

CABINET CHANGES

THERE have been few striking changes in the personnel of the Central Ministry though there has been some reshuffling of the portfolios. Mr. S. K. Patil's appointment to the Ministry of Irrigation and Power should bring dynamic leadership to this very important sphere where real progress has been made during the First Five-Year Plan. Some of the biggest Hydro-electric projects have still to be completed and new ones like Rihand, Chambal and Nagarjunasagar will be taken up in the years to come. Another important change is the appointment of Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon to the Ministry of Defence which had been held by Mr. K. N. Katju and later by the Prime Minister. This Ministry takes for the army, the navy and the air force a substantial slice of the federal budget. The difficulty with defence is that weapons of war change so fast that the most recent arms become obsolete within a few years. The aeroplane is itself in danger of being superseded by the long range guided missile and the British Navy has abandoned battleships in favour of aircraft carriers. India has yet to get her first carrier and we have no submarines. We have jet fighter planes but we are still to acquire jet bombers. It may be asked why we need to join the arms race with wealthier and more industrialised countries. The answer is that we cannot be absolute pacifists while neighbouring countries continue to arm themselves. The habit of not thinking in military terms is, however, so strong in India that debates on defence in the Central Parliament are rare and very little interest is taken in the subject by the general public. Yet it is important that the topic should not be neglected because modern armies cannot do without civilian support and to some extent the economy of the country is affected by the demands of the military on our industrial potential. Mr. Menon is, however, to maintain his close association with External Affairs and to continue to represent India abroad when required.