

Black car seen 2 days in row before Kobe killing

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KOBE—A black car parked at the foot of a hill where the body of 11-year-old Jun Hase was discovered last week was spotted in the area on May 22 and 23, less than two days before the boy went missing. The Yomiuri Shimbun learned Wednesday.

It was also learned that a few days after Hase's severed head was discovered in Suma Ward, Kobe, an unidentified man had telephoned an automobile demolition company in the ward to ask how much it would cost to demolish a Nissan Bluebird, according to a police source.

Police believe the car spotted near the hillside may also have been a Nissan Bluebird.

The new information follows earlier sightings of a similar car parked in front of Tomogaoka Middle School at about 5:10 a.m. on May 27, shortly before the time police believe Hase's head was left in front of the school's main gate.

Furthermore, a similar black car was seen near the apartment block where Hase lived on the afternoon of May 24, which is believed to be about the same time the boy went missing, the source said.

Hyogo prefectural police are investigating the possibility that witnesses spotted the same car.

A homemaker living in the neighborhood reported seeing a Bluebird sedan model at about 9 p.m. on May 22 while she was out walking her dog. The woman told police that the car, which had Kobe license plates, was parked next to a sidewalk about 200 meters east of Kita Suma High School, the source said.

The car was about 250 meters northeast of the cable television relay station where Hase's body was discovered, and close to a path leading to the station, which is located on a hill known locally as Tatsunoyama.

The woman said that although the car was not there the following morning and afternoon, she spotted it again

in the evening parked in about the same location as the previous evening.

The woman said she noticed the car because it was unusual to see vehicles illegally parked in the area, the source said. She did not see anyone inside the car, the source added.

The automobile demolition company reported receiving the anonymous telephone call on the afternoon of May 29 or May 30. The caller, believed to be male, asked a female employee of the company how much it would cost to scrap a Bluebird automobile.

The employee told the caller it would cost ¥10,000 if the car was brought to the demolition yard. When the employee offered to have the car brought to the yard, the caller refused and hung up, the source said.

The employee said she remembered the conversation because it was rare for a customer to mention the model of a car before making arrangements for its demolition. She added that the caller's voice sounded subdued, the source added.

Police are considering the possibility that the car seen near the high school might have been used by the killer to make a reconnaissance trip to the cable station prior to the murder.

Police also suspect the killer called the demolition company because he intended to have the car destroyed after committing the murder.

Scratches found on head

Slight abrasions were found on the nose and forehead of the severed head of Jun Hase, police reported Wednesday. Police believe the scratches were inflicted accidentally after Hase's death.

Police believe the abrasions might have been caused when the head rubbed against a rough surface such as tiles on a bathroom floor. As no trace of grass or soil was found on Hase's body, police suspect the killer kept the boy's body at his house, where he is also believed to have cut off the victim's head.