

On Men & Matters

— R. V.

HITENDRA DESAI

MR. HITENDRA DESAI, who joins the Union Cabinet, is a seasoned politician with maturity, wisdom and a long record of devoted public service. Born on 9th August, 1915, Mr. Hitendra Desai tread the routine path of Indian politics entering the Bar, participating in the freedom movement, serving

as Minister in Bombay and Gujerat States and ultimately becoming the Chief Minister of Gujerat in 1965. Soft-spoken, friendly and affable by temperament, Mr. Hitendra Desai maintained the best relations with the Opposition in the State. He was easily the most popular Chief Minister of his time. A man of sound judgment free from pedantry and ostentation, he gave a spurt to industrial and economic development and a fine administration to Gujerat.

The unfortunate rift in the Congress in 1969 drew him to the side of his then leader, Mr. Morarji Desai and for a while Hitendra was caught in a great mental conflict between personal loyalty to his leader and his progressive political persuasions. He resolved the tangle by swinging over to the National Congress under the leadership of Mrs.

Gandhi and thereafter devoted his entire energy to strengthening the organisation. The solid backing to the Congress built up in the traditional pro-Morarji Desai State of Gujerat is, in no small measure, due to Hitendra Desai's patient and persevering efforts. That he did not become Gujerat's Chief Minister again is to some extent due to the rub between the faithful and the converted that one witnesses in many other States also. But what is a loss to Gujerat is a positive gain to the nation. Mr. Hitendra Desai's rich experience, suave manners, gentle spirit of accommodation and unsullied reputation for integrity will stand him in good stead in the wider field of activity awaiting him. Housing, which is a prime necessity of life, will, we trust, receive under his care the dynamic thrust it needs urgently today.

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mism of the great scientist that he not only got to grips with the problems at once, but found himself deeply committed to the sustenance of the projects. We, in the South of India, have particular reason to remember his services to the Kalkkham First Breeder Reactor and Power Plant with gratitude. While thus he supported all our efforts at utilising atomic energy for peaceful purposes, he was equally worried about the consequences of superior technology resulting in the build-up of nuclear arsenals. He was one of the guiding stars of the Pugwash Movement and the Convener of the Indian Pugwash Committee.

The Rockets of Thumba

The other field in which Sarabhai left a distinct impress was India's Space Programme. As Chairman of the Indian National Committee for Space Research, he was primarily responsible for the setting up of the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station near Trivandrum. In January, 1964, the U.N. deputed a scientific team consisting of representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Japan, Sweden, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. for inspecting the facilities available at Thumba and on their recommendation the

TERLS was accepted as an International Facility. Scientists from the U.K., France, West Germany and Japan have already used this facility for rocket experiments of upper atmosphere in the equatorial region. The Thumba Station is now fully equipped with vehicle and payload assembly, tracking radar, tone-ranging system, telemetry receiving station, and communications, computation and design facilities to support rocket experiments. The Rohini and Menaka rockets of Thumba, wholly Indian in structure, have conducted several hundred flight tests already.

The 'Vision of a Resurgent India'

Two other space research stations that owe their existence in a large measure to Sarabhai are the SHAR and ESCES. The SHAR is the station that monitors the Aryabhata Earth Satellite and is situated in an area of 12,000 hectares at Sriharikota Island in the Bay of Bengal, north of Pulicat Lake in Andhra Pradesh. The ESCES is the Experimental Satellite Communication Earth Station in Ahmedabad that helps the SITE programme which has become such an important link in the International Rural Development Scheme of the Government of India. In fact, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, saw in these

space programmes, "the vision of a resurgent India, an India struggling to liberate herself from the shackles of poverty and ignorance and to harness the strength and buoyancy of modern science and technology for the betterment of her 550 million people."

A Humanist, above all

New India looked up to him to give a commanding lead, the kind of precept that only an aristocrat, humanist and a scientist like Vikram Sarabhai could provide. But Fate willed otherwise. A great and purposeful career was cut short by the cold hand of death at the Kovalam Palace Suite in Trivandrum where Dr. Sarabhai passed away peacefully while asleep in the early hours of December 30, 1971. The President of India decorated him with the insignia of Padma Vibhushan posthumously; this was received by his wife, Smt. Mrinalini Sarabhai, herself a very talented artiste and a scion of a reputed family of patriots, jurists and social workers in Madras. But there could be no greater decoration for Dr. Vikram Sarabhai than the several scintillating institutions that are studded all over the country which owe both their conception and their evolution to this truly great genius of contemporary India.