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# Race begins for Japan's top spot

*Kan plans to run; a big job will be to ease voter ire*

By YUKA HAYASHI

TOKYO—After Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama's sudden resignation on Wednesday, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan launched the process of selecting its new leader, racing to prepare for an uphill battle in next month's national elections.

Finance minister Naoto Kan was the first to announce his intention to run for the top job. His victory, which is widely expected, would make him the second leader since the DPJ swept to power in August's historic elections—and Japan's fifth prime minister in less than four years.

Mr. Kan, a 63-year-old party veteran with more than three decades in parliament, is seen by many as the safest bet to steer the DPJ out of its rut.

The new leader's first task will be to calm voter anger over a broken campaign promise to reduce the U.S. military presence in Okinawa, as well as ire over political-funding scandals that claimed the jobs of Mr. Hatoyama and Ichiro Ozawa, a powerful secretary-general who also announced his resignation Wednesday.

## In the wings | Potential Hatoyama successors



**Naoto Kan, 63**  
 Finance Minister  
 Kan won fame in the 1990s as health minister for exposing the bureaucracy's responsibility for providing hemophiliacs with HIV-tainted blood.



**Seiji Maehara, 48**  
 Transport Minister  
 Maehara has in the past defied Hatoyama and other party leaders for their shifting stances and fund-raising difficulties.



**Katsuya Okada, 56**  
 Foreign Minister  
 Okada has trade and foreign-policy credentials as well as a clean and serious image.



Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama leaves his official residence after announcing his resignation on Wednesday.

"During the short time under Prime Minister Hatoyama, we were unable to fulfill the expectations presented to us from the voters last fall," Mr.

Kan told reporters. "I would like to take over the job and make sure it gets done." Other candidates are likely to emerge. Increasingly frus-

trated with top party leaders' old-fashioned governing style, some DPJ members are likely to push for candidates from younger generations. Among

potential candidates are Seiji Maehara, a 48-year-old transport minister known for his practical economic-policy

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## Kan plans to run for leader

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 views, and Katsuya Okada, a 56-year-old foreign minister.

DPJ lawmakers will vote in a party election Friday and announce a leader, who will assume the premiership. On Monday, the winner will appoint a new cabinet and make a policy speech. A huge challenge for Japan's new prime minister: regaining the trust of voters. Amid sinking popular support and following the loss of a coalition partner over Okinawa, Mr. Hatoyama gave up his job only eight months after gaining a mandate to bring about a sea change in Japan's stagnant political scene and its lackluster economy.

The new leader also will need a clear vision for rebuilding Japan's economy and convincing global investors of the country's political leadership.

"We have had four prime ministers stepping down one after another with less than a year in the job," said Hideo Kumano, an economist for Dai-ichi Life Research Institute. "The government can talk great policies but if they don't even last for a year, Japan's weakened economy will never get a chance for getting rebuilt."

Some question whether Mr. Kan is the right man to usher in such changes and whether he can halt the

recent vicious cycle in which the country's prime minister has changed nearly every year. The Liberal Democratic Party, a long-serving conservative organization ousted by the DPJ, named three prime ministers in its final three years in power in an attempt to appeal to voters.

Mr. Kan's background as a civil-rights activist in the 1970s may be unique among Japan's political leaders. He sprang to popularity in the mid-1990s when, as health minister, he exposed the bureaucracy's responsibility for infecting thousands of hemophiliacs with HIV-tainted blood.

At one point, Mr. Kan stepped down from the helm of the DPJ after he admitted failing to make contributions to a national pension plan. In atonement, he shaved his head, donned traditional Buddhist garb, and went on a pilgrimage to 88 rural temples.

But Mr. Kan is also viewed as belonging to the older generation of Japanese politicians who rely on behind-the-scenes negotiations to drive policy and personnel decisions. Mr. Kan, after all, has led the DPJ since its founding in 2003 as part of the "troika" that included Messrs. Hatoyama and Ozawa. Mr. Hatoyama said Wednesday they were stepping down to pave the way

for a "new DPJ."

"Hatoyama and Kan could both be just transitional characters," said Norihiko Narita, a political scientist and president of Surugadai University. "In the post-Kan-and-Hatoyama era, we will see a completely different culture in the DPJ and new ways of conducting politics."

It isn't clear that anyone in the new generation is ready for the job. Mr. Okada, despite his popularity, probably won't qualify as a serious candidate this time because as foreign minister he signed a bilateral accord to keep a big Marine base in Okinawa. Mr. Maehara, known for his youthful eloquence and quick action, has been criticized for his flip-flops on policy issues such as restructuring Japan Airlines.

In an informal online survey conducted by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei) daily Wednesday, 1,442 respondents named Mr. Maehara as their favorite candidate for next prime minister. Mr. Kan followed with 1,096 votes and Mr. Okada with 878. Mr. Maehara said nothing has been decided on his possible candidacy and Mr. Okada hasn't made any remarks on the subject.

Under Mr. Kan, the DPJ's policies wouldn't likely change significantly as he is already involved in government policy making as finance minister and deputy prime minister.

