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Evacuees served hot meals Budokan first shelter in capital to offer square fare to displaced

By **NATSUKO FUKUE**
Staff writer

Six days since shelters opened in Tokyo for tsunami survivors from the Tohoku region, evacuees finally tasted hot meals Wednesday thanks to volunteers.

"I really appreciate a hot meal because we hadn't had it for a while," said Nanami Nitama, a 22-year-old nursery school teacher from Iwaki, Fukushima Prefecture.



Hot meals: Volunteers (left) distribute food to Fukushima Prefecture evacuees at Tokyo Budokan in Adachi Ward. SATOKO KAWASAKI PHOTO

Nitama said she took a highway bus to Tokyo with her parents Saturday, fearful of leaking radiation from the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

To support evacuees like Nitama, volunteer members from the Nippon Seikokai (Anglican Church in Japan) and another nonprofit organization for day laborers in the Sanya district, cooked rice and miso soup with meat and vegetables at the Tokyo Budokan in Adachi Ward, where many Iwaki residents had evacuated.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has opened two other temporary shelters. Ajinomoto Stadium in Chofu, which can accommodate 1,600 people, opened Thursday, and Tokyo Big Sight in Koto Ward, which can handle 3,000 evacuees, opened Tuesday.

Meal coupons for restaurants inside Big Sight are distributed to evacuees, but people at the two other venues had mostly been provided bread or instant noodles once a day.

The government decided Wednesday to start providing three meals a day to evacuees at the Budokan and Ajinomoto Stadium. The government, however, warned that warm meals may not always be included.

Lawyer Kiyoshi Morikawa, a representative of the volunteer groups that provided the hot meals Wednesday, said their initial request to hand out meals had been rejected.

"We went to the venue with about 300 boxed meals, but we were told (by government staff members) they were not necessary," he said.

After sending a written request to the metropolitan government Sunday, volunteers were allowed to provide food outside the building Wednesday, Morikawa said.

The metropolitan government has not accepted volunteers at the shelters so far, saying there are currently enough government staffers.

Meanwhile, the tsunami survivors from Fukushima — including Nitama, who said she had applied for public housing in Tokyo — were worried about their next moves.



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"I want go to back because I have a job, but I'm also worried (about radiation)," she said.

A couple from Iwaki, who gave only their family name, Saito, also said they did not know when it would be safe to return home.

"No relief seems to be sent to Iwaki," the wife said.

The couple and their three children had been eating food they had stocked away at home after the disaster hit. Market shelves had been emptied, water supplies stopped and gasoline depleted in the city, they said.

"So those who don't have enough gasoline in their car, they can't even evacuate. And they have no food," the husband said.

"Some of our friends who had evacuated once actually went back from Tokyo to Fukushima, but because of the conditions, they want to come back here again."

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