

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 84):

The Best of Mates

29 July 2022

(This is the translation of the original Japanese text, which was drafted on 20 July 2022)

I have been asked by my newsletter's readers in Japan about how Australia received the news of the extraordinarily tragic incident in which former Prime Minister of Japan, ABE Shinzo, was shot in broad daylight while giving a campaign address and subsequently lost his life.

Hence I would like to report about how Australia responded to the event in this edition of my newsletter.



Prime Minister Albanese visited the Residence to sign the condolence book

1. A “True friend of Australia”

On the 8th of July, as soon as the media started to report the news of the incident, I started to receive phone calls and emails to my mobile from key people from

various fields in Australia, including former Prime Ministers Tony Abbott and Scott Morrison, wishing the swift recovery of former Prime Minister ABE and expressing concern and sympathy.

Soon after former Prime Minister ABE had passed away despite the earnest efforts to treat him, Prime Minister Albanese held a press conference. There, with a pained expression on his face, he offered his condolences, saying “Japan has lost a true patriot and leader, and Australia has lost a true friend”.

2. Condolence messages from all walks of life in Australia

On the morning of the 11th of July, at the start of the following week, we set up a condolence book reception area in the Embassy of Japan in Canberra. One of the very first to make their way to the Embassy was Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Secretary Jan Adams, who had only just returned to Canberra from her post as Ambassador to Japan to take up her new position.

At around midday of the same day, we were visited by Prime Minister Albanese who arrived together with Foreign Minister Penny Wong, both of whom kindly wrote messages in the condolence book. Of course, while condolence books had been set up in Japanese diplomatic missions across the globe, I understand that Australia was the only country where the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister together visited an embassy to write messages of condolence.



With Prime Minister Albanese and Foreign Minister Wong at the Ambassador's Residence

On the following day of the 12th, the Governor-General of Australia and Mrs Hurley visited the Embassy to write messages in the condolence book. Moreover, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles, who at the time was visiting the United States, made an effort to visit the Japanese Embassy in Washington D.C. to sign the condolence book there.



Governor-General Hurley visited the Embassy to write a message of condolence

Sentiments of condolence were received not only from politicians, but also from business people, government officials, journalists, think-tank members, and ordinary Australian citizens from every field and walk of life. I was deeply moved by the sight of many beautiful bouquets of flowers with heartwarming messages received at the Embassy and consulates around Australia.



The many messages and bouquets of flowers received at the Embassy of Japan

3. Achievements in the Japan-Australia relationship

Such profound expressions of condolence and compassion reflected not only the fact that former Prime Minister ABE, who forged friendly ties with foreign leaders during his long-term regime, was highly recognisable, but also the respect and value placed on his enormous contribution to Japan-Australia relations.

The most significant and highly regarded of his contributions was to elevate the Japan-Australia relationship, which for many years had been primarily focused on ties of trade and investment, to that of a “Special Strategic Partnership”. The greater frequency of joint training between the SDF and ADF and joint activities such as patrols in the South China Sea, and the commencement of negotiations for the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) signed by Prime Ministers KISHIDA and Morrison in January this year, came thanks to initiatives by the ABE Government.

In terms of business, it was under the ABE Government that the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement came into force and, tangible progress was made in the area of trade and investment liberalisation. It was the ABE Government that closely cooperated with Australia to take together the leadership role to bring the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to its ratification and implementation.

The Quad (Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue) is also highly regarded in Australia as former Prime Minister ABE’s initiative.

4. Two milestones

When looking back over the rapid development in Japan-Australia ties over the past few years, one achievement that remains vivid in the memories of people in both countries should be the historic address by then Prime Minister ABE to both chambers of the Federal Parliament in Canberra in 2014. It was then Prime Minister Tony Abbott who arranged for this to take place, thus making it the first ever address to the Australian Parliament by a Japanese prime minister.



(photo courtesy of the Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

Four years later, in 2018, Prime Minister ABE also became the first Japanese prime minister to visit Darwin. At the site of repeated air attacks by Japanese forces during the Second World War in 1942, he laid a wreath together with then Prime Minister Morrison. It was an act that symbolised the reconciliation between Japan and Australia achieved over many years throughout the postwar period.



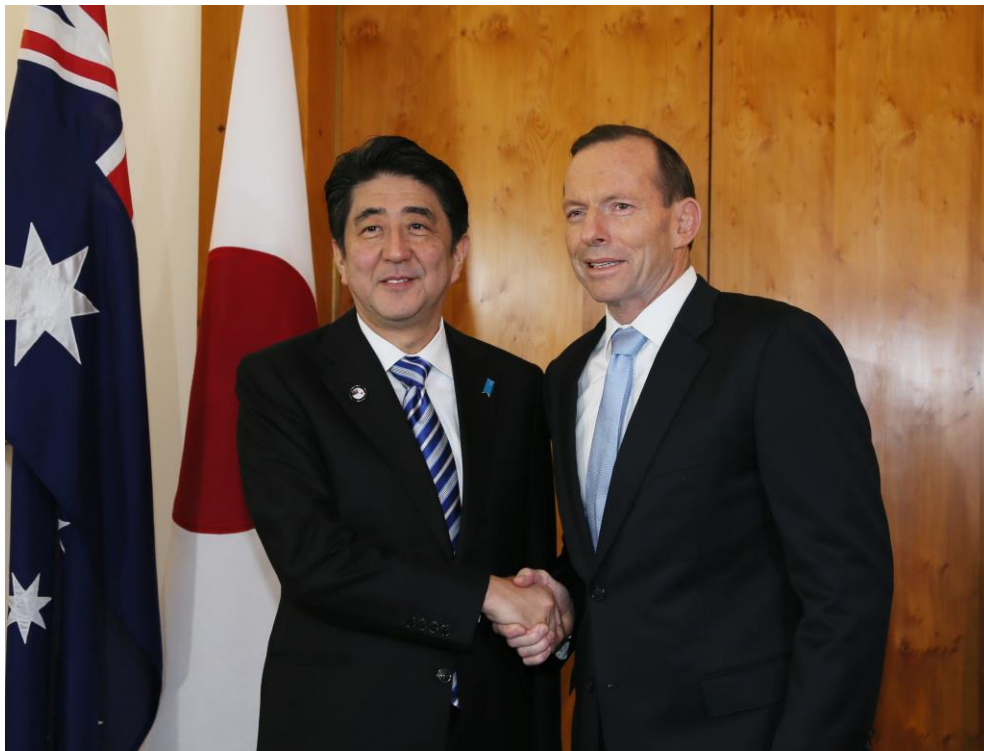
(photo courtesy of the Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

