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## Most Japanese want Kan to stay as Japan PM: Polls

**TOKYO:** More than six in ten Japanese want Prime Minister Naoto Kan to win his party leadership battle with powerbroker Ichiro Ozawa, polls showed yesterday.

In a survey conducted at the weekend by the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper, 66 per cent of voters said Kan would be a better choice than Ozawa, with just 18 per cent favouring Ozawa.

In a poll by the Asahi Shimbun daily, 65 per cent supported Kan, against 17 per cent for Ozawa.

The election for president of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) on September 14 is an internal vote but voters' opinions are likely to be taken into account by lawmakers, local assembly members and others with voting rights.

Kan and Ozawa are level-pegging in the race for party president, according to another Yomiuri survey conducted Friday with DPJ lawmakers and others eligible to vote.

The leadership election threatens to divide the ruling party just a year after it took power and comes amid a slowing recovery of the country's fragile export-led economy, threatened by a strong yen.

The rivals represent the two different wings of the party which a year ago ousted the conservatives after more than half a century of almost unbroken rule.

Ozawa, 68, is a veteran powerbroker who years ago defected from the conservative Liberal Democratic Party.

He has earned nicknames such as 'Shadow Shogun'

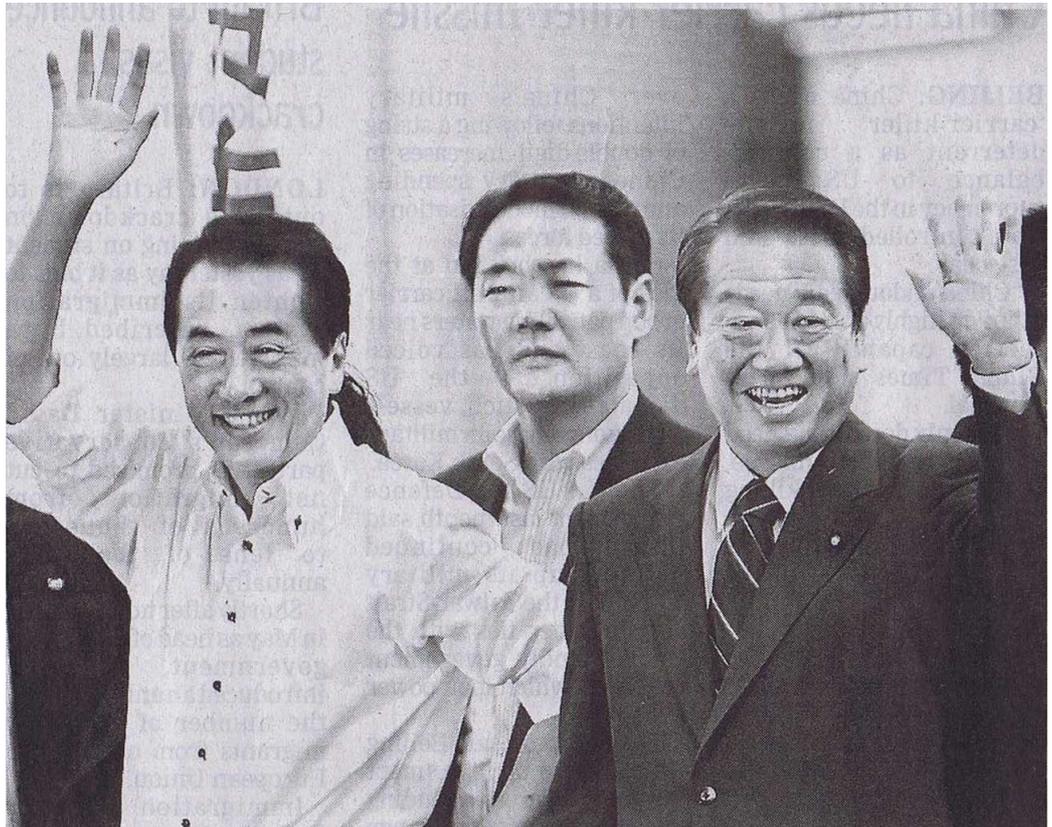
and the 'Destroyer' for his record of creating and splitting parties.

Kan, 63, started his political life as a left-wing grassroots activist and shot to fame when, during a brief stint as health minister, he uncovered official culpability in an HIV-tainted blood scandal.

Ozawa on Wednesday pledged a currency intervention to tame the yen if he defeats Kan to become premier.

On foreign policy, Ozawa signalled he may reopen a controversy over an unpopular US airbase on the southern island of Okinawa that has strained ties with Washington and angered local residents.

If Ozawa won, he would become Japan's sixth premier in four years. — AFP



**ELECTION CAMPAIGN:** Japanese Prime Minister and ruling DPJ leader Naoto Kan (left) and his rival Ichiro Ozawa wave to their supporters during their joint election campaign for the DPJ presidency in Osaka. — AFP photo