

Noda Must Reconstruct Japan Instead of DPJ

Koichi Endo

On August 29, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan elected Finance Minister Yoshihiko Noda as its new president and next prime minister to replace Naoto Kan.

Before the DPJ presidential election, Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Banri Kaieda had been viewed as a top runner among the five candidates because he had secured support from two former DPJ presidents – Ichiro Ozawa and Yukio Hatoyama. In fact, Kaieda became the top vote winner in the first round of voting, collecting 41 more votes than Noda -- 143 against 102. In a runoff election, however, Noda beat Kaieda with a margin of 38 votes -- 215 to 177.

The end of Troika leadership

The DPJ presidential election result may indicate an end to the party's traditional Troika leadership consisting of Ozawa, Hatoyama and Kan. It is significant that the Ozawa-Hatoyama alliance, which represents the largest faction within the DPJ, has lost two consecutive DPJ leadership elections. The so-called Ozawa myth has collapsed. Hatoyama also should learn that he no longer has any place in the political world. Including Kan who has offered to resign as prime minister after exposing his lack of capabilities to lead Japan, the three should retire from politics as soon as possible.

Noda won the DPJ presidential election by taking advantage of worries about and opposition to Kaieda who was backed by only Ozawa and Hatoyama. In this sense, Noda's speech just before the runoff might have been well organized. He made clear his intent not to back away from tax increases, while refraining from making any direct commitment to increase tax for the reconstruction of the region damaged by the March 11 earthquake. At the same time, Noda said, "I would like you to go beyond past strings and human relations and clearly decide who can shoulder this country." He thus called for overcoming Ozawa's dominance and emphasized the importance of qualifications as prime minister. His phrase, "With thoughts instead of speculations, with best wishes instead of ulterior motives and with persuasion instead of refutation," might have effectively represented an irony against the Troika generation. Noda also vowed not to dissolve the House of Representative, attracting DPJ lawmakers who are afraid of the dissolution that could force them to lose Lower House seats.

Establish firm defense policy

As one of the Japanese nationals, I am relieved to see Kaieda failing to become

prime minister. But I'm not sure about whether Japan could be reconstructed under Noda's leadership. Noda must be prepared to tread a thorny path.

It would be very difficult for him to implement tax increases for securing financial resources for both post-disaster reconstruction and social security. Noda, who has offered to cooperate with opposition parties, should not get greedy but give priority to an integral reform of social security and tax systems as a structural challenge while being flexible about a tax increase for the reconstruction. I also would like him to propose firm defense and national security policies. Whether Noda really knows growing tensions in East Asia is uncertain.

Ages of the candidates for the latest DPJ presidential election averaged 57 as they included relatively younger lawmakers. But they failed to impress the people with their freshness. Why? This is because the DPJ has lost its freshness. I wish to see Noda go beyond the tiny DPJ frame and become a leader tackling Japan's reconstruction from a wider, deeper perspective.

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