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Ex-FM Hayashi eyed as new top spokesperson

Replacements in focus as LDP officials face ax

KANAKO TAKAHARA
STAFF WRITER

As the fallout from the Liberal Democratic Party's political funds scandal continues to spread, all discussion in Japan's political world is centered on who Fumio Kishida will turn to after the expected exits of four key ministers, including his right-hand man.

The Cabinet ministers and party executives that are expected to be replaced, including Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno, are members of an LDP faction that was led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe before his assassination. They allegedly received tens of millions of yen in kickbacks from fundraising party ticket sales that were not reported as political funds.

In a news conference Wednesday evening, Kishida said he would make replacements the following day but declined to comment on the details.

"I will fight at the forefront to change the party culture anew. That is my mission," Kishida said. But he did not respond to questions on what he would do if more ministers are implicated in the scandal.

LDP policy chief Koichi Hagiuda, LDP Upper House Secretary-General Hiroshige Seko and LDP parliamentary affairs chief Tsuyoshi Takagi are expected to tender their resignations on Thursday before Kishida replaces them.

It is anticipated that Kishida will also replace Matsuno, trade minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, internal affairs minister Junji Suzuki and farm minister Ichiro Miyashita, along with five deputy ministers. As for six parliamentary vice ministers who are lower-ranking members in the Abe faction, Kishida will apparently hear them out first before deciding what to do.

Kishida appears to be having difficulty finding a replacement for Matsuno, with there being few veteran lawmakers who are not Abe faction members. Names that have been floated include former Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi.

As the LDP's largest faction, with 99 lawmakers, the absence of the Abe caucus in government and on the LDP executive is expected to have a major impact on the nation's political power dynamics even as the consequences remain unclear.



Liberal Democratic Party policy chief Koichi Hagiuda (center) attends a party hosted by his faction, which was previously led by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in May in Tokyo. Jiji

Meanwhile, there are concerns that further investigation will implicate more ministers and party executives in the scandal, leading to a series of replacements.

The Abe faction is now said to have offered ¥500 million in kickbacks over the past five years — far more than the initial report of ¥100 million.

LDP lawmaker Yoshitaka Ikeda admitted Wednesday that he failed to report about ¥32 million in political funds between 2020 and 2022 and revised his political funds report accordingly, becoming the first lawmaker to do so.

In explaining the reason why the funds



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Nations strike deal at COP28 to transition from fossil fuels

DUBAI
REUTERS, AFP-JJII

Representatives from nearly 200 countries agreed at the COP28 climate summit on Wednesday to begin reducing global consumption of fossil fuels to avert the worst of climate change, a first of its kind deal signaling the eventual end of the oil age.

The deal struck in Dubai after two weeks of hard-fought negotiations was meant to send a powerful signal to investors and policymakers that the world is united in its desire to break with fossil fuels, something scientists say is the last best hope to stave off climate catastrophe.

COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber called the deal "historic" but added that its true success would be in its implementation.

"We are what we do, not what we say," he told the crowded plenary at the summit. "We must take the steps necessary to turn this agreement into tangible actions."

Several countries cheered the deal for accomplishing something elusive in decades of climate talks.

"It is the first time that the world unites around such a clear text on the need to transition away from fossil fuels," said Norway Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide. "It has been the elephant in the room. At last we address it head on."

More than 100 countries had lobbied hard for strong language in the COP28 agreement to "phase out" oil, gas and coal use, but came up against powerful opposition from the Saudi Arabia-led oil producer group OPEC, which argued that the world can slash emissions without shunning specific fuels.

That battle pushed the summit a full day into overtime on Wednesday.

OPEC members together control nearly 80% of the world's proven oil reserves along with about a third of global daily oil production, and their governments rely heavily on those revenues.

Small climate-vulnerable island states, meanwhile, were among the most vocal supporters of phasing out fossil fuels and had the backing of huge oil and gas producers such as the United States, Canada and Norway, along with the EU bloc and scores of other governments.

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U.N. urges Gaza cease-fire as Israel, U.S. show increasing divide

MICHELLE NICHOLS, BASSAM MASOUD AND NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
UNITED NATIONS/CAIRO/GAZA
REUTERS

Israel faces growing diplomatic isolation in its war against Hamas as the United Nations demands an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, with U.S. President Joe Biden telling the longtime ally its "indiscriminate" bombing of civilians is hurting international support.

