

Executive Turnovers in 2001

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Political developments in Japan from the latter part of 2000 to the year 2001 were highlighted by the executive transition from unpopular Yoshiro Mori to exceptionally popular Junichiro Koizumu as the nation's leader.

Toward the end of the year 2000, Prime Minister Mori and his cabinet had to face many difficulties. On 27 October, Mori's closest aid, the cabinet secretary Hidenao Nakagawa, had to resign (and was replaced by Yasuo Fukuda) after he was accused of having links with a senior member of a rightwing group and of having an affair with a woman with whom he reportedly shared confidential information about a planned police raid. Nakagawa's disgrace gave ammunition to those critics who were already questioning the judgement and character of Mori, who himself had committed a series of misjudgements since he came to office in April 2000. Mori's administration was also rocked by a major scandal called the 'KSD affair'. KSD is an insurance organization for small and medium-sized businesses, and it was alleged that some high-profile politicians of his Liberal Democratic Party received bribes from KSD. Further, a massive fraud case surfaced, involving a Foreign Ministry bureaucrat who allegedly spent the ministry's discretionary diplomatic funds for private purposes. (He later pleaded guilty in court to defrauding the government out of 161 million yen.)

Frustrated with Mori's low popularity, some members of the LDP began openly criticizing him and insisted on the need to change the leadership. The tension within the party reached the highest point on 20 November, when the opposition camp presented a motion of no confidence against the Mori government. Those LDP members who belonged to the factions led by Koichi Kato and Taku Yamasaki came close to voting in favor of this motion. At the last minute, however, the prospect of being expelled from the party forced them to abort their rebellious plan. Mori thus survived the crisis, and the ringleader Kato, once regarded as the most likely person to succeed Mori, lost his influence within the LDP and his credibility among the general public.

Having obtained the confidence of the legislature, Mori reshuffled his cabinet on 6 December, maintaining the coalition with the Komei Party and the Conservative Party. The reshuffle was made in line with the new bureaucratic structure that was about to take effect in January 2001. In the spirit of increasing administrative efficiency, some ministries/agencies were merged with others. For example, 'Naikaku-fu', the Cabinet Office, is now structured as a coordination agency, incorporating the former Prime Minister's Office, Economic Planning Agency, and the Okinawa Development Agency. The former 'Somu-cho' (Management and Coordination Agency), the Posts and Telecommunications Ministry, and the Home Affairs Ministry all merged to create the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunication (although the Japanese name is simply 'Somu-sho'). The former Ministries of Transportation and of Construction, together with the former Hokkaido Development Agency and the National Land Agency, were amalgamated into the new Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. The Health and Welfare Ministry and the Labor Ministry were integrated into the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. The Ministry of Education absorbed the Science and Technology Agency to become the new Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, while the former Environment Agency was promoted to the status of Ministry. The former Ministry of International Trade and Industry has been renamed as the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The Ministry of Finance changed its name from 'Okura-sho' to 'Zaimu-sho', although it retained its English title. Mori's appointments to the new cabinet positions are listed in column (A) of Table 1.

The cabinet reshuffle, however, had hardly any effect on Mori's declining political fortunes. The ongoing investigation led to the arrest, on 16 January, of an LDP member of the Upper House, Takao Koyama, who had allegedly accepted about 20 million yen as a bribe in 1996 from KSD. A week later (on 23 January), the newly appointed Minister Fukushima Nukaga, in charge of economic and fiscal policies, was forced to resign (and was replaced by Taro Aso) after it was reported that he had received a total of 15 million yen from KSD in November 1999 and April 2000, while he was the deputy chief Cabinet Secretary. Further, on 1 March, Masakuni Murakami, a powerful LDP Upper-House member and a former Labor Minister, was arrested for having allegedly received 50 million yen in 1996 from KSD in exchange for supporting the establishment of a college which KSD was promoting. Murakami was also suspected of receiving funds from a KSD affiliate to finance party membership fees used in the 1998 Upper House election. Opposition parties criticized the evasive manner with which Mori dealt with these cases, despite the involvement of his own cabinet member and party colleagues.

