

Ups and downs of Abe's tenure as PM

Japan Correspondent **Walter Sim** traces the highs and lows of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's years in charge of the world's third-largest economy.

2006

Sept 26

- Becomes Japan's youngest post-war prime minister at the age of 52.



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivering his first policy speech at the Lower House of Parliament in Tokyo on Sept 29, 2006.

2007

Sept 26

- Quits as PM due to poor health, with support for his scandal-hit administration at a nadir. At least four ministers quit and one hanged himself. He sparks a revolving door of six prime ministers until he retakes the position in 2012.



Japanese pedestrians reaching for copies of special edition newspapers announcing the resignation of PM Shinzo Abe in Tokyo on Sept 12, 2007.

2012

Dec 26

- Becomes PM again after the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) trounces the Democratic Party of Japan in a general election.



2013

January

- Moots the "Abenomics" brand of policies, comprising fiscal expansion, monetary easing and structural reform, to get Japan out of its economic funk. Sets inflation target of 2 per cent.
- But the Covid-19 crisis has wiped out any gains from Abenomics with Japan in recession. The inflation goal also remains out of reach.



PM Shinzo Abe celebrating alongside Tokyo 2020 delegation members after International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Jacques Rogge announced the Japanese capital to be the winner of the bid to host the 2020 Summer Olympic Games, during the 125th session of the IOC, in Buenos Aires, on Sept 7, 2013.

Sept 7

- Tokyo wins bid to host the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, with Mr Abe's strong lobbying.
- But the event, which would have cemented his legacy as PM, has been postponed to next year.

Dec 26

- Becomes the first Japanese PM in seven years to visit the controversial war-linked Yasukuni Shrine, igniting a firestorm of criticism from China and South Korea, and disapproval from ally United States.
- He has not visited the shrine since.

2014

July 1

- Reinterprets the war-renouncing Constitution to allow "collective self-defence", thus enabling Japanese troops to fight in the aid of allies under armed attack.

Dec 14

- Wins snap election, called two years ahead of time, to attain public mandate on economic policies, including a tax hike delay.



Customers pushing shopping carts at an Aeon supermarket in Chiba, Japan, on April 1, 2014. Japan's economy had withstood a sales tax increase that took effect as PM Shinzo Abe prepared economic stimulus measures and companies raised wages.

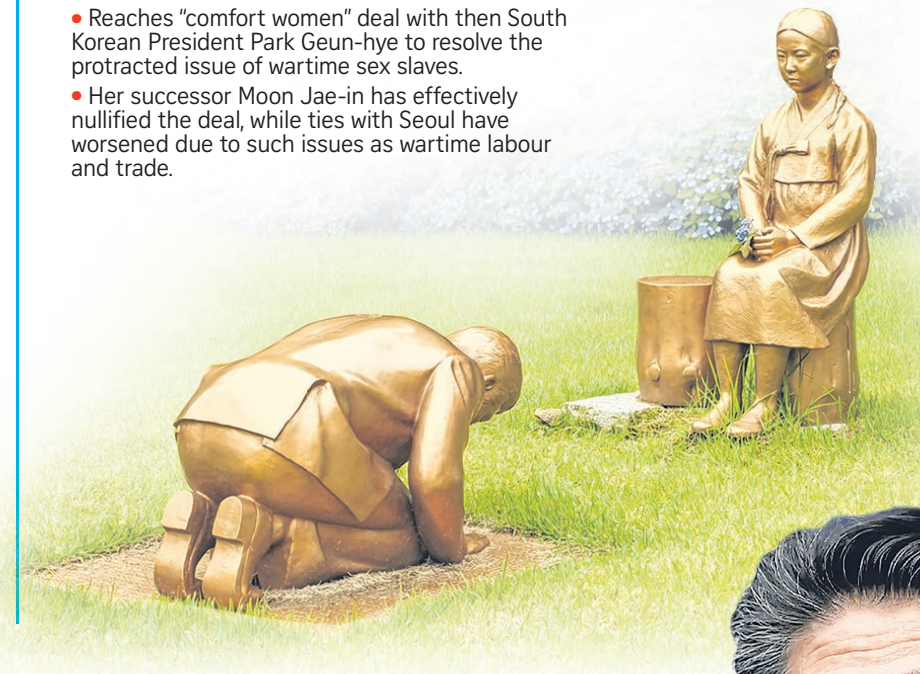
2015

Aug 14

- Expresses remorse but gives no apology on the 70th anniversary of World War II. Says future generations of Japanese should not be made to keep apologising.