After dire warnings from U.N. officials

about a deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the 193-member U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday passed a resolution calling for a cease-fire with three-quarters of member states voting in favor.

"The price of defeating Hamas cannot be the continuous suffering of all Palestinian civilians," the leaders of Canada, Australia and New Zealand said separately in a joint statement calling for a cease-fire.

The Palestinian Authority welcomed the resolution and urged countries to pressure Israel to comply. A Hamas official in exile,

Izzat El-Reshiq, in a statement on Telegram echoed that reaction, saying Israel should "stop its aggression, genocide, and ethnic cleansing against our people."

The U.S. and Israel, which argue a cease-fire only benefits Hamas, voted against the measure along with eight other countries.

Before the U.N. vote, Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan said: "A cease-fire means one thing and one thing only — ensuring the survival of Hamas, ensuring the survival of genocidal terrorists committed to the annihilation of Israel and Jews."

Before the resolution, Biden said Israel now has support from "most of the world" including the U.S. and European Union for its fight against the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

"But they're starting to lose that support by indiscriminate bombing that takes place," he told a campaign donor event in Washington.

In the most public sign of division between the leaders so far, Biden also said that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu needed to change his hard-line govern-

ment and that ultimately Israel "can't say no" to an independent Palestinian state — something that Israeli hard-liners oppose.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan will travel to Israel this week and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will visit the Middle East next week, Biden said.

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Doctor's suicide highlights hospital overwork

Focus

TOMOKO OTAKE
STAFF WRITER

The desperate cry of a 26-year-old doctor during a phone call to his mother from a hospital restroom was a clear sign to her that something was terribly wrong.

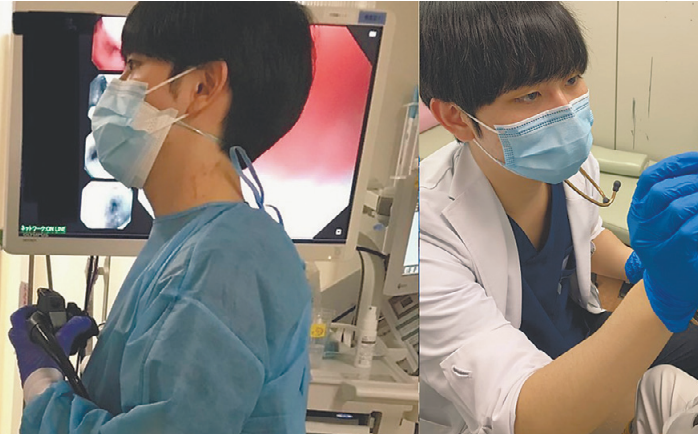
A few days later, her worst fears were confirmed. On May 17, 2022, her son took his own life.

Junko Takashima, 60, vividly recalls the months leading to the death of her son, Shingo.

As part of his training to become a specialist doctor, Shingo Takashima had been assigned to the gastroenterology department of Konan Medical Center, a general hospital in Kobe, since February that year. His health started to rapidly deteriorate after that, his mother says.

He started complaining about being inundated with miscellaneous work, noting immense pressure and the inability to take time off, according to his family.

In April, when Junko Takashima visited



her son's apartment, she found that waste was piling up in the kitchen.

So on that day in May, she called him to ask if he wanted to go out for a meal to take a break.

"He told me, 'That's impossible, 100%,' crying," she says.

After Shingo Takashima's death, a local labor standards inspection office found that he had worked over 100 days straight without a day off, and had put in 207 hours

Shingo Takashima, a 26-year-old doctor, killed himself three months into his specialist doctor training at a general hospital in Kobe.
COURTESY OF THE TAKASHIMA FAMILY

of overtime in the month leading up to the day he took his own life. The bureau judged that it was a case of *karōshi* — death from overwork.

The story illustrates the harsh working conditions faced by young hospital doctors in Japan, who clock extremely long hours, often sacrificing their own health in the process.

The issue is now coming into sharper focus ahead of the April implementation of a legal cap on doctors' overtime.

One major point of contention is how much of the time that doctors spend at their workplace should be considered as work, and how much should be seen as self-study or self-improvement.

Konan Medical Center has paid Shingo Takashima's family ¥1.3 million for accumulated overtime, but the institution has said it disagrees with the bureau's findings, arguing that most of his extra hours at the hospital were spent on self-improvement, such as preparing for an academic conference, which the hospital does not consider a work duty.

The 460-bed hospital claimed that he had

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