

Ministry admits Abe took taxi while on Taiwan trip

Written by Taipei Times

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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) yesterday admitted for the first time that former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe took a taxi during a late night dinner with several opposition party politicians during a recent two-day visit to Taiwan.

The admission came after ministry officials had been insistent, amid growing questions raised over the diplomatic lapse, that government-supplied courtesy cars were provided at all times during Abe's visit.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Timothy Yang (楊毅) said yesterday that Abe shared a taxi with members of the entourage at 11:30pm on Sunday night.

He maintained, however, that the incident, first revealed by Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) officials, only took place after Japanese diplomatic officials told the driver of a ministry supplied van that he could retire for the night.

"Under the circumstances of having no car, it seems like [Abe and his entourage] did take a taxi," Yang said. "But it wasn't because the MOFA purposely withdrew the cars."

Yang's remarks contradicted MOFA spokesperson James Chang (張良), who claimed on Tuesday that a van was supplied at all times during Abe's visit, adding the opposition party's remarks on the taxi incident were "completely false."

Yang yesterday said he called the van driver surnamed Tan (譚) to determine the causes of the discrepancy between the DPP and the ministry. The van driver said he was told by the Japanese that he could leave after he drove the former Japanese prime minister from the restaurant where Abe met the DPP politicians back to the hotel, Yang said.

"It was then about 10:20pm. It was impossible that our van driver would leave without permission. They are all very disciplined," Yang said.

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Several DPP politicians, all of whom were at the dinner on Sunday night, originally told the Taipei Times on Tuesday that the incident was first mentioned by a Japanese representative at the dinner party.

The DPP account said Abe had been escorted in a van provided by the ministry to the dinner party at 9pm on Sunday. He later left the party halfway through in the same van to meet with members of the Japanese press at his hotel.

At about 10:30pm, according to the DPP's account, which differs slightly from Yang's, Abe returned to the dinner venue in a taxi accompanied by a bodyguard and another member of the Japanese Diet.

After the dinner concluded, Abe left the venue, a seafood restaurant near Yijiang Street, accompanied by a senior DPP official and a bodyguard in DPP Secretary General Wu Nai-jen's (吳乃仁) private sedan.

These events have since been independently confirmed to the Taipei Times by other witnesses at the venue.

Wu yesterday suggested that it was unlikely Japanese officials had told the MOFA-supplied driver he could retire for the night.

The member of Abe's entourage that told the DPP of the incident thought that it was "a bit strange" and said it was hard to understand how this could have happened, Wu said.

"We know of this because a member of his entourage mentioned it. Abe didn't talk about it at all," he said. "We thought it was outrageous ... we had expected him to take the MOFA van back since that was the vehicle that took him to the hotel."

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This latest diplomatic bungling, could point to a serious lack of diplomatic protocol amid growing concerns that Japanese officials have been hampered by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government during their meetings with opposition party politicians.

Information given by the DPP yesterday suggested Taiwan's representative office in Tokyo told a visiting Japanese parliamentary delegation that it was "inconvenient" to help them schedule meetings with former DPP politicians.

The statement, which the DPP said was obtained from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Tokyo, says that it would be inconvenient to help plan visits with former Taiwanese representatives to Japan, Koh Se-kai (高盛凱) and Lo Fu-chen (羅福申), as well as World United Formosans for Independence chairman Ng Chiau-tong (吳昭堂).

The Japanese delegation, including a number of members of the Japanese Diet, had originally hoped to meet the trio during their three-day trip last month, which was separate from Abe's, DPP officials said.

"This is not the only time that meetings with [DPP] politicians have been blocked" by foreign affairs officials, DPP Legislator Chiu Yi-ying (邱毅) said. "This has happened many times before."

MOFA denied the allegation in a press release yesterday, saying it had arranged for the Japanese guests to meet with Wu.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/11/04](#)