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END OF AN ERA

# Shinzo Abe, Japan's longest-serving PM, resigns

TOKYO, AFP

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced Friday he will resign, ending his record-breaking tenure in a bombshell development that kicks off a leadership race in the world's third-largest economy. Abe said he is suffering a recurrence of the ulcerative colitis that forced him to cut short a first term in office, and that he no longer felt able to continue as prime minister.

"Now that I am not able to fulfil the mandate from the people with confidence, I have decided that I should no longer occupy the position of the prime minister," he said. While speculation about Abe's



Japanese PM Shinzo Abe. REUTERS

political future has grown in recent weeks, the resignation nonetheless came as a surprise.

Even as recently as Friday morning, the government spokesman had appeared to dismiss concerns

about Abe's health and suggested he would stay on.

But Abe made clear that would not be possible.

"I would like to sincerely apologise to the people of Japan for leaving my post with one year left in my term of office, and amid the coronavirus woes," he said.

Abe said he would "firmly execute my duty to the end", and until the next prime minister is appointed.

"It was a big surprise", said Shinichi Nishikawa, a professor of political science at Meiji University in Tokyo. "His resignation comes at a time when Japan is facing tough issues, including measures against the coronavirus," Nishikawa said.

Abe had been expected to stay in office until the end of his term as LDP leader in September 2021.

Abe's decision to step down will be bitterly familiar for the man who was forced to leave office just one year after becoming the country's youngest-ever PM.

He has since become Japan's longest-serving premier, forever associated with the economic policy that bears his name: Abenomics.

He said his legacy would be for others to decide but pointed to his efforts to bring Barack Obama to Hiroshima, making him the first sitting US president to visit the site of the atomic bomb attack, as among his proudest achievements.