Once classified as a fiscal dove, he has grown increasingly conservative since becoming finance minister in January.

He often cites the Greek debt problem as a "wake-up" call to him about Japan's need to begin reducing its national debt—now nearing double the country's gross domestic product—as early as possible.

Mr. Kan probably differs from Mr. Hatoyama in his receptiveness toward an increase in the consumption tax.

After becoming finance minister, he soon mentioned the need to begin studying a consumption-tax increase, which by then was a taboo because of Mr. Hatoyama's election pledge not to raise the tax for four years.

If Mr. Kan becomes prime minister, a consumption-tax increase could come earlier.

—Takeshi Takeuchi  
 contributed to this article.

### Revolving door

Two decades of Japanese prime ministers

Name	Period in Office	Days in Office
Toshiki Kaifu	Aug. 10, 1989 - Nov. 5, 1991	818
Kiichi Miyazawa	Nov. 5, 1991 - Aug. 9, 1993	644
Morihiro Hosokawa	Aug. 9, 1993 - April 28, 1994	263
Tsutomu Hata	April 28, 1994 - June 30, 1994	64
Tomichi Murayama	June 30, 1994 - Jan. 11, 1996	561
Ryutaro Hashimoto	Jan. 11, 1996 - July 30, 1998	932
Keizo Obuchi	July 30, 1998 - April 5, 2000	616
Yoshiro Mori	April 5, 2000 - April 26, 2001	387
Junichiro Koizumi	April 26, 2001 - Sept. 26, 2006	1,980
Shinzo Abe	Sept. 26, 2006 - Sept. 26, 2007	366
Yasuo Fukuda	Sept. 26, 2007 - Sept. 24, 2008	365
Taro Aso	Sept. 24, 2008 - Sept. 16, 2009	358
Yukio Hatoyama	Sept. 16, 2009 - June 4, 2010*	262

\* Expected

Source: Prime minister's office

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*U.S. plan to shift  
Okinawa base  
stays contentious*

By YUKA HAYASHI

TOKYO—The contentious issue of relocating U.S. troops in Okinawa will continue to be a challenge for Washington and Japan's new prime minister as persistent local opposition will make it extremely difficult to implement a key bilateral accord to build a new military facility.

After Mr. Hatoyama announced his resignation, citing his failure to garner domestic support for the new accord, officials in Okinawa repeated their opposition against the relocation of a major U.S. Marine base to a new offshore facility in another part of the island. The plan is key part of the pact signed last week, which affirmed strong security ties between the two nations at a time of escalating tension in East Asia. It turned out to be highly unpopular with the Japanese and prompted a party to leave the ruling coalition.

Yoshiyasu Iha, mayor of Gifu  
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*Okinawa issue hovers over U.S., Japan*

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nowan City, where the unpopular Futenma helicopter base is currently located, said Mr. Hatoyama's resignation gave Okinawa an "opportunity for a new start" in its fight against U.S. bases. Hirokazu Nakaima, governor of Okinawa, repeated his assessment that getting Okinawa to agree to the plan was "extremely difficult." Mr. Nakaima previously supported the relocation plan but he has grown critical in recent months.

Mr. Iha, whose eloquent opposition to the relocation plan made him a national figure, is seen as a challenger to Mr. Nakaima in a November gubernatorial election. The Okinawa governor has the authority to approve or reject building a new military facility.

This has also been a challenging experience for U.S. alliance managers, who were "unprepared for the unpredictability of the day-to-day relationship with Japan's new government," said Sheila Smith, a Japan expert at the Council on For-

eign Relations in Washington. While it is still too early to tell the new leader's stance on Okinawa, she said, the U.S. government will "need also to assess this past eight months and consider the lessons learned for future alliance cooperation."

On Wednesday, White House spokesman Bill Burton said the Obama administration was still watching the political process play out in Tokyo, but added the security alliance wasn't going to fundamentally change because of the emergence of a new government.

Meanwhile, Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, said the U.S. will continue to urge Tokyo to stick with the new basing plan. "The realignment road map is the best plan for reducing the burden on Okinawa while maintaining our treaty obligations and our ability to defend Japan and maintain security in the region," he said.

Local opposition to the bases has flared up since Mr. Hatoyama's center-left government swept to power in September with promises to re-

duce the presence of troops on the island, the host to three-quarters of U.S. bases in Japan.

According to a poll by the Yomiuri Shimbun published this week, 58% of respondents disapproved of the bilateral accord and 69% said it won't reduce the burden on Okinawa, the stated goal of Mr. Hatoyama's Democratic Party of Japan. Such a response came even though the agreement calls for moving thousands of troops out of Okinawa to Guam and returning Futenma and other facilities in central Okinawa to local residents.

Still, the U.S. demanded the new government stick to a relocation plan agreed to by the previous administrations on both sides, afraid that more negotiations would only lead to delays in implementation.

Mr. Hatoyama eventually gave in to Washington's demand and agreed to the original relocation plan with only minor modifications, a decision that proved fatal for his career.

—Peter Spiegel in Washington  
*contributed to this article.*