

AFGHANISTAN

So much to do

HAMID KARZAI will be a popular choice as Afghanistan's head of state for the next 18 months among many foreign governments and many Afghans. But there have been grumbles that the *loya jirga*, a traditional grand council, is simply endorsing decisions and deals already made. Many delegates were indignant when it was reported that Mr Karzai had already been appointed, even before a vote had been held. Some still want Zahir Shah, the 87-year-old former king, to become head of state, believing that, despite many years spent in exile, he would be a better guarantor of national unity than any younger faction leader, and that Mr Karzai is tainted by the backing he has been given by the leaders of armed groups. But on Monday, the king ruled himself out of contention, and offered his backing to Mr Karzai, who has been leading an interim administration, to carry on.

This dispute and jostling among rival groups for control of ministries had set the start of the *loya jirga* back by a day, to Tuesday June 11th. Besides naming the head of state, the 1,550 delegates to the next government, and draw up a constitution for the war-torn country. In 18 months another grand council will be called to approve the new constitution, after which there will be elections. That the *loya jirga* can be held at all shows there has been considerable progress since the Taliban regime was toppled by American forces last autumn. But the squabbles surrounding the opening demonstrate how much remains to be done to transform Afghanistan into a stable, functioning state.

Future stability will depend, in part, on whether the next government more closely reflects the country's ethnic make-up. The six-month interim administration has been heavily tilted in favour of the Tajiks from the Panjshir valley, who make up a small proportion of the country's population but form the backbone of the Northern Alliance forces, which helped rout



the Taliban regime. Tajiks control the key ministries of defence, interior and foreign affairs. Seats in the next government will not only be used to achieve a different ethnic balance, but also to buy allegiance from local commanders, such as Ismail Khan in Herat, who have so far cocked a snook at central authority.

Even if a reasonably acceptable government comes out of the *loya jirga*, stability and prosperity are still a long way off. Security, too, is still a rare luxury in Afghanistan. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is

restricted to Kabul. Its installations have been attacked by rockets, and there are fears that the *loya jirga* itself could be the target of terrorist attacks. Coalition forces, with the help of locally recruited militias, are still hunting for elusive remnants of Taliban and al-Qaeda in the eastern part of the country, along the porous border with Pakistan.

The interim administration has had neither the muscle nor the authority to prevent factional fighting, and the international community has not helped much. Despite repeated calls from mem-

bers of the interim administration, foreign governments have shied away from providing the troops or money necessary to beef up ISAF and deploy it to other cities. Even where there is no fighting, the central government's authority is often contested. Mr Khan has been running Herat with a free hand. Customs duties for goods coming from Iran never make it to Kabul. Humanitarian agencies which have been helping Afghan refugees returning from Iran report that the local truck-driver cartel has ramped up transport prices by 17-20 times, disrupting the programme. In some areas, local commanders are believed to derive generous profits from the banned opium trade.

On the bright side, no one seems to be seriously thinking that Afghanistan should be broken up into autonomous pieces. Even the idea of a loose federation enjoys only limited support. A reasonable degree of decentralisation, however, is unavoidable in a country as fragmented as Afghanistan. Deciding the best balance between central and local authority will be one of the main tasks of the new constitution.

Instead of providing troops to help secure the country and beef up central authority, the international community is betting on carefully applied pressure on the most unruly local elements, as well as the revival of a credible national army and police. An estimated 75,000 soldiers and another 100,000 militias are working for local commanders, often the best or only employers around. Formal disarmament is not in prospect, though, as local commanders are not ready to hand in their weapons. The idea is to demobilise by gradual reintegration. Those men who make the grade will be hired for the national army or police, which could each eventually be about 70,000-80,000 strong. Others, it is hoped, will choose civilian life as more jobs become available.

Ex-combatants are not the only people needing jobs. Years of war have left Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world. Over the past few months, close to 1 million refugees have returned from Pakistan and Iran. The country is struggling to absorb them. Decent housing is too scarce, and jobs too few. Job-intensive reconstruction projects, from road building to irrigation repair, have not yet started, since money for longer-term development programmes has been slower to appear than humanitarian assistance. To fill the gap, the UN development programme has launched a \$3m initiative to create short-term jobs, such as cleaning up streets or planting trees. This has so far focused on Kabul, but is expected to be expanded to Kandahar and Jalalabad.

