

1st cherry blossom viewing after nuclear accident

Former residents of a village near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have taken part in a cherry blossom viewing event for the first time in 3 years.

All residents of Iitate Village evacuated from their homes after the nuclear accident at the plant in March 2011.

The event was held on Wednesday in the village's Iitamizawa area, whose former residents are allowed to visit their homes but not stay there. The event lasted only one hour due to high radiation levels. Full-scale decontamination of the area has not been done.

About 60 former residents took part in a Shinto ceremony to pray for reconstruction of the village. They were served dumplings and oden, a dish containing fish, eggs and other ingredients.

One woman said she feels lonely living away from the village, and that she was happy to chat with former neighbors.

The event was planned by local farmer Masao Aita and his wife. They've tended about 2,000 cherry trees for at least 10 years.

Aita said he wants to hold a similar event when villagers are allowed to return.

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