



Morarji Desai

Why in News

Recently, the **125th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Morarji Desai** was observed.

- He was the 4th Prime Minister (1977-79) and the first non-Congress Prime Minister of India.

Key Points

▪ Early Life:

- Shri Morarji Desai was born on 29th February, 1896 in Bhadeli village, now in the Bular district of Gujarat.
- After graduating in 1918 from the Wilson Civil Service in Bombay, he served as a Deputy Collector for twelve years.

▪ Contribution in Freedom Struggle:

◦ Joined Congress:

- In 1930, when India was in the midst of the **Civil Disobedience Movement** launched by Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Desai, having lost his confidence in the British sense of justice, **decided to resign from Government service and to plunge into the struggle.**
- Shri Desai was **imprisoned thrice** during the freedom struggle. He became a Member of the All India Congress Committee in 1931 and was Secretary of the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee until 1937.

◦ Participation In Individual Satyagraha:

- He was **detained in the individual Satyagraha** launched by Mahatma Gandhi, released in October, 1941 and detained again in August, 1942 at the time of the **Quit India Movement.**

▪ Political Career:

- In 1952, he became the **Chief Minister of Bombay.**
- He joined the **Union Cabinet as Minister for Commerce and Industry** in November, 1956. Later, he took the Finance portfolio in March, 1958.
- In 1963, he resigned from the **Union Cabinet under the Kamaraj Plan. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri**, who succeeded Pt. Nehru, as Prime Minister, **persuaded him to become Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission** for restructuring the administrative system.

- **According to Kamaraj Plan**, it was proposed that all senior Congress leaders should resign from their posts and devote all their energy to the revitalization of the Congress.

- Desai was **arrested and detained on 26th June, 1975, when Emergency was declared.** He went on an indefinite hunger strike to support the **Nav Nirman movement of Gujarat.**

- **Nav Nirman Andolan** was a socio-political movement in 1974 in Gujarat by students and middle-class people against economic crisis and corruption in public life.
- He was later unanimously elected as Leader of the Janata Party in Parliament and was sworn in as the **Prime Minister of India on 24th March, 1977.**
- **His Ideology:**
 - **Against Inequality:** According to him, unless the poor and the under privileged living in villages and towns enjoy a decent standard of life, the talk of socialism will not have much meaning. Shri Desai gave concrete expression to his anxiety by enacting progressive legislation to ameliorate the hardships of peasants and tenants.
 - **Supported Austerity:** Shri Desai translated into action what he had professed in matters of economic planning and fiscal administration. In order to meet the needs of defense and development, he raised large revenues, reduced wasteful expenditure and promoted austerity in Government expenditure on administration. He kept **deficit financing** very low by enforcing financial discipline. He brought curbs on extravagant living of the privileged section of society.
 - **Rule of Law:** As Prime Minister, Shri Desai was keen that the people of India must be helped to become fearless to an extent where even if the highest in the land commits a wrong, the humblest should be able to point it out to him. "No one, not even the Prime Minister", he was repeatedly said, should be above the law of the land".
 - **Strict Disciplinarian:** For him, truth was an article of faith and not an expediency. He seldom allowed his principles to be subordinated to the exigencies of the situation.

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