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DEATH OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Statement by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

I have learned with shock and deep regret of the death today of Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Prime Minister of India.

He took office at a testing time, having to succeed the late Jawaharlal Nehru who had been Prime Minister for a long while and had made a particular place for himself in Indian and international affairs. Lal Bahadur Shastri established himself as a leader in his own right, and in his all too brief period as Prime Minister he had to grapple with many acute problems, some involving the international relations and security of his country, and some the continued economic and social progress of India. At the time of his death he had just concluded negotiations with the President of Pakistan designed to ease the tension between the two countries and to open the way to further agreement. In domestic affairs, his government was faced with a most severe drought and the great shortage of food which had resulted.

I was in touch with Lal Bahadur Shastri at various times during his term as Prime Minister, and I had the great pleasure of meeting him and working with him in London at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' meeting last year. I had the most cordial relations with him throughout his term. Like all the people of Australia, I deeply regret his passing and express my sympathies for his family and all the people of India.

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CANBERRA,

11th January, 1966.