In rural areas, the situation is dire. The rains have been better this year, but the country is unlikely to produce enough food to feed its people. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation are currently trying to estimate how much food assistance will be needed this year. In some areas, despite a government ban, farmers have turned back to the highly lucrative business of growing poppies for opium, an activity eradicated by the Taliban. In Khogyani, in Nangarhar province, Juma Gol, a local farmer, explains that cultivating poppies is the only way he can feed his ten children. This year, he sold 40kg for almost \$15,000. His neighbour has not been as lucky. To make ends meet, his sold his 12-year-old daughter for \$1,000. The government claims that one-third of this year's opium crop the equivalent of 76 tonnes of heroin has been eradicated, but that leaves a fair amount behind.

Foreign donors have promised \$4.5 billion in aid over the next five years, \$1.8 billion of which should be given this year. An Afghan Assistance Co-ordination Authority (AACA) has been created to deal with the 61 donor countries and dozens of NGOs providing assistance, and to make sure international help fits in with the government's priorities. The private sector is expected to be the driving force for reconstruction. A foreign-investment law has been drafted, the defunct banking system is being revived and the tax structure which currently includes a 60% levy on property revenues, but no income taxes being rethought.

The next transition government, whatever it turns out to be, is likely to face a tough 18 months trying to secure and rebuild the country. This is the best chance Afghanistan has had in several decades. But that is not saying much and, without sustained and generous international help, its future could yet be as bleak as its past.

Courtesy: The Economist of London.

JAPAN

Koizumi under a nuclear smokescreen

AXEL BERKOFSKY

"FUKUDA has to go," demanded Japan's political opposition after the Liberal Democratic Party's chief cabinet secretary Yasuo Fukuda questioned the three non-nuclear principles that ban the country from producing, possessing and introducing nuclear weapons into Japan.

"Depending upon the world situation, circumstances and public opinion could require Japan to possess nuclear weapons," said the influential LDP politician in an off-the-record conversation with Japanese reporters last week, causing an uproar in Japan and indeed all over Asia.

Initially, it was reported that it was a "high-ranking official LDP official" who made the controversial remarks on Japan's nuclear policy, although the choice of LDP politicians with the nerve to question the fundamentals of Japanese defense policy was very quickly narrowed down to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi himself and a few defence personnel around him.

Koizumi, though, was on his way to South Korea to watch the opening of the World Cup, and two days later Fukuda admitted that he was the official in question, who, on condition of anonymity, had spoken to Japanese journalists, reportedly "trying to get young reporters to begin thinking differently about their country's future".

The journalists thanked Fukuda for the lesson on Japanese constitutional rights, yet another verbal gaffe from Japan's policy-making elite and a spectacular headline for the next morning's newspapers had been made.

During the administration of former prime minister Yoshiro Mori, the articulate Yasuo Fukuda was named the "exculpatory chief cabinet secretary".

Now, it seems, Fukuda has to sort out his own verbal blunders, and talking himself out of trouble will certainly be as challenging as it can get when Japan's sacred three non-nuclear principles, established in 1967, are the issue.

Koizumi stood up for his embattled colleague, and reportedly had no problem whatsoever with Fukuda's gaffe, saying it was "nothing serious", and he casually dismissed the opposition's call for Fukuda's head. "The opposition is always requesting someone to resign, but I wonder how effective such tactics are," Koizumi said in his usual nonchalant manner.

Fukuda, for his part, set about rephrasing his remarks, claiming that they in no way represented a shift in Japan's nuclear policy. This proved to be a very challenging task, even for the eloquent Fukuda, who found himself explaining to a special committee of the Diet's House of Representatives why his remarks and the announcement that "the revision of Japan's non-nuclear principles is likely now that the revision of the constitution is under way" still conformed to the government's non-nuclear principles. Koizumi jumped in quickly to stress that no review of the principles was planned, hoping to lay the issue to rest.

The same special committee is

currently discussing Japan's national emergency laws that would enable the armed forces to defend Japanese territory effectively, and Koizumi fears that interrogating Fukuda could further delay the implementation of the bills beyond the current Diet session that is scheduled to end on June 19.

