

[Sitaraman Shankar](#), Hindustan Times
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Tokyo calling: What PM Modi, Shinzo Abe have in common

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe in Kyoto on Saturday, expect the chemistry to crackle and fizz. Put that down to the kindred souls of Asian politics being united by their staunch nationalism and right-wing views. "The nations are very different: Japan is a mature economy, with an ageing population and low growth, while India is developing, young and growing. But the leaders are similar, and what unites them is their guts, their will to get things done, whether you agree with them or not," says Takashi Shimada, president of consulting firm Indo Business Centre.

But their handshake will be underpinned by other interesting symmetries.

Read: [Quiet Kyoto meet for Japan's Abe and PM Modi?](#)

Both men celebrate birthdays later in September. Modi will turn 64 on the 17th; Abe will be 60 four days later.

Abe became PM on December 26, 2012; Modi won his third term as Gujarat CM that month, the win that put him on the path to Delhi. Modi, too, became PM on a 26th – May this year.

Japan's Nikkei share index has vaulted 50% in the 20 months since Abe became PM. And that's the gain that Indian stocks would have recorded when Modi gets to 20 months, if their performance in the first three months of his rule are any indication.

Modi arrives in Japan on Saturday on a five-day visit that could see deals in nuclear, infrastructure and defence sectors.

Read: [Modi leaves for Japan, says 'grateful' for its contribution to India's development](#)

The path to some of the more difficult agreements could well be lubricated by the interpersonal equation between the two men.

Numerical oddities aside, there are striking similarities in the way they do their politics.

Modi is unapologetic in his jettisoning of what he regards as token secularism; Abe has ignored critics of Japan's past by visiting the Yasukuni shrine to pay respect to the war dead.

Both Abe and Modi came to power booting out left-of-centre formations short on charisma, an attribute the two men have in spades. Both brought stable governments after years of policy uncertainty.

A delicious irony is that this grand embrace was set in motion by the ousted UPA government, which invited Abe to be the chief guest at Republic Day this year, and before him, hosted Emperor Akihito and his wife.

In the past, history sometimes kept India and Japan apart. Now expect chemistry to bridge that

gap.

Read: [Shinzo Abe, Modi exchange tweets, to hold 'chai pe charcha' in Japan](#)

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PM Modi meets Abe as India, Japan sign MoU to give Varanasi a facelift

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made the unprecedented gesture of travelling to Kyoto to meet Narendra Modi on Saturday, flagging the importance of the growing relationship between Asia's second and third-largest economies. Modi landed at Kansai airport in Osaka at around 5pm Japan time (13:30 IST), emerging from the Air-India aircraft in a dark-coloured bandhgala jacket. He was then driven to nearby Kyoto to meet Abe over a vegetarian banquet at the city mayor's residence, the day's only official engagement.

Abe normally meets dignitaries in the capital Tokyo, and travelling 500 kilometres to Kyoto clearly means that the Japanese are going out of their way to honour the Indian PM, local observers said.

"Japanese leaders have hosted get-togethers in Kyoto before but this is the first time I can recall that the prime minister went to meet a visiting dignitary and thereby honour his arrival," said Jeff Kingston, director of Asian Studies at Temple University in Tokyo.

Ahead of the dinner, the two leaders witnessed the signing of a "partner city affiliate" agreement for Kyoto and Varanasi covering city modernisation and conservation intended to be a framework for smart heritage cities.

Read: [What PM Modi, Shinzo Abe have in common](#)

The Kyoto leg of the trip, kept secret until close to the date of Modi's arrival, has interesting resonances. The city is the old imperial capital of Japan, something an ardent nationalist like Abe is bound to cherish.

That it is a prime example of how to develop a heritage city without losing its character chimes nicely with Modi's plans for his parliamentary constituency, Varanasi.

"The choice of venue is significant because it is a chance to highlight to Modi Japan's most attractive urbanscape where tradition and modernity have been balanced and highlight the common cultural roots in Buddhism," said Kingston.

Takashi Shimada, president of the Indo Business Centre consultancy, called the Abe initiative unprecedented, adding that it was "a clear message to our neighbours", a reference to China.

Time together at Kyoto will give the two leaders an opportunity to have a quiet interaction away from the hustle and bustle – and greater media glare – of Tokyo.

It's possible that one of the topics over dinner could be the civilian nuclear deal, where the men could use their interpersonal chemistry to dissolve several sticking points. These largely centre around Japanese sensitivities over the N-word and India's reluctance to provide still more assurances over a moratorium on testing.

First product of [#ModiinJapan](#) -- the two sides sign a pact for partner city affiliation b/w Varanasi and Kyoto. "Smart heritage" [@htTweets](#)

– Sitaraman Shankar (@shankarht) [August 30, 2014](#)

It is understood that the deal will go down to the wire, and even on Saturday officials were saying that the sides were still talking, a process that began in 2010.

An agreement would allow Japanese companies to provide vital components for nuclear plants in India, which would ease the way for big Western investments into the sector. There will still be other roadblocks such as Indian nuclear liability laws, which make foreign companies responsible for paying out damages in case of an accident.

Modi's programme in Kyoto on Sunday includes a visit to the Toji temple, a Buddhist shrine, and to laboratories specialising in stem cell research.

Read: [Five takeaways from Modi's big foreign policy interview](#)

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