ehime. They showed kind consideration to the residents who welcomed them at various locations, and the streets on their way were filled with a sea of smiling faces. According to a summary by the prefectural police, 26,040 people turned out at the sites and along the route.

During their stay, they interacted with the members of the Nagahama High School Aquarium Club in Ozu City and met sufferers of the Western Japan heavy rains. They visited the Tobe Prefectural Zoo in Tobe Town, where they observed "Peace," the polar bear that was the first in Japan to be successfully raised by humans.

They met people who were doing relief work in the burn areas following the forest fires that occurred in both Imabari and Saijo cities last March. Akira Ochi, aged 76 and former chairman of the Ochi Imabari Forestry Association, worked tirelessly on designing restoration plans and planting trees. He received encouraging words from the Empress, "Restoration is hard work. Please keep up the good work." He was deeply moved, saying, "There is nothing more joyful than being able to speak with Her Majesty in person," and renewed his determination for reforestation. (May 17, 18, Ehime Shimbun)

### **Two Soccer Players from Ehime to World Cup**

On May 15, the Japan Football Association announced 26 national team members for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, including Yuto Nagatomo (age 39, FC Tokyo, from Saijo

City, Ehime) and Daichi Kamada (age 29, Crystal Palace, from Iyo City, Ehime).

Nagatomo has been selected for five consecutive tournaments, more than any Japanese player, and has also broken the record for the oldest player selected, surpassing Eiji Kawashima (Jubilo Iwata) from the previous tournament. Kamada has been selected for the second consecutive tournament.

Head coach Hajime Moriyasu read out the roster at a press conference in Tokyo and stated, "I have selected the best 26-player squad for Japan to win on the world stage." Japan, making its eighth consecutive World Cup appearance, has set winning the tournament as its goal.

The tournament, jointly hosted by Canada, Mexico, and the US, kicks off on June 11. Japan will play their first Group F match against the Netherlands on June 14 (June 15 Japan time). They will face Tunisia on June 20 (June 21 Japan time) and Sweden on June 25 (June 26 Japan time).

Nagatomo held a press conference in Tokyo and expressed his resolve to serve as a spiritual pillar for the team, saying, "I have a unique, passionate spirit that will allow me to keep the team moving positive, even when things aren't going well. I've made it this far thanks to the support of so many people. I feel nothing but 1000% gratitude. I would like to bring my career to a close in the best possible way." (May 16, Ehime Shimbun)

### **River Cleanup and Awareness Campaign in Matsuyama**

Let's stop garbage from flowing into the sea off Ehime Prefecture. The prefecture, in response to the current situation where an estimated 14 to 65 tons of plastic waste, such as PET bottles and shopping bags, flow into the sea from rivers within the prefecture annually, has begun full-scale efforts this fiscal year to curb waste generation in cooperation with Matsuyama City and other cities. On May 30th, the first river cleanup event is scheduled to be held in Matsuyama City.

Awareness campaigns will also be conducted for river waste countermeasures, collected from residents of the prefecture. The prefecture is also investigating the condition of rivers that are sources of marine debris, including tracking the drifting process from rivers to the sea, and estimating the amount of waste flowing out.

In December of last year, it was announced that the prefecture would be working with

five cities with a high concentration of rivers—Niihama, Imabari, Matsuyama, Toon, and Uwajima—to promote waste reduction measures. The logo, unveiled in late April, depicts people holding hands to form a circle, symbolizing the prefecture's collective effort to beautify its waters. The catchphrase, "Let's pick up river litter with wide-ranging love," promoting a chain reaction of consideration. The prefecture is calling on people to "make an effort to take their trash home, to make the sea a little cleaner." (Ehime Shimbun, May 6)



### **Enjoying the cool taste of summer a little early**

The annual "Heike Valley *Somen Nagashi* (flowing noodles) Festival" began on April 29th in Miyauchi, Honai-cho, Yawatahama City. Many families enjoyed this summer tradition under bright, fresh greenery. It will run until August 31st.

Although it was a little chilly that first day, customers arrived in droves at lunchtime. Children's eyes were shining as they scooped up the flowing *somen* noodles and gobbled them up. At the rainbow trout fishing pond, children shouted excitedly, "I caught a big fish!" The event is organized by the local-Senior Citizens' Club "Fukuju-kai". Business hours are from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

(Ehime Shimbun, April 30th)

\**Somen nagashi* is catching *somen* noodles with your chopsticks as they flow down a bamboo trough.