

Headline
Date
MediaTitle
Section
Journalist
Frequency
Circ / Read

Finance minister is likely to be Japans next leader
04 Jun 2010
International Herald Tribune
World News
N/A
Daily
91,039 / 273,117

Language
Page No
Article Size
Color
ADValue
PRValue
English
4
160 cm²
Black/white
2,985
8,954



Finance minister is likely to be Japan's next leader

TOKYO

BY MARTIN FACKLER

Finance Minister Naoto Kan emerged on Thursday as the leading candidate to become Japan's next leader, one day after the unpopular prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama, abruptly announced his resignation.

Apparently caught off guard by Mr. Hatoyama's sudden decision to resign over broken campaign promises, the Democrats have moved quickly to find a replacement — and to try to win back public trust. They face an uphill battle in regaining the momentum they had in August after winning a landslide election victory that ended a half-century of virtual one-party rule in Japan.

Several leading members of the governing Democratic Party threw their support behind Mr. Kan, a sharp-tongued political veteran who earned a name for himself by battling Japan's powerful bureaucrats. Japanese news media reports characterized him as the front-runner, with an internal party vote scheduled for Friday morning to choose a successor for Mr. Hatoyama.

The only other candidate to emerge by Thursday evening was Shinji Tarutoko, 50, a legislator who leads the environmental policy committee in the lower house of Parliament. While a relative unknown, Mr. Tarutoko enjoys the support of the party's shadowy power broker, Ichiro Ozawa.

Indeed, there are signs that the party could end up divided between those opposing and supporting the influence of

Mr. Ozawa, who also resigned from his post as party secretary general on Wednesday following damaging political financing scandals.

Mr. Kan has been a leading critic of Mr. Ozawa. At a news conference Thursday night, he said he would aim for politics free of financial scandals. He also vowed to return the Democrats to their original goal of revamping Japan's stagnant postwar order.

Other possible contenders, like Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and Transport Minister Seiji Maehara, have declared their support for Mr. Kan.

They and other party members are apparently betting that Mr. Kan's background as a former civic activist who rose through the opposition will make him a more forceful leader than the indecisive and professorial Mr. Hatoyama, who squandered his mandate from the historic election last summer.

Known for his quick temper, Mr. Kan, 63, gained national attention in the mid-1990s when as health minister he exposed the use of H.I.V.-tainted blood. In the Hatoyama administration, he also served as deputy prime minister and was a point man in the party's push to rein in secretive central ministries that have run Japan since World War II.

Whoever is chosen in the party vote Friday will later in the day face a vote in Parliament for prime minister. The Democrats' commanding majority in that chamber means that their candidate is virtually assured of winning.

The newly selected prime minister must then go through the formality of being appointed by Emperor Akhito.