

LOK SABHA

Monday, May 5, 1969/Vaisakha 15,
1891 (Saka)

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the
Clock.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

OBITUARY REFERENCE

DEMISE OF DR. ZAKIR HUSAIN, PRESIDENT
OF INDIA

MR SPEAKER : The hon. Prime
Minister.

**THE PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF
ATOMIC ENERGY AND MINISTER OF
PLANNING (SHRIMATI INDIRA
GANDHI) :** Mr Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak

with a heavy heart. The country has suffered a grievous loss, and the world has lost a man of vision and compassion. Dr. Zakir Husain was a wise guide to our people. He reflected the best in the heritage of civilised man. He was an unusual amalgam of steadfastness and gentleness, representing the finest flowering of the composite culture of our country.

It is rare to find so integrated a personality as Dr. Zakir Husain's. His life was rich and varied. Every visit to him, every conversation with him was an enriching experience, and I think, Sir, that that was the feeling of most people who met him. He was a learned scholar, a thinker and a writer of distinction. Interested in people and nature, he was a connoisseur of creative arts and had a deep and abiding interest in the finer things of life. With his wealth of knowledge and experience, he had a disarming simplicity. Although he rose to the highest positions in the land, he retained the humility of true greatness and was proud to describe himself as a mere teacher. He was so little attracted to pomp and power

that the high offices which he held had to be thrust upon him. He set the highest standards of conduct for himself, and every act and gesture of his was living proof of this high integrity, ennobling all around him. To the end of his days, he remained an elder statesman whose soft words of wisdom were heard in defence of all that is of enduring value in public life.

Many influences moulded his personality, the teaching of Islam and other great religions of our country and the world, the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi and other great seekers of freedom and light the liberal and humane philosophies of the West and the writings of the great poets and authors of all lands. He had an inquiring mind, not an accepting one. But he was free from dogma or narrowness of any kind and bent his fastidious intellect to a search for harmony and in the interests of a larger purpose.

It is two years since the nation elected him to this high office. I recall the controversy which was generated at that time. But I am sure that to-day every one in the country, without distinction of party, region or religion, would agree that Dr Zakir Husain adorned the office of President with dignity, distinction and unblemished integrity. We did not elect him because he was a Muslim by birth and faith. We elected him because he was the most eminent Indian we could think of to be the first citizen of our Republic. And in the manner in which he conducted himself as President and earlier as Vice-President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha, he vindicated India's basic commitment to democracy and secularism.

As President and representative of India, he made a deep impression on the statesmen and people of other countries, and earned greater esteem and friendship for India.

This evening we shall lay to rest a great India, who belongs to the long line of sages

and wise rulers of our ancient land. It is fitting that he should be laid to rest in an important centre of learning which he himself had built through his dedication and where practically every brick, book and tree he had chosen. He will be one with the soil, the flowers and the plants of the land he loved so much. Dr Zakir Husain was a man who wanted our country to become a garden and a school. His gracious presence is no more but his gentle words of deep conviction and his example of dedication, compassion and tolerance will remain in our memory and become part of our conscience.

Mr Speaker, as the Head of the Government I naturally mourn the death of the President. In the many difficult crises through which the country has passed during his brief tenure, he was a source of strength to my Government. But I remember him from the olden days of our freedom struggle. I remember also his long-standing comradeship with my father and other eminent leaders. This was a partnership which bound together all classes and castes, the old and the young in a common—cause the unity, the freedom and the welfare of our people.

In paying homage to Dr. Zakir Husain, let us rededicate ourselves to our cherished values and to our unfinished tasks.

May I, Sir, on behalf of the Government and also on behalf of the whole House, request you to be good enough to convey to Dr. Zakir Husain's family our sincerest condolences as also the assurance that we share their sorrow ?

May I move a Resolution at this stage ?
Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Lok Sabha, assembled under the shadow of a national tragedy, expresses its profound sense of sorrow at the sudden death of the President of India, Dr. Zakir Husain, and pledges itself to promote the high ideals of patriotism, national unity, secularism and the service of humanity which he upheld."

SHRI M. R. MASANI (Rajkot) : Mr Speaker, Sir, in grief we are united. The

Leader of the House has spoken for all of us. I would like, on behalf of my Party to associate ourselves with what has fallen from her lips and also with the Resolution that has been placed before the House.

Sir, it is now more than thirty years that I recall first meeting Dr Zakir Husain. Most of the time that I knew him, I knew him as an educationist. It was in that capacity that many of us came to appreciate him and admire him.

I remember, in the early forties, or the mid-forties when he was concerned with establishing the Jamia Millia, I had the privilege to be of a little help to him in placing that establishment on a well-endowed and stable basis.

And then, later on, I knew him as Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh University, later as Governor of Bihar and then as Vice-President.

As the Prime Minister had said, Sir, he was an embodiment of culture, of patriotism and love of the country, of gentleness and humility.

As the Prime Minister recalled, in 1967 we, on this side of the House, were unable to concur in his election as President. That, Sir, was based on broad political considerations and the national interest as we conceived it. And it was done, so far as some of us were concerned, with great regret, because of the personal regard we had for the man.

He was a great Gandhian and a great democrat and he understood this and I can testify to the fact that he did not allow that incident to colour or mar in the slightest the personal relations he had with some of us. I remember only a few months ago, a long, intimate conversation I had with him when he shared with me his concern at the state of the country and the nation.

A commentator of All India Radio said on Saturday night that he hated to think of Dr Zakir Husain as belonging to the world of politics. He said that "neither temperamentally nor intellectually did he belong to that shady world." Perhaps the way in