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Executive Turnovers in 2000

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On April 5 2000, the Diet elected Yoshiro Mori as Japan's 55th prime minister. His predecessor, Keizo Obuchi, had suffered a stroke and became unable to carry out his official responsibility. Mori, who was the former Secretary General of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), inherited the three party coalition between the LDP, the new Komei Party and the Conservative Party, and reappointed all of Obuchi's cabinet members. Yohei Kono was reposted as the Minister of Foreign Affairs; Hideo Usui as Justice; Kiichi Miyazawa as Finance; Hirofumi Nakasone as Education, Science and Technology; Yuya Niwa as Health and Welfare; Tokuichiro Tanazawa as Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Takeshi Fukaya as International Trade and Industry; Toshihiro Nikai as Transport; Eita Yashiro as Posts and Telecommunications; Takamori Makino as Labor; Masaaki Nakayama as Construction; Kosuke Hori as Home Affairs, Mikio Aoki as Chief Cabinet Secretary; Kunihiro Tsuzuki as Management and Coordination; Tsutomu Kawara as Defense; Taichi Sakaiya as Economic Planning; Kayoko Shimizu as environment; and Sadakazu Tanigaki as Financial Reconstruction.

In accordance with the change in its leadership, the executive body of the LDP was reorganized as well. Hiromu Nonaka, a key senior member of the Obuchi's faction, was appointed as the new Secretary General of the party. Yukihiko Ikeda of Koichi Kato's faction was appointed as the Chair of the LDP's Executive Council. Shizuka Kamei, the co-leader of another faction, was appointed as the Chair of the Policy Research Affairs Council.

On 5 July, following the results of the general election in which the LDP and its coalition partners together retained the lower house majority, Prime Minister Mori reorganized his cabinet. In the consideration of the approaching Kyushu-Okinawa summit meeting of leading industrialized nations, Foreign Minister Kono continued serving in the same cabinet post. For the continuity of economic policies, Mori reappointed both Finance Minister Miyazawa and the Economic Planning Agency Director Sakaiya. The Management and Coordination Agency Director, Tsuzuki, was also reappointed to carry out the ongoing reorganization of government ministries and agencies. The other 14 members (out of 18) were new appointments. The post of Defense Agency Director was given to Kazuo Torashima; Justice to Okihara Yasuoka; Education, Science and Technology to Tadamori Oshima; Heath and Welfare to Yuji

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Tsushima; Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to Yoichi Tani; International Trade and Industry to Takeo Hiranuma; Transport to Hajime Morita; Posts and Telecommunications to Kozo Hirabayashi; Labor to Yoshio Yoshikawa; Construction to Chikago Ogi; Home Affairs to Mamoru Nishida; Chief Cabinet Secretary to Hidenao Nakagawa; Environment to Yoriko Kawaguchi; and Finance Reconstruction Commission Chair to Kimitaka Kuzo. Within the LDP, Nonaka and Kamei were reappointed as Secretary General and the Chair of the Policy Research Affairs Council respectively, while Ikeda was replaced by Sadatoshi Ozato as the Chair of the Executive Council.

Aside from these turnovers based on the cabinet shuffles, there were some cases of resignations of top executives caused by their own illegal behavior and political scandals. On 30 July, less than a month after the formation of Mori's second cabinet, Kuze, the chairman of the Financial Reconstruction Commission (FRC) was forced to step down from the position. It was reported that Kuze had taken benefits and payments from Mitsubishi Trust and Banking Corp. and condominium builder Daikyo Inc. This incident was a serious blow to the Mori cabinet's popularity because it became apparent that Mori had known about Kuze's connection with Mitsubishi Trust prior to his appointment. Kuze was the second FRC chief to resign in this two-year organization, which is responsible for the reconstruction of Japan's financial system by determining whether it grants public funds to failing and failed banks. Earlier this year, in February, Michio Ochi was forced to resign from the same position, after making a remark suggesting that, if the request was made personally to him, he would take a lax attitude toward bank inspections.

Scandals also hit hard the nation's policy force earlier this year. On 6 January the National Police Agency (NPA) Chief, Yuko Sekiguchi, stepped down from his position after the recurrent surfacing of scandals involving the Kanagawa prefectural police headquarters. There were cover-ups of officer's drug use, sexual harassment, attempted extortion, and violence during interrogation. Although Sekiguchi denied that his resignation meant he took the blame for these scandals, the public interpreted it so. Sekiguchi was replaced by Setsuo Tanaka, who had been the agency's deputy director general since March 1997.

Japan is in the midst of ongoing administrative reorganization, and, by January 2001, the number of the ministries and agencies will be reduced from 21 to 12. Some ministries and agencies will be merged with others to enhance the central bureaucracy's efficiency and effectiveness. Leading the administrative integration, on 1 July, the Financial Service Agency was established by unifying the Financial Supervisory Agency and the financial-system planning bureau of the Finance Ministry. The mission of the new agency is not only to inspect and supervise financial institutions, but also to plan an overall policy for the Japanese financial system. Prime minister Mori appointed Masaharu Hino, who was the first commissioner of the Financial Supervisory Agency, as the New Director of the Financial Service Agency. Hideichiro Hamanaka a former Finance Ministry official, was appointed as Hino's deputy.

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In sum, during the period from January to September 2000, the changes of executive positions in the Japanese government were brought about mostly by the cabinet alternations, scandals, and the ongoing reform of the administrative organization. Because the formal regrouping of government ministries and agencies is scheduled to be complete by January 2001, even more significant turnovers are likely to take place next year.

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