



Chowing down: Participants in a "natto" speed-eating contest compete in Mito, Ibaraki Prefecture, on Saturday. KYODO PHOTO

## Japan defends honor in Mito's annual 'natto' speed-eating contest

MITO, Ibaraki Pref. (Kyodo) The annual "natto" fermented soybean speed-eating contest was held Saturday in Mito, Ibaraki Prefecture, drawing 72 contestants including competitive eating regulars from various parts of Japan and eight people from overseas countries such as Australia.

Participants in the preliminaries had to eat about 100 grams of sticky natto beans mixed with a bowl of about 310 grams of rice. The 10 who advanced to the final stage had to then eat 350 grams of natto.

Spectators enthusiastically cheered a woman struggling to swallow the food, as well as an Ethiopian man trying hard but clumsily to use chopsticks.

The winner was Masaki Nakamura, a 44-year-old company employee from the city, who set a record time of 30.97 seconds.

"I tucked into it like I used to when I was a student," said a smiling Nakamura, who has taken part in the competition for the past nine years. "This is my second victory but I am happy as one representing this district."

Mito, roughly 100 km northeast of Tokyo, is known as a major production center for natto — a traditional high protein delicacy with a distinctive smell and flavor. It has been holding the event for the past 10 years.

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