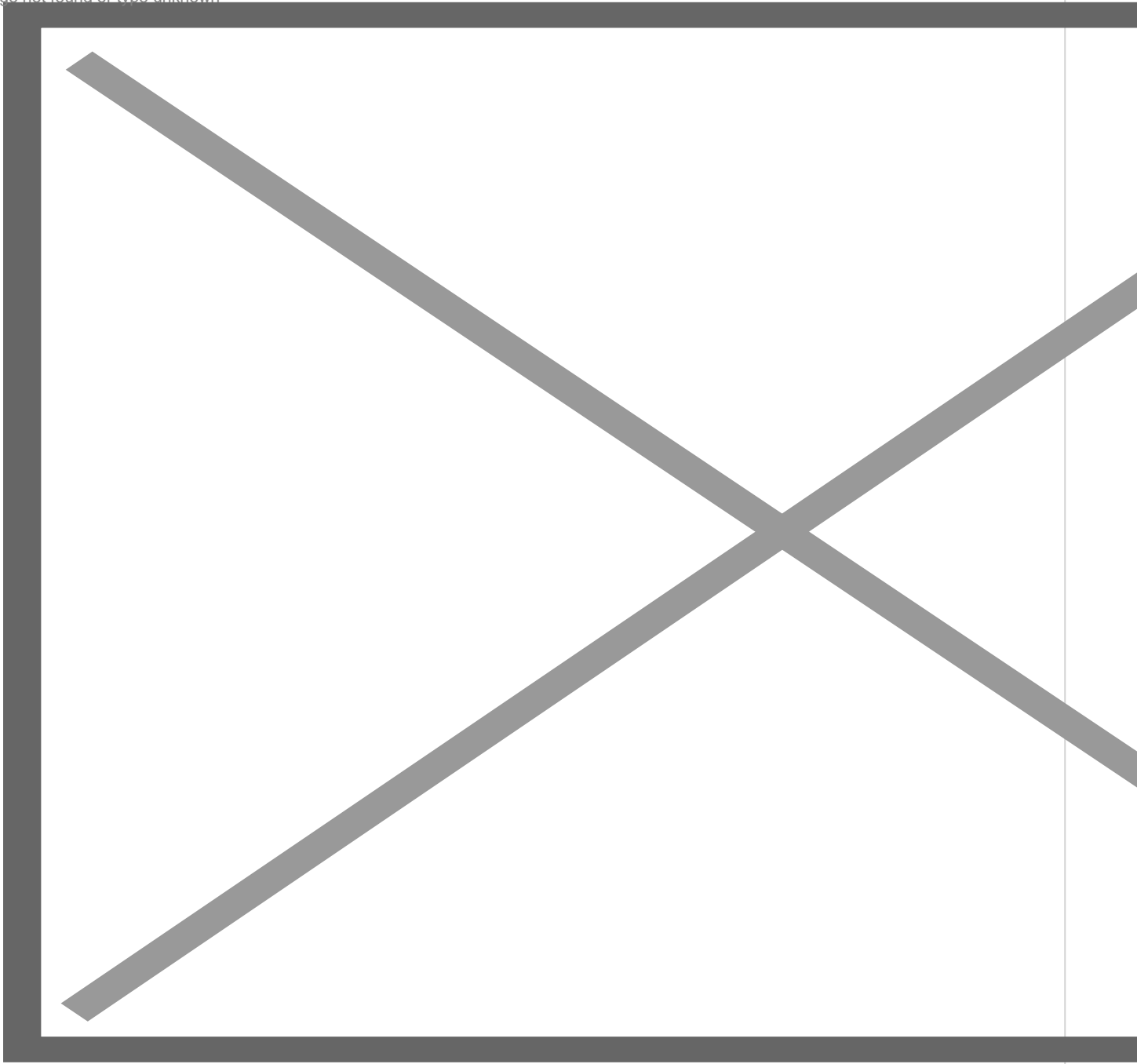


*Japan mourns during funeral for
former Prime Minister Shinzo
Abe*

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Tokyo, July 12 (RHC)-- With prayers and flowers, Japan on Tuesday said farewell to Shinzo Abe, the country's longest-serving premier.

Family and friends of Shinzo Abe, the assassinated former prime minister of Japan, gathered at a temple in the capital, Tokyo, for a private funeral, as mourners outside condemned the leader's "despicable" murder.

Although the funeral rites on Tuesday were for family members and close associates only, long lines of people, some dressed in black, came to the Zojoji Temple to pay their respects.

The hearse carrying Abe's body drove through central Tokyo and passed a number of significant buildings, including Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) headquarters, the prime minister's residence and the parliament building.

Abe was shot at close range on Friday while giving a campaign speech in the city of Nara, two days before upper house elections that saw the LDP strengthen its hold on power.

The murder suspect, 41-year-old Tetsuya Yamagami, is in custody and has told police he targeted Abe because he believed the politician was linked to an organization he resented.

Satoshi Ninoyu, the chairman of the National Public Safety Commission, a cabinet position overseeing national police, pledged on Tuesday to hold a full review of any security failings.

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