

# LEADERS MOURN DEATH OF FORMER JAPANESE PM

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Deep bond: In this photo dated January 25, 2014, Manmohan Singh and Shinzo Abe interact in New Delhi. PTI

India will observe a day of mourning for former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday even as Prime Minister Modi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and leaders across the political spectrum condoled the loss of a leader who gave India-Japan ties a new energy during his tenure. As news of Mr. Abe being shot came in, Mr. Modi and the former Prime Minister and senior Congress leader issued statements praying for his health, and as his death was confirmed a few hours later at the Medical University Hospital in Nara, many joined in to condole his death.

In 2021, the Union government awarded Mr. Abe the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian honour.

"Mr. Abe made an immense contribution to elevating India-Japan relations to the level of a special strategic and global partnership. Today, India mourns with Japan and we stand in solidarity with our Japanese brothers and sisters in this difficult moment," Mr. Modi said in a tweet.

Mr. Abe visited India in 2007 during his first tenure at the invitation of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, addressed Parliament and set up several mechanisms for intensifying relations, including proposing the "Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue" (QSD). Mr. Modi visited Japan as Gujarat Chief Minister in 2007 and discussed investment projects with Mr. Abe, and continued the close relationship when both were leaders of their countries from 2014 to 2020.

President Ram Nath Kovind tweeted, "I find it difficult to believe that Shinzo Abe is no more. He was a great statesman, & his infectious affability endeared him the world over. That he fell prey to an assassin's bullet is a tragedy for the whole humanity. My heartfelt condolences to his family and people of Japan."

In his first tenure, Mr. Modi made Japan his first bilateral destination outside the neighbourhood (after Bhutan and Nepal).

Since then, the two Prime Ministers had been seen at alternating annual summits in Japan and India, sharing a considerable amount of personal time together.

India and Japan were able to conclude the Civil Nuclear deal, considered impossible given Japan's nuclear sensitivities and India's refusal to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty, only due to Mr. Abe's persistence with his Parliament.

Dr. Manmohan Singh said that he was "deeply shocked by the tragic attack" on his friend. While Mr. Singh was more than 20 years older than Mr. Abe, the two leaders struck up an easy relationship during the latter's first visit to India, where they discussed economic issues.

## Global partners

"During my tenure as Prime Minister, we worked to raise both our countries' ties to the level of a global and strategic partnership," said Mr. Singh, adding that relations had been taken to "a

qualitatively new level”.

During Mr. Abe’s visit to Delhi in 2014, when he was Japan’s first Prime Minister to be invited as chief guest to the Republic Day parade, his aide Tomohiko Taniguchi told reporters that Mr. Abe considered Mr. Singh his “mentor or guru”.

Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who had known Mr. Abe since his years as Indian Deputy Chief of Mission in the Indian Embassy in Tokyo (1996-2000), said it was a “sad day for the world, and him personally. “A quarter century of memories of Shinzo Abe. No words to express them,” he added.

In a condolence message, Congress president Sonia Gandhi called Mr. Abe’s death a “huge misfortune” for Japan and the entire international community. Congress MP Rahul Gandhi said Mr. Abe’s role in strengthening the India-Japan relationship was “commendable”, and said Mr. Abe left a “lasting legacy” in the Indo-Pacific, referring to his work in steering the Quad engagement when it was revived in 2017.

In December 2019, Mr. Abe had to cancel his visit to India where he was set to hold the annual summit with Mr. Modi, as violent protests broke out over the Citizenship Amendment Act, which had just been passed in Parliament. Attempts to reschedule the visit failed after the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, and Mr. Abe stepped down that year due to his own health condition.

His desire to go to India’s northeastern States, where Japan has made a significant commitment to development, was never fulfilled. Nor was the dream of the Japanese bullet train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai, which he and Mr. Modi signed together, but has been subsequently delayed due to land acquisition and other issues. Mr. Modi last met him in May this year, when he travelled to Tokyo for the Quad Summit. Mr. Abe had also just taken over as the chairperson of the Japan-India association.

The Home Ministry announced one day’s State Mourning throughout the country on Saturday as “a mark of respect to the departed dignitary.” “The National Flag will be flown at half-mast on the day of mourning throughout India on all buildings where the National Flag is flown regularly and there will be no official entertainment on the day,” the statement said.

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