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Japan victor hails 'revolution'

Japan's opposition leader Yukio Hatoyama has hailed an election "revolution", with exit polls suggesting a massive win for his party.

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won 300 seats in the 480-seat lower house, ending 50 years of almost unbroken rule by the LDP, NHK TV predicted.

Yukio Hatoyama: "The nation has voted for regime change"

Mr Hatoyama, 62, said people were "fed up" with the governing party.

Prime Minister Taro Aso said that he took responsibility for the defeat and would resign as head of the LDP.

Japan is suffering record unemployment and its economy is struggling to emerge from a bruising recession.

The DPJ has said it will shift the focus of government from supporting corporations to helping consumers and workers.

The White House has already said it hopes to forge a "strong alliance" with the incoming government.

'Close partnership'

Mr Hatoyama, who is almost certain to lead the next government, is the wealthy grandson of the founder of Bridgestone tyres. His other grandfather was a former LDP prime minister.

He said after polls closed: "We will not be arrogant and we will listen to the people."

"The people are angry with politics now and the ruling coalition. We felt a great sense of people wanting change."

Mr Hatoyama, who is expected to announce a transition team on Monday, has promised to boost welfare and reform the bureaucracy.

He also vowed on Sunday to strive to resolve a long-standing territorial feud with Russia.

The White House called the election "historic", adding: "We are confident that the strong US-Japan alliance and the close partnership between our two countries will continue to flourish."

However, Mr Hatoyama has indicated he wants Japan to distance itself from US diplomatic policies and be more independent.

The BBC's Roland Buerk in Tokyo says Mr Hatoyama will have little time to savour his victory.

EXIT POLL PROJECTIONS

- National broadcaster NHK: DPJ 298-329 seats; LDP 84-131
- Private network TV Asahi: DPJ 315 seats
- Tokyo Broadcasting System: DPJ 321 seats
- Nippon Television: DPJ 324

Outgoing 480-seat lower house of parliament: LDP 303; DPJ 112

- Profile: Yukio Hatoyama
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ANALYSIS

Alastair Leithead, BBC News, Tokyo



It's a massive swing. What the opposition can do now they are coming into power, and untested, is

JAPAN'S ELECTION

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- Japan's hereditary politicians
- Brink of defeat
- Cartoon campaigning
- Profile: Yukio Hatoyama
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Elections to the less powerful upper house are due next year, he says, and the DPJ will want to retain the control it gained there in 2007 to push through its agenda.

Sunday's exit polls suggested a stunning reversal of fortune for Japan's political parties, reducing the LDP to a rump in parliament, correspondents say.

Mr Aso's party has governed Japan for all but 11 months since 1955. Official results are expected early on Monday, but Mr Aso conceded the LDP was heading for a big defeat.

"These results are very severe," he said at party headquarters. "There has been a deep dissatisfaction with our party."

The LDP's Kotaro Tamura said: "We made too many mistakes. Very crucial mistakes... we changed prime minister three times without holding an election."

Turnout in Sunday's election was reportedly just under 50%, slightly down from 2005 when elections saw the charismatic Junichiro Koizumi's LDP elected with a significant majority.

Officials said the turnout held up despite a combination of typhoon-triggered rainfall around Tokyo and a government warning that a swine flu epidemic was under way.

deal with the serious problem revolving around the economy and the recession.

Unemployment is at the highest level it ever has been and by the end of next year Japan will no longer be the second biggest economy in the world - that will be China.

Almost a third of the people here will be pensioners and therefore there will be fewer taxes coming in, more money going out.

It's a very difficult position that Japan is in. People have voted out a party that was in power almost without break for 50 years.

They are now looking to a new and inexperienced government to try and deal with some difficult challenges.



Taro Aso said the results were "very severe"

Japanese broadcaster NHK announced its exit polls moments after voting ended at 2000 (1100 GMT), saying they showed a major power shift in Japan.

The LDP had 303 seats in the outgoing parliament, compared to the DPJ's 112.

The projections were based on exit polls of roughly 400,000 voters.

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Press upbeat on Japan's elections

The election defeat of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) after 54 years of nearly unbroken rule and the landslide victory of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has met a cautious welcome in newspapers around in the world.



DPJ leader Yukio Hatoyama says he is ready for the challenge

The press in Japan and the United States voice the hope that the change of power will make Japan's staid political system more competitive, democratic and dynamic, while Chinese papers look forward to an easier ride in the two countries' difficult relationship. Commentators everywhere, however, also caution against expecting too much in the way of radical change, particularly in Japan's traditionally close ties with the US.

The media in North Korea did not directly comment on the election, but an editorial in the main state newspaper the morning after the vote renewed calls for Japan to apologise for abuses committed in Korea during World War II.

EDITORIAL IN THE JAPAN TIMES

The election's outcome should not be interpreted as a simple "yes" vote for the DPJ, despite its landslide victory. It was, in fact, a "no" vote for the LDP... Clearly, the DPJ government faces a tough road ahead... In the field of foreign policy, the DPJ government must ensure relations remain on a positive footing with other nations - especially the United States.

EDITORIAL IN JAPAN'S MAINICHI DAILY NEWS

How the LDP will address voters' dissatisfaction and distrust in the party that have been accumulated over the years - which many LDP candidates bitterly felt during their campaign - is to be tested.

DANIEL SNEIDER IN THE WASHINGTON POST

This is more than a simple shift in power. It ushers in a competitive, two-party democracy in which politicians and their constituents may finally have more say in shaping Japanese policy than bureaucrats and businessmen. Neither Japanese voters nor the DPJ seek radical change ... Some worry that a DPJ government may undermine the US-Japanese security alliance. But Ozawa and the DPJ are deeply committed to a strong relationship, even if they take a different path now and then.

EDITORIAL IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Yesterday Japanese voters did the unthinkable and threw out the LDP in a landslide. We wish we could be more confident that this healthy transfer of power to the opposition will mean better policies ... New leaders sometimes surprise, of course, and the magnitude of the DPJ's victory will give it room to be more daring.

EDITORIAL IN CHINA DAILY

The widely expected win of the DPJ in the parliamentary election is an event of great significance. For it would not only end more than



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The policies that differentiate Japan's rival parties

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50 years of almost unbroken rule by the LDP, but also herald more promising prospects for the long-term development of Sino-Japanese relations... Any expectation of a drastic change in Japan's foreign policy would be unrealistic... With relations across the Taiwan Straits improving, the new Japanese administration should clarify that Taiwan is not included in its sphere of 'surrounding areas'.

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ZHANG ZHIXIN IN CHINA'S XINMIN WANBAO

One can expect that the DPJ cabinet will be more strategic and resolute than the LDP in terms of developing friendly Sino-Japanese relations... Of course, we still need to be cautious while looking forwards to the DPJ's China policy and we must not be blind and careless.

LEE CHI-DONG IN SOUTH KOREA'S YONHAP

There is speculation that Japan's new centre-left government will be more flexible than the outgoing administration in dealing with historical and territorial disputes with Korea, a legacy of Japan's 1910-50 colonization of the peninsula.

EDITORIAL IN NORTH KOREA'S NODONG SINMUN

Growing in the international arena are voices denouncing the crimes related to "comfort women" for the imperial Japanese army. Japan is working hard to gloss over the above-said crimes without adequately redeeming its inglorious past, but their victims will never pardon it ... For Japan to gain international trust, it must squarely break with its crooked past.

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