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Supporters welcome Lee's return

'SUCCESSFUL' TRIP: The former president said that Taiwan-Japan relations are strong and his trip was successful in bringing the two nations even closer

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STAFF REPORTER

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Taiwan's relations with Japan are quietly growing stronger, former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) said yesterday.

"My trip to Japan is an indication that Taiwan-Japan relations are at their best," Lee told a huge crowd of supporters at CKS Airport yesterday after concluding a week-long visit to Japan.

Lee's trip drew strong protests from China, but was hailed in Taiwan as a vital step in normalizing the nation's relations with Japan.

The former president gave a brief speech at a grave site in Kyoto where a renowned novelist and personal friend of Lee was buried.

"Today I am going to finish this short seven-day trip. I want to thank once again the kind care given by the Japanese government and people and overseas Taiwanese in Japan," Lee said.

"Although my stay is brief, I have learned a lot about the Japanese culture and life. To me, it is a rich harvest. Japan is a progressive country which is capable of retaining its tradition," he added.

"My trip can be considered a success if Taiwan and Japan can establish stronger relations. Again, I want to pay tribute to the Japanese people and hope that Japan will further prosper and grow in Asia. Thank you all," Lee told reporters.

Lee and his family visited the Kyoto Kiyomizudera, the most ancient temple in the city, before departing for Osaka from where he flew back to Taiwan.

Before boarding, a reporter asked Lee whether he would come back to visit Japan. Lee said, "I don't know."

Due to the sensitivity of the trip, the Japanese government required Lee not to be involved in any political activities or meet politicians during his stay. Though constantly followed by the media, Lee seldom talked to reporters apart from nodding to them and saying "thanks."

Meanwhile, despite cold weather, Lee's supporters gathered at CKS International Airport to welcome him back hours before he arrived yesterday.

Organized by the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) and other pro-independence organizations such as the Alliance to Campaigning for Rectifying the Name of Taiwan and the Taiwan North Society, Lee's supporters chanted, "Uncle A-hui" -- Lee's nickname -- on their way to the airport.

The supporters, some of them traveling all the way from Kaohsiung to join the welcome rally, all wore jackets printed with a map of Taiwan and the words "Rectify the Name of Taiwan" and "Make Our Constitution."

"Japan defied China's oppression and issued former president Lee a visa. Lee's trip to Japan displays to the international



Former President Lee Teng-hui yesterday waves to the public upon his arrival at CKS International Airport in Taoyuan, after he arrived back from his seven-day trip to Japan. Hundreds of Lee supporters went to the airport to welcome him back despite the cold weather.

PHOTO: SEAN CHAO, TAIPEI TIMES

community the sovereignty of Taiwan," said TSU Legislator Chen Chien-ming (陳建銘).

Lee's flight arrived at CKS International Airport at 7:20pm. Minister of Foreign Affairs Mark Chen (陳唐山) and Lo Fu-chen (羅福全), president of the Association of East Asian Relations, were among the officials who welcomed the former president back.

Shortly after, Lee gave a speech to his supporters in an airport parking lot. According to organizers, more than 1,500 people attended the airport rally. Beforehand, a small group of male participants were sent to scout the parking lot, as rumors circulated that a group of pro-unification activists intended to disrupt Lee's speech.

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