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Ruling DPJ Lacking Majority in Diet and No Good Signs for Coalition; What is Happening in Japanese Politics?

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The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the ruling party, lacking a majority in Diet, and its failed attempt to form a coalition forecast an unstable political situation. The vigorous opposition parties, such as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), are encouraged to return to power by realizing a snap election. This tug-of-war over dissolution would be the focal point of the Japanese politics for the time being. It is more than likely that the present administration should be dissolved without completing the remaining three years in office. Although Prime Minister Kan Naoto expressed his intention to retain his office, he could not evade his responsibility for the election loss as the DPJ leader. Indeed, the friction with the former Chief Secretary Ozawa Ichiro will heat up as the coming election for DPJ leadership draws closer. The DPJ administration is expected to seek a policy-based partial coalition, so that it could cope with the Twisted Diet (Nejire Kokkai), where DPJ has a majority in the Lower House, while the LDP has an overwhelming majority in the Upper House. Ozawa, with his clout over 150 representatives in the DPJ, would be the key to the possibility of forming a united party based on compromise.

Although the Prime Minister Kan's proposal to raise consumption tax rate was the biggest cause of defeat in the last election, that is not all. The consumption tax issue reminded people of an image that the DPJ administration in the past ten months had been quite unclear in its policy orientation, and they questioned the legitimacy of the DPJ rule in its entirety. The poll was negatively affected by disappointments with the DPJ rule, as in cases of the Futenma issue, confusion over a provisional tax rate and of postal privatization bill, running of Parliament by the strength of numbers, and the issue of "mammonism in politics" represented by Ozawa and Hatoyama. The DPJ will be faced with a tough situation in the Twisted Diet, which is reminiscent of what former LDP's Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo said in his term: "I'm in so much trouble as to feel self-pity." Besides the possible allies for DPJ, such as New Komeito and Your Party, denying the possibility to join the present administration, no party has so far

expressed its will to cooperate with it immediately. Hence, the DPJ administration has to overcome the tough situation by forming policy-based partial coalitions for the time being. But it never promises a bright future.

The partial coalition virtually failed in the former Ohira administration, and he was additionally troubled by the 40-days-conflict, and finally died of a heart attack. In short, the ruling party can pass the bills only with the opposition's agreement in the Twisted Diet. As the LDP's President Tanigaki Sadakazu claimed that Prime Minister Kan should dissolve the parliament and appeal to the people, the opposition parties will attempt to drive the DPJ administration into dissolution and achieve a general election by any possible means. Members in the House of Representatives now have three remaining years in office but are quite unlikely to complete them. There are a lot of factors forecasting the dissolution, such as unexpected scandals and inner-party politics. Furthermore, conflicts might occur inside the party such as anti-Kan movement and anti-Edano movement (Edano Yukio is Chief Secretary of DPJ), and even anti-Eda movement would be evolved in the Diet (Eda Satsuki is the chairperson of the House of Councilors.). Because Eda is quite unpopular among the opposition parties, the chairperson's position is very likely to be replaced by someone from the opposition LDP which has a majority in the parliament.

As Prime Minister is quite new to his post, anti-Kan campaign is not easy. Therefore, the opposition seems to lean toward anti-Edano campaign. Although Prime Minister Kan is now screening Edano from blame, the question is whether Edano is replaced by someone close to the Ozawa faction on compromise. Ozawa side, once kicked out from the major positions in the party, will possibly demand someone neutral or closer to Ozawa to be selected as next Chief Secretary of DPJ. Ozawa, however, cannot demand too much because the previous Hatoyama-Ozawa administration would not be able to gain more than ten seats in the last election if they should have remained in their posts. The last election maneuvered by Ozawa critically failed. If Kan administration strikes a bargain with Ozawa, it might enable the administration to form a coalition with New Komeito or LDP. The consumption tax issue would be a key. However, the LDP will attempt to return to power by recovering the once-lost seats in the House of Councilors. Thus, the opposition party will strengthen their attitude more than ever, in order to drive the DPJ administration into early dissolution. This is quite a reverse situation. Three years ago, the DPJ questioned the legitimacy of the then LDP administration by claiming that the election of House of Councilors was "the latest will of the people" and calling for a snap election. Anyway, the Japanese politics will be increasingly unstable. For the time being, attentions will be paid on how the inner conflict in the DPJ develops toward the next

election for DPJ leadership at the end of September, which will be followed by the extraordinary long session of the Diet.

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