

Japanese Expert Takes a Stab at Moscow Traffic

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August 29, 2010

The  Moscow Times

The irony could not have been stronger.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama faced the prospect of being stuck in Moscow rush-hour traffic — perhaps for hours — after his plane landed late at Domodedovo Airport.

So Mayor Yuri Luzhkov did what he could to help. He dispatched a police escort to spirit Hatoyama's limousine through bumper-to-bumper traffic the entire 45 kilometers from the airport south of Moscow to the city government's headquarters on centrally located Novy Arbat.

The appointment? The presentation of a new book by Hatoyama's son on how to solve Moscow's traffic jams.

The book, "Moscow: Traffic Problems of a Megalopolis," does not suggest a police escort as a

solution to the city's cataclysmic traffic problems. Indeed, police escorts and other official cars with flashing blue lights are the bane of city drivers and are blamed for contributing to the road mess.

But neither father nor son mentioned this at the presentation, which started 90 minutes late on Thursday night because of Hatoyama's delayed arrival.

Hatoyama apologized for his tardiness and thanked Luzhkov for the police escort.

Perhaps Hatoyama won't have to depend on a police escort next time he visits if City Hall and Moscow drivers heed the advice of the book, which was presented by Luzhkov and suggests introducing Japanese-style politeness among the city's notoriously lawless drivers.

"Moscow's traffic jams can be solved," said his son, Kiichiro Hatoyama, a visiting lecturer at Moscow State University's Graduate School of Business Administration.

As a vital ingredient, he advocated "smart driving," which entails changing the behavior of all who are involved in traffic and draws on Japan's experience.

Drivers must exhibit "competent, responsible and friendly behavior," says the book, co-authored by Hatoyama and Vasily Kichedzhi, head of City Hall's Transportation Committee.

"Drivers and pedestrians need to be polite to one another. This must become a new style," Kichedzhi told reporters after [the presentation](#).

"Obeying traffic rules must become fashionable," he said.

Hatoyama pointed to some trademark bad habits of the city's drivers, including driving into intersections when the traffic ahead is at a standstill, thus causing extra congestion for drivers coming from crossroads who subsequently "wedge" their cars into the flow.

He also noted that Muscovites like to use straight lanes for making U-turns, and they habitually park their cars in or too close to intersections.

Solving the problem, he said, requires drivers to work together with pedestrians, police and the local government.

In the book, the authors define the desired behavior as filled with respect and humility. "Don't compete, don't swagger and don't ignore one another, but cooperate, give way and respect one another," they write.

The authors also advocate further improvements in roads and signposts and the introduction of electronic guidance systems, but they say such modifications are pointless without a change in behavior.

"Without giving prominence to the 'human factor' ... any development of the traffic systems will face a dead end," they say.

Yet the authors conceded that any changes are likely to be slow.

"Russia is a nation of first-generation drivers. We need time until responsible behavior and

first and foremost respect become the norm," they write.

Luzhkov, who [briefly nodded off](#) during the presentation, said he had read the book and found it to contain more than scientific value. "Their analysis is of practical use for the conditions in our city," he said.

He did not say how the book's recommendations might be implemented. City Hall plans to also print English and Japanese versions of the book.

The life of the capital depends heavily on Luzhkov, and the book's recommendations are unlikely to be put into action without his approval. Indeed, just as Luzhkov helped get the elder Hatoyama to the presentation, he played a major role in helping the younger Hatoyama research his book.

A month after starting work on the book in 2008, Kiichiro Hatoyama told Moscow State University rector Viktor Sadovnichy that he needed to get an aerial view of Moscow, Sadovnichy said.

"Because it is forbidden to fly over the city, I approached Yury Mikhailovich [Luzhkov], who gave us a helicopter," the rector said. "And the helicopter landed on a very cold day outside the main entrance to the university, and we flew for a long time over Moscow."

The Hatoyama family has good ties with Russia's leaders. Yukio Hatoyama, who served as prime minister from September 2009 to June 2010, is the grandson of former Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama, who in 1956 signed the Japanese-Soviet Joint Declaration that formally restored diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Moscow.

Sadovnichy said if Kiichiro Hatoyama's research helped solve the traffic jams, he would be honored with a monument.

But Hatoyama himself offered a more humble estimate of his work, which is published by DPK Press and has a print run of 50,000 copies. "This book won't solve the problem," he said.

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