Koizumi received support from Japan's biggest daily newspaper, the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, which right after Fukuda's "this is not what I was really trying to say" line published a couple of editorials pointing out that the government, at least for now, did not recommend a change in nuclear policy. "Given an ordinary interpretation, this [Fukuda's] statement is simply an observation that any basic policy of a country can be reviewed depending on changing times and circumstances," the paper said, hinting, nevertheless, that the nuclear policy could be changed.

The timing to question Japan's sacred non-nuclear principles couldn't have been worse, with Koizumi attending the opening ceremonies of the World Cup in South Korea, and Japan's foreign minister calling on India and Pakistan to pledge not to use nuclear weapons against each other.

"At a time when Japan should be urging caution over rising tensions between India and Pakistan, it is criminal to utter such a comment," said an official of the Hiroshima Council against Atomic Bombs in a recent interview with the *New York Times*, joining Japan's second-biggest daily newspaper, the *Asahi Shimbun*, which wrote that "Japan cannot complain if Asian nations suspect Japanese ambitions to become a military power".

The three non-nuclear principles were established during the administration of Eisaku Sato and are considered to be untouchable tenets of Japanese defence policy. Only in theory, however, as revelations of recent years seem to suggest. Roughly two years ago, Japan's Communist Party represented the Japanese public with the "US-Japan Secret Agreements" documenting that visiting US warships calling at Japanese ports during the Cold War had regularly been equipped with missiles carrying nuclear weapons.

These once-classified documents seem to confirm earlier suspicions that consecutive Japanese governments were never really overly interested in finding out whether US warships were violating one of the sacred principles. According to the documents and secret conversations between then US ambassador to Japan Edwin Reischauer and the Japanese government in the 1960s, the US government claimed that ships with nuclear warheads on board calling Japanese ports could not be classified the "introduction" of nuclear weapons into Japan, and therefore there would be no violation of the non-nuclear principles.

The Japanese government reportedly gave in to this US linguistic interpretation, and so with the revelations of nuclear-armed US warships refueling at Japanese harbors critics have some cause to say that in fact the three non-nuclear principles were a long time ago reduced to two - indicating a "half-

compliance" with the principle of not introducing nuclear weapons into Japan.

The Japanese government is vehemently denying all of this, calling the revelations "leftist propaganda" and calling the documents fake, although Fukuda's comments were certainly not at all helpful in assuring the Japanese public that Japanese governments are as allergic to nuclear weapons as they have made out over the decades.

In May, deputy chief cabinet secretary Shinzo Abe said that Japan's pacifist constitution and the war-renouncing Article 9 would not stand in the way of Japan possessing nuclear weapons as long as they were "small", adding that "in legal theory Japan could have intercontinental ballistic missiles and atomic bombs".

A few months earlier, Ichiro Ozawa, an influential opposition leader and one of Japan's most outspoken advocates of expanded the country's regional and global military role, went even beyond the theoretical and announced that Japan could easily go nuclear if China continued to threaten Japanese territory.

In October 1999, Shingo Nishimura, then the newly appointed vice minister of defence in the cabinet of Keizo Obuchi, suggested in an interview with the Japanese *Playboy* that Japan should consider arming itself with nuclear weapons to avoid being "raped by China", as he put it. Unlike Fukuda, Nishimura did not even bother to explain his remarks, did not fall on his knees to apologise in the typical Japanese-style career-saving move, and was forced to resign still insisting that equipping Japan with nuclear weapons would become necessary sooner rather than later.

No discussion on Japan's defence is possible without comments from Tokyo's nationalist and outspoken mayor, Shintaro Ishihara, who thanked Fukuda personally for his "courageous" remarks about nuclear weapons, as the *Tokyo Shimbun* reported last week.

The controversial governor and self-declared defender of Japanese national interests is also known for his antagonism toward China and his desire to see the US troops stationed in Japan booted out so that the country can take care of its own defence. More sound bites from Ishihara might be in the offing since he is widely considered a possible candidate to succeed the prime minister should sinking public approval rates and opposition from within his own party force Koizumi out of office.

And in this regard, Koizumi is counting on his influential chief cabinet secretary Fukuda to help him hang on to his job, and he cannot afford to lose his close ally within the LDP. So, given Koizumi's own appetite for high-sounding rhetoric and enthusiasm for defence matters, Fukuda is very unlikely to face any consequences beyond advice to take a break from generating negative headlines.

Courtesy: Asia Times Online