

# Premier Ill, Japanese Party Delays Vote on Successor

By NORIMITSU UNISHI

TOKYO, Sept. 13 — A day after abruptly announcing his resignation, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was hospitalized with gastrointestinal problems on Thursday morning, and the governing Liberal Democratic Party pushed back the date to choose his successor.

Mr. Abe is expected to stay in the hospital at least three days because he is suffering from digestive problems and a lack of appetite brought on by fatigue and stress, according to his doctor at Keio University Hospital here. Party officials had cited Mr. Abe's poor health as one reason behind his resignation.

Worsening the political vacuum, party officials announced that they would hold an election to choose a new leader on Sept. 23, not Sept. 19, as they had said Wednesday.

Apparently worried about giving the impression that the next prime minister would emerge from backroom deals, the officials said the extra time would allow more candidates to campaign before the general public.

Taro Aso, the party's secretary general, had been considered the front-runner but seemed undermined by his close ties to Mr. Abe. Support appeared to be building instead for Yasuo Fukuda, a former chief cabinet minister who is considered a moderate.

The disarray inside the Liberal Democratic Party and recent gains by the main opposition Democratic Party will almost certainly interrupt, and perhaps end, the Japanese naval force's six-year role supporting the war in Afghanistan.

In announcing his resignation, Mr. Abe said a more popular successor would be better able to extend the naval force's mission past its scheduled expiration on Nov. 1.

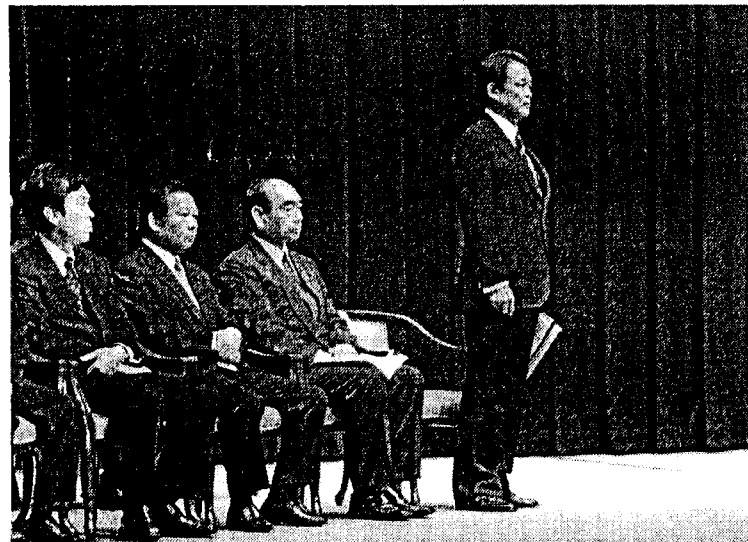
But because of the resignation, and with time needed to select a new prime minister and form a new cabinet, the governing party will be unable to overcome opposition objections before the expiration, said Gen Nakatani, a member of Mr. Abe's party who served as defense minister when the law was first passed in 2001.

"It's now 100 percent sure that our ships will have to come back at least once," Mr. Nakatani said in an interview, adding that he hoped the mission would resume



SATORU ISHII/MAINICHI SHIMBUN, VIA REUTERS

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, rear, went yesterday to Keio University Hospital for treatment for stress. Taro Aso, standing below, the party secretary general, is among the possible successors.



TOMOHIRO OHSUMI/BLOOMBERG NEWS

## Re-examining ties to Bush and Japan's role in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

pan-U.S. alliance is our most important one. But is it right to look only to the United States and turn our backs on China and South Korea?"

Opposition lawmakers said they would use their new control over the upper house to extract more information about the exact nature of Japan's military assistance in the Indian Ocean.

Kenji Eda, an independent lawmaker, said some of the oil supplied by Japan might have been used in Iraq instead of Afghanistan, and in other ways that possibly contravened Japan's anti-terrorism law. The government has denied the charges.

"The actual conditions surrounding the refueling mission have barely been explained," Mr. Eda, who has pressed the government to release more details, said in an interview. "Until now, the governing party used its large majority to easily extend the law."

Mr. Haku added: "We have no idea what's happening on the other side of the ocean. We're told that everything's going well, but there's no way to know the truth."

under a new law. "In the international community, it's important to carry out a mission to the end. If we withdraw at this stage, all that we have accomplished will go down the drain."

Urged by the United States to shoulder greater military responsibilities, Japan has passed laws since 2001 to circumvent its pacifist Constitution and allow it to assist in the American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. President Bush and other American officials have pressed Japan to extend its mission in the Indian Ocean, where its ships have been refueling American and other vessels taking part in the war in Afghanistan.

Debate over the law allowing that mission is expected to lead to a larger discussion about Ja-

pan's security alliance with the United States and the increasingly assertive military.

The Democratic Party opposition leader, Ichiro Ozawa, has said Japan's military should take part only in United Nations-led missions. Members of Mr. Ozawa's party have said that under Mr. Abe and his predecessor, Junichiro Koizumi, Japan grew too close militarily with the United States at the expense of its relations with its neighbors.

"Koizumi and Bush, Abe and Bush — from our perspective, those relationships were too close," Shinkun Haku, a Democratic Party lawmaker who is a member of the upper house of Parliament's foreign affairs and defense committee, said in an interview. "I don't deny that the Ja-