

Japan's defence chief quits over alleged document cover-up

28/07/2017 07:22 by admin

Tokyo: Japan's beleaguered defence minister resigned today over an alleged cover-up of military documents from UN peacekeeping operations, the latest blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's scandal-ridden government.

Photo: AP. Tomomi Inada denied, however, that she herself took part in the alleged cover-up

Tomomi Inada denied, however, that she herself took part in the alleged cover-up. Abe said he accepted her resignation and assigned Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida to take on the defence portfolio for now.

The Defence Ministry was conducting an internal investigation following accusation that it concealed parts of a daily log of activities by Japanese UN peacekeepers in South Sudan that referred to dangers faced by the troops in Africa's conflict zone.

Inada announced her resignation as she announced the investigation results, which she said showed "serious" mishandlings of official documents in violation of the information disclosure law and suggesting to the public a lack of governance. The probe showed no evidence that she gave prior consent to the officials' plan to conceal the document, she said.

"As defence minister, whose job is to oversee the organisation, I feel serious responsibility over this," she said. "I'm stepping down as defence minister."

The popularity of Abe's administration has plunged over a series of recent scandals, including accusations of misuse of power and cronyism.

Abe is expected to reshuffle his Cabinet next week in a bid to regain public support, but has been criticised for defending Inada for too long. Opposition lawmakers plan to grill Abe over his appointment of Inada, who had little expertise in national security.

In the alleged cover-up, defence officials had reportedly tried to conceal logs containing references to worsening safety in the area where Japanese peacekeeping troops were repairing roads.

Defence officials initially denied a public information disclosure request, saying the documents had been destroyed, but a subsequent probe in March found that the data actually existed.

A whistleblower recently said that Inada had approved a plan to reject the request despite knowing the documents existed. Inada has denied she gave consent.

Inada, a lawyer, has come under fire for an election campaign speech in which she sought support for a ruling party candidate on behalf of her ministry and military troops, a possible violation of a law requiring political neutrality for government employees.

She has also been criticised for links to an ultra- nationalist school operator now under criminal investigation for an allegedly fraudulent state land transaction.

- AP