

Experts agree that PM has little reason to fret

Kishida likely to keep top job despite ratings

◎Analysis

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As Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's approval ratings continued to fall over the last few weeks, speculation of a change in leadership has intensified.

However, while the situation around the administration warrants no optimism, experts agree Kishida can rest assured he won't lose the top job anytime soon.

Virtually every survey conducted recently has shown support for the Cabinet dropping to record lows. The latest poll, conducted over the weekend by TV Tokyo and the daily Nikkei Shimbun, showed Kishida's approval ratings fall to 30% — a 3 percentage point drop from last month and a first for this poll — while the disapproval rate jumped to 62%.

Respondents cited the economy and social security as their top concerns and voiced their mounting disappointment with the government's agenda. The government's economic package, centered on a tax cut, hasn't received the support Kishida had hoped for and has generated some discomfort within the prime minister's Liberal Democratic Party.

In this context, the public's attention has turned to a potential successor. The Nikkei poll showed that the public's choices for the next LDP president — who would also likely become the next prime minister — remain largely unchanged, with former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba (16%), former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi (15%) and digital minister Taro Kono (13%) topping the list.

Minister for economic security Sanae Takaichi (9%) and former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (5%) followed, while only 4% of those surveyed said they hoped Kishida remained in office.

Takaichi, a onetime rival of Kishida in the

2021 LDP leadership election, recently set up a study group of like-minded politicians centered on "national power." Although she has repeatedly denied any hidden motive, the move was widely interpreted as an attempt to raise her profile and build a support base within the party.

Meanwhile, amid an ongoing debate over legislation to introduce ride-hailing services, Suga has steadily increased his media exposure, voicing veiled criticism of the government's approach to the economy.

Along with Suga, both Koizumi and Ishiba have slowly come to the fore without hiding their ambitions for a more prominent role in the future. Koizumi served as environment minister under Suga and the two both hail from Kanagawa Prefecture.

Looking forward, the public's reception of Kishida's performance in the next few weeks of debate in parliament will offer some crucial hints on the direction of his administration as well as his political fortunes, according to veteran political journalist Hiroshi Izumi.

"At the moment, it's very hard to say whether polls will go down further or will stop falling," said Izumi. "Much will depend on whether the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan will present a no-confidence motion toward the end of the current session of parliament."

The ongoing session of parliament is slated to end on Dec. 13. By launching a no-confidence motion, the CDP would be taking a firm stand against the government and potentially improve its standing in the eyes of voters.

However, as other opposition parties, including Nippon Ishin no Kai and the Democratic Party for the People, voted in favor of the government's budget in the Lower House last Friday, chances that a CDP-backed no-confidence motion will pass in the last days of the assembly remain extremely low.

In case of a no-confidence motion, build-



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Sanae Takaichi (center) and Taro Kono attend a Lower House session in Tokyo last week. KYODO

ing on strong parliamentary support, the government will finalize the outline of the budget for fiscal 2024 and proceed with ¥100,000 handouts to lower-income households, right around Christmas.

That will slowly change the general mood with regard to the administration, help Kishida improve his image and set a new course for the administration ahead of the new year, Izumi explains.

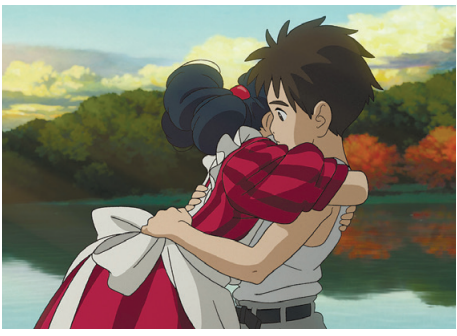
The political calendar has largely played in Kishida's favor so far. With no general election slated until summer 2025, the prime minister has the authority to call a snap election at any given time.

While record-low approval ratings would normally have triggered full-fledged gambits to replace him, the current circumstances suggest there's no need for Kishida to fret. "All in all, at the moment there is no room for a full-scale maneuver to oust Kishida," Izumi said.

The lack of consensus over a potential successor remains another key factor of strength for Kishida. Takaichi, who doesn't belong to any faction, might be able to muster support from more conservative lawmakers, but she



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Nihon University to disband football club

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Nihon University has decided to disband its American football club following a scandal over drug use within the team, the school confirmed Wednesday.

The university's internal sports management committee decided in a meeting the previous day to bring an end to the 83-year history of one of the nation's most prominent college football teams.

Nihon University said it is yet to make a formal announcement but plans to do so upon completing the necessary procedures and making the decision official. An extraordinary board meeting was set to discuss the decision on Wednesday afternoon, the Yomiuri Shimbun reported.

The scandal started in August, when it was reported that illegal stimulants had been found in one football player's dormitory room. The third-year student was arrested later that month for allegedly violating the special law on narcotics.

Two more players on the team have since been arrested, both on suspicion of purchasing marijuana — one in October and the second on Monday.

A third-party report on the scandal released in October found that there was a culture of rampant drug use within the team, highlighting that there have been multiple students who have taken drugs besides those arrested.

In September, the university suspended the team's activities within the school's premises, and in November the Kantoh Collegiate Football Association suspended the team from all official matches for this season.

The scandal was further complicated and exacerbated due to a delayed response by the school's management.

The same third-party report found that management had downplayed the team's drug use, pointing out that some staff members were aware of the issue as early as October last year through reports from both players and parents, but failed to take action.

Nihon University Vice President Yasuhiro Sawada in particular was criticized for a lack of transparency, given that it took him 12 days to report to the police that he had

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Invasion of Ukraine had put participation in doubt | **NATIONAL, PAGE 2**

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Japan and coal likely to be in focus at COP28

◎Focus

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During the COP28 climate talks in Dubai that begin Thursday, Japan is likely to agree to triple renewable energy use and pledge to reduce its reliance on coal.

While those measures may garner widespread support, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida could face less enthusiasm among the delegates for Japan's plan to reduce coal plant emissions with more cutting-edge — but controversial — carbon capture technologies. These are part of a broader debate at the conference over the future use of coal and a key topic likely to dominate discussions during the two-week talks that end Dec. 12.

The United Nations and many countries, including Japan, back the development of coal-fired power plants equipped with Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage (CCUS) technology as a way to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement. On Tuesday, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said



that Japan would use COP28 as a venue to explain how new technologies can help with the global push to phase out coal.

"Japan's policy is to reduce the ratio of coal-fired thermal power generation while introducing renewable energy to the maximum extent possible, and to steadily phase out inefficient coal-fired power generation by 2030. To meet the 2050 net zero carbon emissions goal, we will promote efforts to

The two-weeklong COP28 climate talks are scheduled to conclude on Dec. 12. BLOOMBERG

replace coal-fired power generation with zero-carbon alternatives such as hydrogen, ammonia, CCUS and other resources," he said.

Japan will have a pavilion at COP28, where companies involved in CCUS technology, such as Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, will be present to explain how it works.

Kishida joins Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, French president Emmanuel Macron and nearly 170 world leaders, including King Charles, expected to attend the COP28 conference.

However, both U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping — leaders of the world's top emitters of carbon dioxide — will skip the event. Biden's climate envoy John Kerry will represent the U.S., while Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang will head China's delegation.

The main goal of COP28 will be to conclude what the U.N. calls a "global stocktake," an assessment of the current state of global warming and the progress made so far toward meeting the goals of the Paris

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