

Tokyo Governor, Yoichi Masuzoe, Resigns Over Spending Scandal

①TOKYO — The governor of Tokyo resigned on Wednesday, after he admitted using funds intended for political campaigns to pay for personal travel and entertainment, setting off a public furor.

The governor, Yoichi Masuzoe, is the second leader of the Japanese capital's metropolitan government to leave office over a financial scandal in two and a half years, an especially embarrassing development because the city will host the Summer Olympic Games in 2020 and counts on the governor to act as an organizer and global ambassador.

②Anger at Mr. Masuzoe's spending had been building for months, but the governor told the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly that he had hoped to stay on long enough to attend this year's Games in Rio de Janeiro, where Tokyo will receive a measure of attention as the event's next host.

"I thought it would be disruptive to have an election with the Rio Olympics right around the corner," he said in the assembly after submitting his resignation. "My main concern was for the Games."

③Plummeting approval ratings and defections by political allies ultimately persuaded him, however.

The amounts that Mr. Masuzoe has been accused of spending improperly on himself and his family are hardly vast by the standards of modern politics-and-money scandals. There are reimbursements of a few hundred dollars here for restaurant meals, and a few thousand dollars there for hotel stays.

④In a report issued this month, lawyers hired by the governor to review his spending found 4.4 million yen, or about \$41,000, in expenses over several years that they called "inappropriate, but not illegal." Mr. Masuzoe apologized and said that there had been "some mixing of public and personal" in his spending, but that he had not knowingly broken any rules. He has not been charged with wrongdoing.

⑤Still, the relatively minor scale of his reported excesses did not help him.

If anything, the public's antagonism appears to have deepened. The word that has perhaps been most frequently used to describe the episode is seko, meaning cheap or petty. That Mr. Masuzoe might nickel-and-dime taxpayers and contributors for spa trips seems to have struck a rawer nerve than if he had engaged in wholesale theft.

⑥"I'm angry. This is seko — too seko," Shigeru Kamibayashi, a member of the assembly from the right-leaning Liberal Democratic Party, where Mr. Masuzoe has spent most of his political career and which supported his bid for governor, said after the lawyers issued their report. The word has been ubiquitous in newspaper and social media references to the scandal.

Among the spending that the lawyers labeled inappropriate were purchases of manga comic books, some worth just a few dollars, and a silk calligrapher's robe from a Shanghai tourist gift shop. Mr. Masuzoe charged them to his campaign organization, which by law is supposed to finance only political activities, though experts say the definition is vague enough that politicians routinely stretch it to cover private expenses.

⑦Mr. Masuzoe's travel costs in office have also come under criticism. He has taken large groups of aides on trips to London, New York and Paris, flying first class and staying in upscale hotels. Japanese news outlets have reported that he has used government limousines to travel back and forth to a home he owns in a spa town southwest of Tokyo 48 times since April last year.

"Is the leader of a major global city supposed to stay in a second-rate business hotel?" he said on one occasion, defending his global travels as necessary to burnish Tokyo's brand ahead of the Olympics. Later, after an outpouring of complaints, he began expressing more contrition, but the damage had already been done.

⑧Mr. Masuzoe, 67, entered politics after a career as a political scientist and television commentator and served as health minister in the mid-2000s. He won the governorship in 2014 after his predecessor, Naoki Inose, resigned over a campaign-funding scandal.

Mr. Inose quit in December 2013 after he acknowledged receiving a loan of more than half a million dollars from a hospital operator during an election. He denied that the money was for political purposes, but critics called it an undisclosed campaign contribution.

⑨Liberal Democratic members of the Tokyo assembly were among lawmakers from seven parties who were preparing to pass a no-confidence motion against Mr. Masuzoe on Wednesday, a threat that appears to have cemented his decision to resign. A series of recent newspaper opinion polls showed that three out of four voters wanted him to quit.

His last day in office will be Tuesday, and an election to replace him is expected to take place on July 31 or Aug. 7. It will add to a busy political calendar in Japan, with elections for the upper house of the national Parliament set for July 10.

⑩Like Mr. Inose, Mr. Masuzoe is a supporter of the Olympics, but he made reining in its growing cost a signature issue. His refusal to shoulder the expense of a main stadium that was increasingly over budget was a major reason that its design, by the Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid, who died in March, was scrapped in favor of a cheaper plan last year.

His repeated promises not to waste taxpayer money ultimately bounced back at him.

"I've eliminated waste," he said in response to initial criticism of his travel spending in March. "But when you have to spend, you have to spend." 【 JUNE 15, 2016/ the New York times】

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★Ice breaker for active discussion

1. Do you think it was the right choice for Mr. Masuzoe to resign? Please explain why.
2. Why do you think he acted so "seko"?
3. Can you name other Japanese vocabularies that are known worldwide?
4. He tried to defend his lavish spending as necessary for Tokyo's image and reputation. What is your opinion about it?
5. Ms. Yuriko Koike has been elected as the new governor. What will be the challenges that she has to tackle with?
6. Make sentences using the following words: disruptive, defection, antagonism, wholesale, burnish and contrition.