The passing of former Prime Minister ABE prompted many requests for interviews from Australian television stations, radio stations, and newspapers. In my interviews, I explained the above achievements and milestones.

5. A true friend in Prime Minister Abbott

For the success of any initiative, be it the promotion of the Japan-Australia relationship or the start of the Quad, the cooperation of a partner is indispensable. In the world of diplomacy, this is why we often refer to the phrase “it takes two to tango”.

During the era of the ABE Government, the position of prime minister of Australia shifted from John Howard, to Tony Abbott, to Malcolm Turnbull, and then to Scott Morrison. It is extraordinary that former Prime Minister ABE could maintain good, cooperative relations with all these successive prime ministers. Having said that, the excellent “pas-de-deux” of the like-minded duo of Prime Minister ABE and Prime Minister Abbott may be something that stands out most vividly in my memory to date.



(photo courtesy of the Cabinet Public Affairs Office)

Former Prime Minister Abbott was awarded the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun in this year's Spring awards in recognition of his exemplary contribution to Japan-Australia relations. However just before the conferment ceremony for the award was scheduled to take place at the Ambassador's Residence on the 14th of July, former Prime Minister ABE was shot and passed away in Nara.

6. The Conferment Ceremony

After consulting with Mr Abbott and Tokyo, it was agreed that the conferment ceremony would go ahead as planned. We agreed that it is all the more important for us not to be cowed by such a barbaric act, especially in the immediate aftermath of the tragic incident.

It was also decided that, at the conferment ceremony, a video message from former Prime Minister ABE to his best friend Tony, recorded before his death, be aired. As planned it was a video brimming with the former Prime Minister's personal touch, from his looking back over their friendship to his heartfelt congratulations. Quite understandably, there were many in attendance watching the video with their eyes welling up.

The conferment ceremony was attended by the Hon. KANEKO Yasushi, Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, who was visiting Canberra at the time and who graciously gave the celebratory toast. It is exceedingly rare for a member of a sitting Japanese cabinet to attend an award conferment ceremony in a diplomatic mission overseas. Minister KANEKO's attendance was very warmly welcomed by former Prime Minister Abbott and the other Australian attendees as a sign of the enthusiasm of the KISHIDA Government to further strengthen relations between Japan and Australia.



Internal Affairs and Communications Minister KANEKO from Japan also attended the Award conferment ceremony

The conferment ceremony, which was attended by Mr Abbott's mother, his wife, sisters, friends and colleagues, took place in a warm, relaxed atmosphere and went long into the night. Mr Abbott himself commented on it, spontaneously remarking that "the spirit of Shinzo hovers over us". Tony's friends filled up the lounge room and joined Tony in singing of 'My Way' while cradling glasses of 'hibiki' whisky in hand. These scenes will be indulged in reminiscence as a pleasant memory.

(My speech delivered at the conferment ceremony can be read [here](#). A television interview featuring former Prime Minister Abbott and myself can also be seen [here](#).)

7. Business as usual

Minister KANEKO was not the only Japanese minister to pay a visit to Australia last week. The Hon. HAGIUDA Koichi, Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry was invited to attend the Sydney Energy Forum, where he made a speech. On this occasion, Minister HAGIUDA also attended the Quad Energy Ministers' Meeting. I myself attended the meeting between Minister

HAGIUDA and the newly appointed Resources Minister, the Hon. Madeleine King, and the Minister for Climate Change and Energy, the Hon. Chris Bowen.

As this forum took place immediately following the heinous crime committed in Nara, I heard that Australian government officials expected both Ministers would have no choice but to cancel their visit to Australia. However both Ministers, rather than being bound by the situation, carried out their visits. The special consideration given to furthering the relationship between Japan and Australia received high praise from our Australian hosts.

8. On to Prime Minister KISHIDA's visit to Australia

During his visit to Japan to attend the Quad Leaders' Meeting in May this year, Prime Minister Albanese experienced his strong expectations for a visit to Australia at the earliest opportunity by Prime Minister KISHIDA.

This is the Special Strategic Partnership between Japan and Australia, which one could say is a legacy of the true ties of friendship forged between Prime Ministers ABE and Abbott. In order to continue to build further on this legacy, I hope that the ties of cooperation between our countries will be further strengthened between Prime Ministers KISHIDA and Albanese.

YAMAGAMI Shingo