

## **Japan's new Cabinet aims to boost economy**

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TOKYO: Members of Japan's newly appointed Cabinet said Sunday they are considering further economic stimulus measures to address consumer concerns about rising prices.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda replaced several key ministers Friday in a move aimed at boosting public support for his government, which has dropped to around 20 percent in recent months amid a series of political scandals and bureaucratic blunders.

New Finance Minister Bunmei Ibuki said earlier steps taken by the government were insufficient and "we have to take additional economic stimulus measures."

An additional budget for the current fiscal year is among the options, he said, appearing with six other new ministers on public broadcaster NHK.

"We have to think what we can do after using it (the current budget) up," he said.

Japan recently introduced measures to ease the impact of global price rises, including a 74.5 billion yen (US\$690 million) aid program for fishermen hurt by higher fuel prices.

Japan's economy has shown signs of deterioration in recent months, with unemployment rising and consumer spending falling.

Japan's jobless rate climbed to 4.1 percent in June from 4.0 percent in May, reaching the highest level since last September. Household spending in June dropped 1.8 percent from a year earlier.

"The impact of the rising fuel prices on the local economy is extremely serious," Trade Minister Toshihiro Nikai said. "The entire government must make all-out efforts to overcome the difficult situation."

No details were released, but local media reported Sunday that the additional measures could provide financial support for small businesses, farmers and fisheries as early as September.

Speaking Saturday after the new Cabinet was sworn in, Fukuda promised to do his utmost "to create a society where the people can live with peace of mind" and provide emergency relief to those hit hardest by rising prices of fuel, food and other goods.

Fukuda had seen his support ratings nose-dive in recent months amid scandals over lost pension records and accusations of bribery in the bureaucracy.

Public support for the government generally rose after the Cabinet shake-up, according to newspaper polls published Sunday.

A Yomiuri newspaper survey found the public approval rating shot up to 41.3 percent from 26.6 percent in July, with disapproval falling to 47 percent from 61.3 percent.

But a separate survey by the Mainichi newspaper found an improvement in the approval rating of just 3 points to 25 percent, while the Asahi newspaper found the approval level unchanged at 24 percent. The polls, conducted Aug. 1-2 with telephone interviews of randomly selected adults, did not provide a margin of error.

**Source:** The Associated Press



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