

Yoshihide Suga, Japan's Chief Cabinet secretary has become Japan's new Prime Minister after unfortunate resignation of Japan's longest serving PM Shinzo Abe due to severe health conditions. Yoshihide Suga's is emerging to take control of world's third largest economy and Asia's one of the most powerful developed country. Mr. Suga, 71, was the longest serving chief cabinet secretary and played a pivotal role in Abe's administration. He has been a very loyal supporter of his predecessor.

While most of Japan's top leadership hails from the powerful dynasty and elite political families, Suga is the odd one out. He is a self-made and time tested leader. Mr Suga belongs to the family of a strawberry farmer and a school teacher. In his early youth, he resorted to all petty works, as a cardboard factory worker to a security guard to pay for his education in Tokyo. Life had tested him hard since the very beginning and he sailed out of all those challenges with his firm commitment and dedication

On Monday, he was elected as the leader of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan. As he took over, he is expected to serve the remaining term as the PM till September 2021 when the next general elections will be held.

Suga, widely acclaimed as Abe's Right-hand man, has pledged to pursue many of Abe's programs, including his signature "Abenomics" and structural reforms, including deregulation and streamlining bureaucracy. Mr Suga has promised to propagate Abe's most cherished goals. He said that his top priorities will include fighting pandemic effectively along with repairing the economic devastation meted out by the pandemic to the country. He gained popular support on the expectations that he will continue Abe's legacy.



Image source: Reuters

Experts say that even after serving essentially as chief of staff and as the main govt spokesperson under Shinzo Abe, for over 25 years, he has not really come out with very strong policies. He has not explicitly mentioned his vision for the future of Japan. But he has been a behind the scene moderator than a front-line leader. Suga recently enhanced his image by unveiling Japan's new imperial era called Reva which earned him a nickname 'Uncle Reva' His admirers say that he has four eyes and four ears, he worked incessantly from morning to night and played a pivotal role in Abe's plethora of successful decisions. Great talents are slow to mature, might have been carved for Mr Suga.

But all this is coming at a time when Japan is facing a massive crisis, its economy is in doldrums, it has been hit by the devastating pandemic, undoing the years of positive development and growth under Abe's regime. Suga, who won a ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) leadership race by a landslide, faces a vast array of challenges, including tackling COVID-19 while reviving a battered economy, Tokyo Olympics and dealing with a rapidly ageing society. He has got a lot to prove in a short time until he faces another election in 2021.

Sudden and unfortunate resignation of PM Shinzo Abe due to worsening health conditions is

expected to impact Tokyo's relations with some countries unpredictably. Abe had not only nurtured Japan's new-age policy with subtle revisionism but also established personal connections with world leaders, building trust in relationships. The Abe-Modi friendship signified one such leadership bond.

Another prominent and rather more striking example was his personal diplomacy with Trump because world leaders struggle to understand President Trump. So, if President Trump comes to power again, whether Mr Suga will be able to survive that bromance and the 'awkward handshakes', that will be interesting to note.

With a trivial diplomatic experience, Prime Minister Suga will have to necessarily deal with deteriorating US-China relations, build ties with the winner of the U.S. presidential elections and try to keep Japan's own relations with Beijing on track.



Japanese Emperor Naruhito/ NYT

Future of Japan's Anti-War provision

Shinzo Abe's biggest failure in his greatest legacy was the preservation of Japan's Anti-Military Constitutional Provision. This Anti-War Provision enshrined in Article 9 was imposed by the US onto Japan's constitution which came into effect on May 3, 1947, at the end of World War II, so that Japan does not build a strong military force or go to war. According to the article, the state formally renounces the sovereign right of belligerency and aims at international peace and to accomplish this, maintenance of armed forces with the war potential should be avoided.

He sought to eliminate Article 9 of Japanese Constitution, which 'forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes', but faced strong opposition from its citizens. 69% of them opposed the change to Japan's postwar defence policies by renouncing article 9. They believe that this removal of article 9 is the brainchild of Japanese billionaires who wants to build a strong military-industrial complex, which will drain all the funds used for public welfare. And further Japan and the US also had signed a strong defence pact which is sufficient for Japan's security. Japan took this pacifist vow after WW2. But this is the 21st century and Japan lies in close vicinity of North Korea and warmongering China.

Last year, North Korea launched its ballistic missiles that fell in Japanese waters and over the last few months, Japan is peacefully watching China sending its aggressive vessels to Senkaku islands in the East China sea. North Korea's nuclear programs and china's militaristic incursions had triggered Tokyo to realize that it can no longer hide behind the fragile shield of Pacifism. Shinzo Abe being a visionary leader tried to scrap this article many times in his tenure but couldn't achieve success. Now the hopes rely on his successor. If new PM manages to get rid of this article then the QUAD military pact could prove a reality in the near future. This will favour India to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Prospects of Indo-Japan relations

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday congratulated Yoshihide Suga on his appointment as Japan's Prime Minister and said that he was looking forward to taking the "special strategic and global partnership" between the two countries to new heights.

Heartiest congratulations to Excellency Yoshihide Suga on the appointment as

Prime Minister of Japan [@kantei](#). I look forward to jointly taking our Special Strategic and Global Partnership to new heights. [@sugawitter](#)

— Narendra Modi (@narendramodi) [September 16, 2020](#)

The Modi-Abe chemistry has been described as one between close old friends. Although India-Japan shares cordial relations right from the time of post-independence era, but Abe's visit to India in December 2015, kickstarted the widening of bilateral ties, with an action-oriented and long-term approach to political, economic and strategic goals. They announced a joint statement on "Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership — Working together for peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the world," which strives for "new era in Japan-India relations."



Source: The Japan Times

Abe's tilt towards India provided New Delhi with a confident partner to broaden its [Indo-Pacific](#) strategy. It has also emboldened the security partnership between the two sides and which is likely to continue under Abe's successor. Japan's inclusion into the Malabar naval exercises as a permanent member in 2015 has opened up new fronts for enhancing interoperability and cooperation for security in the maritime domain.

Multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific has ensured regional security and provide necessary political signalling and also keep the regional balance of power in check, which becomes very important in the context of Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, its territorial and historical disputes with Japan, and its desire to increase its footprint in the SCS and Indian Ocean Region. Sustained cooperation similar to Abe's era is mandatory to continue under his successor, at a time when both Japan and India are trying to navigate through the troubled waters of the Indo-Pacific. The departure of Abe could see a shift in Japan's approach to recruiting India back to the negotiating table on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). India withdrew from RCEP due to concerns about its trade deficit with China, a situation that has been compounded by the ongoing border standoff with China. Abe's strong relationship with Modi was considered as pivotal for India to rejoin negotiations, although the "door" will still remain open for India in the near future.

Japan under Abe had crystallized many regional and strategic groups to counter belligerent China. Yoshihide Suga is not in favour of an Asian NATO but he promised to continue and strengthen the cooperative and strategic ties with India. Although Abe's long reign at the helm and cordial relations with India seems to have provided a solid platform to provide stability even in his absence, how will the long-term relations between India and Japan shape up under his successor is unlikely to be stated precisely at this point of time.

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