

MORAKOT: THE AFTERMATH: Cabinet does about-face in rejection of foreign aid

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 14 August 2009 07:59 -

The government yesterday did an about-face, saying it would accept foreign aid after the public expressed indignation over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MOFA) decision to refuse all foreign assistance except for cash.

"We welcome all kinds of help from all countries. We will provide a detailed list of the items that we need very soon," Executive Yuan spokesman Su Jun-pin told a press conference following the weekly Cabinet meeting yesterday. "The list could include personnel, aircraft and heavy machinery."

On Tuesday, MOFA said it was only accepting cash donations and declined all other forms of assistance, such as goods and search and rescue teams.

MOFA spokesman Henry Chen told reporters at the time that Taiwan was grateful for the kind offers of help extended by the international community, but said that Taiwan was capable of handling the disaster on its own.

Chen's comments drew fire from the public, which panned the government as being money hungry and apathetic toward the plight of flood victims.

Angry citizens bombarded the ministry with complaints yesterday, urging it to immediately open the borders to foreign aid.

Some bloggers compared the Taiwanese government with the military junta in Myanmar when it blocked foreign humanitarian groups from helping after Cyclone Nargis devastated the country last May, leaving thousands to fend for themselves.

The government's position on accepting foreign aid remained unclear through Wednesday, with Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi quoted by media as saying that the Presidential Office respected MOFA's decision and its professional judgment, while Premier Liu Chao-shiuan, at a separate setting later on Wednesday, said Taiwan was willing to accept help from other countries and would make requests when necessary.

Su yesterday said the remarks were a misunderstanding.

"The main concern of the Executive Yuan was that any aid should be able to meet the needs of the disaster areas," Su said. "The Executive Yuan first asked each government department to determine which items were in sufficient supply. As for other equipment and whether we need foreign help in frontline rescue operations, related government departments will decide whether it is proper based on their expertise. The government is working on collecting information and doing further studies."

Soon after the government said it was willing to accept aid from other countries, US\$1.1

MORAKOT: THE AFTERMATH: Cabinet does about-face in rejection of foreign aid

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 14 August 2009 07:59 -

million in medical supplies and food arrived from Singapore, making it the first foreign donor to help out with supplies after Typhoon Morakot battered southern Taiwan over the weekend.

MOFA deputy spokesman James Chang said that as of yesterday, the government had received much more than US\$500,000 in donations from the international community, adding that more was still being tallied.

So far, 50 countries have expressed condolences and willingness to lend a helping hand if needed, he said.

Earlier yesterday, while inspecting Matou Township in Tainan County, President Ma Ying-jeou denied that his government had rejected international aid, saying that Taiwan welcomed assistance from the international community.

“So far the US, Japan, Singapore and the mainland have donated money, and we have accepted it with pleasure,” Ma said in response to media queries about MOFA’s rejection of aid.

Legislators across party lines yesterday supported the government’s call for foreign aid.

“Which is more important now, saving lives or [saving the government’s] face? Everyone knows perfectly well that saving lives is the first priority,” Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Lo Shu-lei said. “We should welcome all foreign aid that can help us speed up the process of disaster relief and rescue efforts.”

KMT Legislator Wu Ching-chih agreed, saying that the government should invite foreign rescue teams to help with the relief.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Huang Sue-ying said accepting foreign aid was necessary because the government was “obviously incompetent” in disaster relief.

□ ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY KO SHU-LING AND FLORA WANG

Source: [Taipei Times 2009/08/14](#)