The ultimate blow to Mori's fate came with an incident in February in which a Japanese fishery training vessel collided with a US nuclear-powered submarine off Hawaii and sank with nine people on board. It was later discovered that Mori, after being informed of the incident, decided to continue playing golf, a piece of news that

Table 1

	(A) Mori 2 nd Cabinet (5 Dec. 2000)	(B) Koizumi Cabinet (26 April 2001)
Prime Minister	Yoshiro MORI (R)	Junichiro KOIZUMI (R)
Minister of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications	Toranosuke KATAYAMA (C)	Toranosuke KATAYAMA (C)
Minister of Justice	Masahiko KOMURA (R)	Mayumi MORIYAMA (R)
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Yohei KONO (R)	Makiko TANAKA (R)
Minister of Finance	Kiichi MIYAZAWA (R)	Masajuro SHIOKAWA (R)
Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology	Nobutaka MACHIMURA (R)	Atsuko TOYAMA (N)
Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare	Chikara SAKAGUCHI (R)*	Chikara SAKAGUCHI (R)*
Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Yoshio YATSU (R)	Tsutomu TAKEBE (R)
Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry	Takeo HIRANUMA (R)	Takeo HIRANUMA (R)
Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport	Chikage OGI (C)#	Chikage OGI (C)#
Minister of Environment	Yoriko KAWAGUCHI (N)	Yoriko KAWAGUCHI (N)
Minister of State, Chief Cabinet Secretary (Gender Equality)	Yasuo FUKUDA (R)	Yasuo FUKUDA (R)
Minister of State, Chairman of the National Public Safety Commission (Disaster Prevention)	Bunmei IBUKI (R)	Jin MURAI (R)
Minister of State, Director-General of the Defense Agency	Toshitsugu SAITO (R)	Gen NAKATANI (R)
Minister of State (Financial Services Agency)	Hakuo YANAGISAWA (R)	Hakuo YANAGISAWA (R)
Minister of State (Economic and Fiscal Policy, Internet Fair 2001 Japan, IT Policy)	Fukushiro NUKAGA (R) Replaced by Taro ASO on 23 January, 2001	Heizou TAKENAKA (N)
Minister of State (Administrative Reform, Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs)	Ryutaro HASHIMOTO (R)	–
Minister of State (Science and Technology)	Takashi SASAGAWA (C)	–
Minister of State (Administrative Reform, Regulatory Reform)	–	Nobuteru ISHIHARA (R)

Table 1 (*cont.*)

	(A) Mori 2 nd Cabinet (5 Dec. 2000)	(B) Koizumi Cabinet (26 April 2001)
Minister of State (Okinawa and Northern Territories Affairs, Science and Technology Policy)	–	Koji OMI (R)

Notes: ¹(R) refers to House of Representatives, (C) refers to House of Councillors, and (N) refers non-parliamentary members.

² * a member of the Komei Party.

³ # a member of the Conservative Party.

angered the public and made his resignation only a matter of time. On 13 March, at the LDP convention, Mori finally announced his intention to resign. The LDP leadership contest was held on 20 April, in which Junichiro Koizumi, a former Minister of Health and Welfare, won overwhelming support and was elected as the next LDP president (see Reed this volume).

On 26 April, retaining the three-party coalition, Koizumi formed his cabinet, which included five female ministers and three non-parliamentarian members. The names of his appointees are listed in column (B) of Table 1. In the meantime, Koizumi also changed the profile of the LDP executives: Taku Yamasaki replaced Makoto Koga as the party secretary, Taro Aso replaced Shizuka Kamei as the chair of the Policy Affairs Research Council, and Mitsuo Horiuchi replaced Kanezo Muraoka as the chair of the Executive Council respectively. For the first three months after taking the office, Koizumi and his government enjoyed unprecedented level of high approval rating, which clearly helped the LDP to win a major victory in the Upper House election in July. The electoral result indeed persuaded other members of the LDP to extend Koizumi's tenure as the party leader at least until 2003.