

ance, now that the South has voted very differently, is one which the Janata Dal has to approach with a great deal of sensitivity.

## The new Prime Minister

IN THE EYES of most people, Mr. V. P. Singh as the leader of the Janata Dal and Prime Minister is a first class choice. The electoral verdict that amounted to a rejection of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's Congress(I) Government was in a large measure a vote for him. In the momentous developments leading to a change of government at the Centre, his was the most significant role. When he resigned as Minister two years ago on the issue of corruption in high places, the Rajiv Gandhi administration lost its shine and reputation for honesty. And the Opposition that was looking for an alternative leader to offer to the people rallied round Mr. V. P. Singh even if some of the leaders were not quite reconciled to his rise. When the time of reckoning came, a large part of the electorate, particularly in the North, which turned away from the Congress(I) saw in his integrity and sincerity something that was refreshing and strikingly attractive. Yet, if the National Front and the Janata Dal needed some time to achieve a consensus in the choice, it not only brings out the unbridled personal ambitions and jealousies of some of the other leaders but also the amorphous character of the Janata Dal. There were also disquieting reports of the play of money and non-political forces but these fortunately, and for the time being at least, have been shown their place. The strange sequence of Mr. V. P. Singh proposing and Mr. Chandrasekhar seconding Mr. Devi Lal who in no time thereafter proposed Mr. V. P. Singh seems to have been part of a plan for the nonce to play up to the personal ego of the one time "Young Turk" and leave him in the cold minutes later. And the statements soon after by Mr. Chandrasekhar who regards the election a coup of sorts go to show that the process of reconciliation is not going to be all that easy. Any other outcome would, of course, have amounted to robbing the November verdict of its real meaning. With his image that stands undiminished in the public eye despite the several attempts to smudge it in the recent period and his credentials for running the administration established by his highly successful stewardship of the Finance Ministry, the people can now look forward to Mr. V. P. Singh providing a good government.

Even the immediate challenges that Mr. V. P. Singh faces cannot be underrated. The serious business of government formation is to be viewed against the fact that the Janata Dal is an amalgam of distinct groups with ambitious leaders. And running it on the basis of support from the Bharatiya Janata Party, on the one side, and the CPI(M), CPI and other parties of the Left, on the other, is going to be extremely tricky. Mr. V. P. Singh has been asked to seek a vote of confidence in the space of 30 days. If anybody can pull it off, it is Mr. Singh who, it is worth recalling, has been able to rally them all under his persuasive leadership before the elections. One would hope the new experiment succeeds and helps clean the Central administration of all the rubbish that has been accumulating over the last few years. A very important positive step would be to push for real reconciliation in Punjab — a task which, with the change of regime, should pose fewer problems. And the question of holding the regional bal-