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## Osaka: Cafeteria for International Students Launched in Osaka

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The Yomiuri Shimbun  
Students from various countries interact at an International Cafeteria event in Naniwa Ward, Osaka.

**By Masaki Fukunaga / Yomiuri Shimbun Staff Writer**

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OSAKA — A job search company is attracting attention for its International Cafeteria project, which serves free meals to foreign students who have not yet adjusted to living in Japan.

The project was launched by YOLO Japan in Naniwa Ward, Osaka, which operates a job-search site aimed at foreign residents, to support those experiencing economic difficulties and social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 2, international students from various countries living in the Kansai region enjoyed meals, games and lively conversation at YOLO Base, the company's event space near JR Shin-Imamiya Station.

“I can come into contact with the cultures and values of many different countries. I learn a lot. It is a very stimulating place,” said Ho Dieu Ly, 26, from Vietnam.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced classes to be held online instead of in-person. International students were unable to find part-time jobs and forced to stay home for a long period of time. Many felt isolated due to the language barrier, economic difficulties and few opportunities to go out and meet people.

Angga Alif Utama, 31, from Indonesia recalled that time, saying: “I had no job. I was housebound. I felt like I was losing my mind.”

In response, the company planned the International Cafeteria in April last year so that foreign residents could enjoy a meal in a relaxed setting and meet other people going through the same struggles.

The company hosts the event every few months using food and other supplies provided by companies that are sympathetic to the project.

In addition to serving free meals, the event also offers Japanese language lessons, disaster preparedness classes and job interviews by companies seeking to hire non-Japanese people, and around 100 to 200 people attend each event.

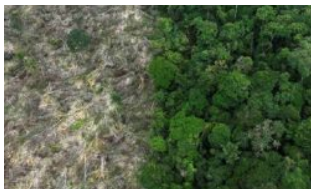
Also, students from Daiichi Gakuin High School, a correspondence school with a campus in Osaka; and Keonguk High School, a South Korean international school in Sumiyoshi Ward, Osaka, volunteer to help operating the event so participants connect regardless of nationality.

Events at the cafeteria include playing games such as a Japanese card game called menko, quoits and a quiz to learn Japanese slang. Shaved ice, which is normally sold at festivals and fairs, is served.

“I love talking to people,” Angga said. “I can meet people from various countries at the international cafeteria, so it is paradise for me.”

Taisuke Kaji, president of YOLO Japan said: “To achieve the goal of Japanese and foreign people living harmoniously together in a diverse society, I want people to be able to form bonds and connect with each other face to face.”

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