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Shinzo Abe's legacy and how he Shaped India-Japan ties

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Image Source: Reuters



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Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's unexpected assassination has left the entire world in a state of shock. Abe's death is an immeasurable loss for the world.¹ He was the longest-serving PM of Japan and indeed an extremely consequential leader. The incident is extremely appalling as Japan is known to be one of the safest countries in the world and its gun laws are very strict. This has raised questions about Japan's safety in the wider international arena. Abe's first tenure as PM was from 2006-2007, and his second tenure was from 2012-2020, wherein he provided dynamic leadership in the international community.

Abe attempted to reform Japan from its conservative ideology through a different foreign policy orientation and economic reforms that were famously coined 'Abenomics.' It was a monetary policy designed to overcome Japan's stagnant economy.² On the domestic front, Abe addressed the issue of Japan's shrinking labour force and its ageing population. He helped women to be more active in the workforce. This policy was coined 'Womenomics'. This progressive policy encouraged major companies to hire women.

For India, Abe was truly a leader who related to India and was a dear friend of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is a great loss for India, as Abe was a leader who invested tremendously in building India-Japan ties. He was the only Japanese PM to make frequent visits to India and he also became the first Japanese PM to be a Chief Guest at India's Republic Day parade when he was invited in 2014 by the then newly appointed Indian PM. Abe's legacy has left an imperishable mark on both domestic reforms and his dynamic foreign policy agenda. In his most memorable speech, 'Confluence of the two Seas', in India in 2007, Abe paved the way for the foundation of the Indo-Pacific concept and founded the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) which comprises India, Australia, Japan, and the US, and has now evolved to be one of the key pillars of India-Japan ties.

The ties were upgraded to a new level with the establishment of a 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership', which encompassed areas of nuclear energy, economic relations, which included bullet trains and quality infrastructure, maritime security, and Indo-Pacific strategy. India and Japan deepened their partnership in securing the Indo-Pacific region, and under Abe's tenure, the Quad Group was revived in 2017 when China's aggressive behaviour grew in the Indo-Pacific. When Abe visited India in 2015, India decided to introduce its own bullet train in collaboration with Japan, which was known as the Shinkansen system. Both countries are also involved in North-Eastern connectivity and cooperation projects. Under Abe's administration, the two nations also signed a civil nuclear pact in 2016. Economic engagement between the two nations was elevated

under Abe as India became the largest recipient of Japan's ODA (Official Development Assistance) and Abe also sought enormous Japanese investment in India.

Abe was quick to understand the threat posed by an aggressive China, and he was the main leader behind realising the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. He also revived the Quad as Japan was supposed to play a vital role in Asia to counter China. Moreover, Abe was a keen supporter of the revision of Japan's pacifist constitution, and in 2015 he reinterpreted Article 9, which allowed Japan to use its self-defence forces overseas in non-combat roles.³ Abe made remarkable efforts to normalise Japan's approach to its national security and also increased defence spending as he felt the need to enhance Japan's power capabilities.

Abe was successful in transforming the nation domestically as well as in its foreign policy agendas and, most importantly, in revising the post-war constitution by giving more power to Japan's military. Abe will always remain an extremely special leader for India as his personal love for India and desire to bolster India-Japan ties remain phenomenal. In 2021, Abe was honoured with the Padma Vibhushan award by the Indian government, which is India's second-highest civilian award. Abe has indeed left behind a significant legacy for Japanese leaders and the entire world by leaving a mark on the domestic field as well as on global strategy.

NOTES:

¹ Yvette Tan & Matt Murphy, "Shinzo Abe: Japan ex-leader assassinated while giving speech", *BBC News*, July 08, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62089486>. Accessed on July 09, 2022.

² "What is Abenomics? How Shinzo Abe sought to revive Japanese economy with his policies", *Zee News*, July 08, 2022, <https://zeenews.india.com/international-business/what-is-abenomics-how-shinzo-abe-sought-to-revive-japanese-economy-with-his-policies-2482983.html>. Accessed on July 10, 2022.

³ Jeffrey P. Richter, "Japan's "Reinterpretation" of Article 9: A Pyrrhic Victory for American Foreign Policy?", *IOWA Law Review*, <https://ilr.law.uiowa.edu/print/volume-101-issue-3/japans-reinterpretation-of-article-9-a-pyrrhic-victory-for-american-foreign-policy/>. Accessed on July 10, 2022.