

# Late Abe gives final message to Abbott

Olivia Ireland

ONLY a week after the assassination of Shinzo Abe, an emotive video of the former Japanese prime minister before his death was played to honour Tony Abbott receiving an award.

The Japanese embassy on Thursday hosted a conferral ceremony and reception for the former Australian prime minister who was awarded the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun for his contribution to strengthening bilateral relations between Japan and Australia.

A video of the late Mr Abe giving a personal message to Mr Abbott was played after receiving special permission from Tokyo, which left a harrowing feeling in the room.

"I am sorry I couldn't make it down there in person this time," Mr Abe said in the recorded message.

"Tony, I certainly look forward to seeing you in the future ... over a glass of Japanese sake and Australian red wine."

The video was made only weeks before the death of Mr Abe, who was assassinated in Nara - Canberra's sister city - on July 8.

Mr Abe said he would "never forget" giving a speech to Australia's Parliament in 2014.

"Tony, you are statesman who drew lessons from history," he said.

"You are a statesman who always identified the best ways forward."

Mr Abbott said he was "incredibly proud" to accept his award, describing the relationship between Japan and Australia as one with "many similarities", particularly that both countries were "challenged by a belligerent superpower in our region".

"Abe-san was one of the great contemporary world leaders, one of the real statesmen of the modern era. He was the father of the Quad," Mr Abbott said.

The former Australian prime minister said it was "the spirit of Abe Shinzo that hovers over this gathering".

"It's incredibly touching and poignant that almost his last public outreach should be

here in Australia, a country that he took so seriously," he said.

The Japanese ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, presented the award to Mr Abbott and described the period since Mr Abe's death as a difficult time.

"I would like to take a moment in memory of former prime minister Abe Shinzo, a close friend of Tony's and a champion of the Japan-Australia relationship," he said.

"I have been truly touched by the many messages of condolence and kindness we have received from Australians, from all walks of life.

"This serves as a fitting testament to the great contribution prime minister Abe made

to our bilateral relationship."

The Grand Cordon is the highest class of the Order of the Rising Sun, which former prime minister Julia Gillard also received in April 2021.

Mr Abbott was quick to release a statement on the death of Mr Abe, saying Australia had "never had a better friend in Japan". The prime ministership of Mr Abe ran from 2006 to 2007 and again from 2012 to 2020, overlapping with Mr Abbott's time in power from 2013 to 2015.

Mr Abe was welcomed to the Australian Parliament in July 2014, describing the period as a "new dawn to the future of Australia-Japan relations".

"Japan and Australia have deepened our economic ties, we will now join up in a scrum, just like in rugby to nurture our regional and world order and to safeguard peace," he said.

The Japan-Australia economic partnership agreement was signed by Mr Abe and Mr Abbott, which aimed to further liberalise trade between countries.

"This is the first free trade agreement that Japan has made with a major developed economy ... for everyone, everywhere, it means that two significant countries are prepared to put their hopes above their fears and declare their confidence in the future," Mr Abbott said.



Former prime minister Tony Abbott and Japan's ambassador to Australia Shingo Yamagami. Picture: Sithixay Dittthavong