

AIR Spotlight - India-Japan Relations and Shinzo Abe's Role

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panelists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. This article features India - Japan relations and the role of Shinzo Abe.

Participants:

1. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa, Former Ambassador to Japan
2. Nilova Roy Chaudhary, Journalist

Context: State funeral ceremony of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Introduction:

- The Prime Minister of India visited Japan to attend the state funeral ceremony of former Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe. The Indian Prime Minister considered it to be a personal opportunity to honour the great friend and champion of India-Japan relations.
- Mr. Abe was assassinated during an election campaign tour on July 8th, 2022. India declared a day of state mourning on July 9th, 2022.
- During his brief visit, Prime Minister also visited Mrs. Abe and the current Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to extend his condolences.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his role in India-Japan relations:

- Mr. Abe played an important role in strengthening and deepening the India-Japan relationship.
- He was the Prime Minister for two terms. In his tenure in 2006-07, he came to India and addressed both the houses of parliament. It is on this very occasion that a famous speech on the Confluence of the seas was given. This laid the foundation of the concept of Indo-Pacific.
- The concept of Indo-Pacific projected by him involved India in the dynamism of the entire Asian region covering [ASEAN](#), Japan, and East Asia.
- Mr. Abe became the Prime Minister of Japan again in 2012 and the relationship between the two countries grew in every dimension covering political, economic, security and defence.
- In 2014, Mr. Abe was the first Japanese Prime Minister to be invited as the Chief Guest of Republic Day of India.
- Mr. Abe was also a great ideator, as he gave the world the concept of 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. He gave India a very prominent position in the region of the Indo-Pacific.
- For a very long time, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean were considered different entities. However, Mr. Abe gave a new definition of Indo-Pacific and made India and Japan the two bookends of the concept of Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific. He included India in this very dynamic economic region.

- The earlier concept of Asia-Pacific centred around East Asia and ASEAN and excluded India. By talking about the Confluence of the two seas, Japan made India an important pillar in the region.
- Moreover, in operationalizing the vision of Free and Open Indo-Pacific he proposed a [Quadrilateral Security Dialog](#) which emerged into the QUAD grouping of the present times. Mr. Abe played the most important role in this context.
- He also carried the vision of rule-based international order and worked for the peace and prosperity of the region.
- The concept of a Free and Open Region was further embraced by other countries and regional groupings of the region. For example, ASEAN proposed its own Indo-Pacific policy. The concept was also well accepted by some European countries.
- Mr. Abe was very insistent on Japan joining the [Malabar Exercises](#) as a regular partner.

For more information on Indo-Pacific, read here: [Strategic Importance of Indo Pacific: RSTV – Big Picture](#)

India-Japan Relations:

- The change in Indo-Japan relations started in the year 2000 when Japan relooked at the role of India. India was growing in terms of economy, and military, and was becoming an important player in Asia.
- The India-Japan relationship grew over a couple of decades irrespective of the political parties in power in both nations.
- In 2006, India and Japan initiated the annual summits at the Prime Minister Level. With each passing year, the bilateral relationship has only strengthened. India conducts such type of engagements with only two countries (Japan and Russia) and Japan conducts it only with India. This reflects the strength of the bond between the two countries.
- The relationship further strengthened as Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and Mr. Abe went beyond the professional domain and shared a special personal bonding.
- The emergence of QUAD:
 - One of the major concerns for both India and Japan was the growing assertiveness of China in the region.
 - It was about the peace and prosperity aspect in the Indo-Pacific and the endeavour to work together in that direction, that QUAD was operationalized.
 - Initially, there were many apprehensions and glitches. For instance, Australia had to back out because of China's pressure.
 - But as the world became conscious of the deteriorating security environment of the region, the growing advent of China's assertion, and threats from North Korea, the idea of QUAD was revived. It was further given impetus by Mr. Abe who became the Prime Minister again in 2012.
- India is the largest Official Development Assistance (ODA) recipient from Japan.

- In 2014, Japan declared a \$3.5 trillion investment for a period of five years in public and private sector units. Moreover, Japan is also collaborating with India on various projects like:
 - High-Speed Rail Project from Ahmedabad to Mumbai.
 - Metro projects.
 - Development of North East India.
- India and Japan are also working together to improve the connectivity of the North East to the seas and South East Asian region through Act East Forum.
- The bilateral relationship between the two countries was upgraded from a General Strategic partnership to Special Strategic and Global partnership. This will make the relationship more comprehensive going beyond bilateral cooperation to working together on global issues.

For more information on India- Japan relations, read here: [India - Japan Relations](#)

Conclusion:

Mr. Abe had a special place for India in his personal life. This was evident from the fact that he maintained great relationships with Indian delegations and Ambassadors even when he was not holding charge of the highest office. India reciprocated it by conferring on Mr. Abe the Padma Vibhushan.