Dec 28

- Reaches "comfort women" deal with then South Korean President Park Geun-hye to resolve the protracted issue of wartime sex slaves.
- Her successor Moon Jae-in has effectively nullified the deal, while ties with Seoul have worsened due to such issues as wartime labour and trade.



A statue symbolising PM Shinzo Abe taking a deep bow to a "comfort woman" is pictured at Korea Botanic Garden in Pyeongchang, South Korea

2016

Nov 17

- Visits US President-elect Donald Trump bearing gold-plated golf club, in charm offensive that rips up diplomatic protocol.

Dec 27

- Becomes first Japanese prime minister to pray for the war dead at Pearl Harbour, the site of a stealth attack that drew America into World War II.
- The trip follows US President Barack Obama's visit to Hiroshima in May.

2017

February

SCANDAL

- Moritomo Gakuen**
- A plot of public land in Osaka was sold at just 14 per cent of its appraised value to the right-wing educator, to build a new elementary school where Mr Abe's wife Akie (right) was to be honorary principal.
 - After Mr Abe says he will quit if he or his wife was found to be directly involved in the sweetheart deal, official government documents are tampered with to scrub out names.
 - A Finance Ministry bureaucrat, ordered to doctor the documents, later killed himself. His widow has sued for damages in a case now before the courts.



May

SCANDAL

- Kake Gakuen**
- Mr Abe was alleged to have favoured his close friend's bid to win a licence for Japan's first veterinary school in 52 years, thus disregarding due process.
 - The tender was termed a "prime ministerial matter" by a close aide.

June 15

- Diet passes "anti-terror" conspiracy Bill, criminalising the plotting of 277 acts before they are committed. These include drug trafficking, copyright violation, and even theft of forestry goods.
- Critics say the law gives the government a free hand to conduct surveillance on citizens.

Oct 22

- Wins in snap election, called one year ahead of time to capitalise on an uptick in support after a Cabinet reshuffle, a disjointed opposition, and the potential flight to safety due to North Korea missile launches.

May 3

- Sets 2020 target to revise the pacifist Constitution for the first time since its 1947 enactment.
- The goal is now out of reach.

2018

March 8

- In a major coup, the revised Trans-Pacific Partnership deal is signed following US withdrawal.
- Member countries credit Mr Abe for his role as a flag bearer for multilateralism in pushing the pact to fruition.

July 20

- Diet passes integrated resorts (IR) Bill, opening the door for legal casinos in Japan for the first time, amid fears that it will worsen gambling addiction.
- A year later, LDP lawmaker Tsukasa Akimoto is arrested in an IR bribery scandal.

2019

November

SCANDAL

- Sakura garden party**
- Mr Abe is alleged to have wined and dined voters from his Yamaguchi constituency in the annual taxpayer-funded event in Tokyo.
 - Amid calls for transparency, the government says that the invitation lists have been shredded.

Nov 20

- Becomes Japan's longest-serving prime minister at 2,887 days, including his 2006-2007 term in office. He overtakes Imperial Japanese Army general Taro Katsura, who led for 2,886 days in the early 1900s.

2020

January

SCANDAL

- Prosecutor retirement**
- Mr Abe moots revised laws to extend the retirement age of handpicked prosecutors, triggering an uproar given that the intended beneficiary was his close ally Hiromu Kurokawa, chief of the Tokyo High Public Prosecutors Office.
 - Support sinks as celebrities lead the charge to pillory Mr Abe. Mr Kurokawa resigns in May after reports emerged that he breached social distancing guidelines by playing mahjong for money during a Covid-19 state of emergency.
 - The plan has been ditched.



Visitors walking through a street of Kabukicho, Japan's biggest nightlife entertainment district in Shinjuku in Tokyo, on May 25, 2020, as a billboard screen shows PM Shinzo Abe speaking during a televised news conference. Mr Abe lifted the state of emergency in the country after a dramatic drop in coronavirus cases.

2020

April 8

- Declares state of emergency amid worsening Covid-19 outbreak, but is criticised for being too laidback in pandemic response.

June 18

SCANDAL

- Cash-for-votes**
- Mr Abe's handpicked justice minister Katsuyuki Kawai and his wife Anri are arrested on charges of vote-buying at an Upper House election in 2019.



June

- Public support sinks over scandals and perceived indifference in Covid-19 measures.
- Suffers early signs of relapse of ulcerative colitis, a stress-induced chronic digestive ailment.

Aug 24

- Sets record as PM with the longest uninterrupted stretch in office, at 2,799 consecutive days since 2012. He overtakes great-uncle Eisaku Sato's (left) record of 2,798 days from 1964 to 1972.
- Privately decides to quit after consulting with doctors.

Aug 28
Announces resignation.

