

ensure a continuity of tradition and policy. If anything, the transition is bound to be smoother than if a leader of some other constituent of the Janata combine than of the Congress (O) heads the new Government.

Mr. Desai brings a high degree of rectitude, a reputation for incorruptibility and rich and varied administrative experience to the exacting office of Prime Minister of this vast country with its myriad problems. Critics have in the past no doubt dubbed him domineering, inflexible, and intolerant—an image also possibly projected by his rigid personal austerity in many matters. But the Morarji of to-day may not be the Home Minister of Bombay of two decades ago who waged a puritan war on Bombay's permissive ways and is said to have conceded that it takes all sorts to make a world. The years and the ordeals should have mellowed him while his Gandhian readiness not to nurture the least bitterness against Mrs. Gandhi for his detention during the Emergency does speak of his high-mindedness.

The exalted and responsible office that Mr. Desai has taken on now calls for his summoning powers of compromise and accommodation of varied pulls and pressures from within and without his party. He has also to equal if not better the outstanding record (despite the ugly aberrations of the Emergency), achieved by his predecessor in office, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, particularly in economic administration, maintenance of discipline in all walks of national life and sound foreign relations, if his party is to justify the people's mandate and fulfil the promise of better government and bread and freedom for all. Whatever else may be against him, it is certainly not his age for, even at 81, he looks fitter and more alert than many others half his age. The rare combination of ability, integrity and a stern sense of realism that distinguishes his make-up should help him steer the ship of state competently as long as he is assured of the necessary support from those concerned. The entire nation will wish him well.

The New Prime Minister

OCTOGENARIAN MORARJI RAM-CHHODJI Desai who was elected leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party has become the Prime Minister of India—at last. For the high office had been almost within his grasp and yet eluded him on two former occasions, when the successors to Jawaharlal Nehru and to Lal Bahadur Shastri were being chosen. Mr. Desai's election as leader now was the obvious choice of the Janata Party because it was brought to power under his chairmanship. But some serious doubts over it seem to have been entertained at one stage, with the name of Mr. Jagjivan Ram, the Chairman of the Congress for Democracy, also being proposed rather strongly and said to have been favoured by the Jan Sangh constituent of the Janata Party. But through the good offices of Mr. J. P. Narayan and Acharya Kripalani the hurdle was overcome, though not smoothly as is evident from the non-participation of Mr. Jagjivan Ram in the meeting of the Janata Party and its electoral allies, that elected the leader. Contrary to earlier expectations, the CFD has also decided to function as a separate group in Parliament and not merge with the Janata Party. It looks as if the price sought by the CFD leader for the merger was the Prime Ministership for himself.

Vaulting ambition comes natural to every politician, but the Janata Party with 270 members of Parliament to back it could hardly be expected to accommodate Mr. Jagjivan Ram with barely 28 members behind him. Not to speak of the irony of electing as Prime Minister one who was till the other day part of the administration that imposed the Emergency (with its excesses) in preference to an outstanding Janata leader who had suffered long incarceration under that Emergency. While Mr. Jagjivan Ram's administrative competence and other political reasons might well have commended him to many in the Janata Party, they were probably reminded by their friends and colleagues that by his shrewdly timed exit from the Congress and his electoral understanding with the Opposition groups, he had just managed to save himself and his adherents from the Janata tornado that swept the North in the elections. It might well be Mr. Jagjivan Ram's thinking that, by keeping the CFD separate from the Janata Party, it will have the chance to grow in numbers should some Congress members opt to move into his group to enable him in due course to bargain from greater strength with any other group that may be in power then or would be making a bid for it. There is nothing surprising or abnormal in all this. But at the moment it does not appear that the Janata Party is so dependent on the CFD for its survival in office as to have to make sacrifices, as its 270 members and the backing of its other allies ensure a safe enough working majority for it, at any rate for the time being.

The 30-year-rule at the Centre of the freedom-winning Congress Party has come to an end, and the Janata Party has taken over the reins of power. But the Prime Ministership of Mr. Morarji Desai, authentic Gandhian, veteran Congressman and freedom-fighter as well as leading participant in Congress Governments at State and Central levels, may still