

Dalai Lama invited to comfort victims

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The Dalai Lama has accepted an invitation to visit the victims of Typhoon Morakot in southern Taiwan at the end of this month, a Kaohsiung City Government official said yesterday.

Asked about the visit, the Presidential Office told the Taipei Times it had "no comment."

The Tibetan spiritual leader had expressed his desire to visit Taiwan last November, but President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) said then that "the timing isn't appropriate."

Mainland Affairs Council Deputy Minister Liu Te-shun (劉德勝) said late last night that the government would evaluate the situation once the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission has received the official application.

When the Dalai Lama first visited Taiwan in 1999, the administration of then president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) granted him visa-free privilege.

Hsu Li-ming (許立明), director-general of the city government's Information Office, said the Dalai Lama would arrive on Monday at the invitation of seven local government chiefs in the south.

During his six-day stay in southern Taiwan, the Dalai Lama will deliver speeches and visit the areas affected by Typhoon Morakot to comfort the victims of the disaster, Hsu said.

In a press release, the city government said the Dalai Lama was very glad to be able to comfort the victims, adding that he understood the pain of the victims because he once saw his people living in northern India suffer from mudslides.

The spiritual leader said he was very concerned about Morakot's aftermath in Taiwan because Taiwanese had given so much support to Tibetans in exile in India, the city government said.

"The Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual leader of Tibet, but also a religious leader. He also embodies love and peace and has comforted billions of souls over the years," the city government said. "We believe the Dalai Lama's visit will help the victims get back on their feet."

The city government's Information Office added that the Dalai Lama's office would apply for a Taiwanese visa, but whether he would be allowed to visit would depend on the central government.

Dawa Tsering, a representative of the Tibetan government in exile, yesterday confirmed that the Dalai Lama had accepted the invitation extended by Taiwanese local government chiefs on Monday. He added that the Dalai Lama might travel to Taiwan as soon as this weekend if it was convenient for Taiwan.

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