

At state funeral in Tokyo, Modi recalls Abe's vision for a free, open Indo-Pacific

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Strengthening the Indo-Pacific region, a concept first articulated by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was at the top of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's discussion with Japan's current Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo on Tuesday.

Mr. Modi, along with several heads of state and government, attended Mr. Abe's funeral in the Nippon Budokan arena, where Mr. Kishida and his predecessor, Yoshihide Suga, offered emotional tributes to their former leader, who was assassinated in July.

A total of 20,000 policemen were deployed at the ceremony attended by nearly 4,300 people. Security arrangements were stepped up due to recent protests over the Kishida government's decision to accord the former Prime Minister a state funeral, which the Opposition parties called overly expensive



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Japanese counterpart, Fumio Kishida, at the Akasaka Palace guest house in Tokyo.AP

and out of step with tradition in Japan which reserves the honour for the royal family. Only once in the past – in 1967 – was a state funeral accorded to a Prime Minister.

Mr. Modi offered flowers at the funeral, and later met Mr. Abe's widow, Akie Abe, and offered condolences.

“When I was in Tokyo earlier this year, little did I imagine I would be back for the solemn programme of former PM Abe's state funeral. He was a great

leader, a phenomenal individual and someone who believed in India-Japan friendship. He shall live on in the hearts of millions,” Mr. Modi tweeted about Mr. Abe, whom he had known for several years, and had last met in May when he had gone to attend a Quad summit.

Among the dignitaries at the funeral were the Prime Ministers of Australia and South Korea, the President of Vietnam and U.S. Vice-President Kamala Harris.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who was due to be the only G-7 country leader present, cancelled plans at the last minute due to floods in Canada, and his Industry Minister attended instead.

Apart from the bilateral meeting with Mr. Kishida, Mr. Modi met Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the Akasaka palace event in the evening.

Bilateral meeting

“Prime Minister [Modi] noted the contributions of late Prime Minister Abe in strengthening India-Japan partnership as well in conceptualising the vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region,” said the Ministry of External Affairs in a statement about the bilateral meeting between Mr. Modi and Mr. Kishida on Tuesday morning.

Speaking at the funeral, Mr. Kishida spoke of Mr. Abe's vision of the Indo-Pacific, which he had first outlined in a speech he

gave in the Indian Parliament in 2007. “You who advocated ‘the confluence of the two seas’ deepened that concept further, cultivating it to become the framework of a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ that encompasses many countries and includes massive numbers of people,” said Mr. Kishida, who served in Mr. Abe's Cabinet during both his prime ministerial tenures (2006-07 and 2012 to 2020).

“You not only markedly strengthened our ties with the United States and dramatically reinforced Japan-U.S. deterrence but also enhanced our cooperation with India and Australia to form the Quad framework, based on reasoning you had long promoted.”

In a mark of growing tensions with China, the Japanese government hosted a high-power delegation from Taiwan at the state funeral, and included Taiwan's name on the list of floral tributes from various countries read out.