

Sunday Standard 21/3/71

## We'll keep out of blocs — Masani

NEW DELHI, March 20.

SWATANTRA Party president M. R. Masani today ruled out his party joining any bloc in Parliament.

"It is no longer worth pursuing," Mr. Masani told newsmen at the end of the meeting of the Central Parliamentary Board of the party here.

He said the Board had directed the party members in Parliament to function on their own and articulate the distinctive Swatantra approach and policies.

Mr. Masani, however, made it clear that this decision did not bind the party's State units. They were free to work out adjustments or alignments.

He also did not rule out the possibility of the Swatantra leadership considering in future the party's merger with any new party, although it would not take any initiative in the matter.

Mr. Masani said the party's National Executive and General Council will meet on April 17 and 18 either at Bombay or Madras to make an "agonising reappraisal" of the results.

The Parliamentary Board felt the newly elected Lok Sabha did not reflect fairly the will of the people, which had been "grossly distorted by an absurd over-representation of the ruling party and a cruel under-representation of all opposition groups in terms of the popular support mobilised by them."

It pointed out that while the New Congress had to pull only 180,144 votes to get a member elected to the new Lok Sabha, the Swatantra party had to poll 553,683 votes.

### Distortion

Therefore, the Board felt, the claim that the country had given the Prime Minister and her party a mandate to amend the constitution as they wished was unfounded and belied by the voting figures.

The Prime Minister and her party had not succeeded in getting more than 43.64 per cent of the votes polled and had failed to reach anywhere near getting a majority of those who voted or even one-fourth of the entire electorate.

A proportional representation, Mr. Masani felt would be simple and would not distort the will of the people. While the distortion had taken place in favour of the New Congress at the national level, the distortion had benefitted the CPI (M) in West Bengal, he said.

Asked whether he thought the four-party alliance was a mistake, Mr. Masani said it was very good when it was adumbrated in June 1970. It had always been the party's view that a democratic alternative was what the country needed and that nothing less than a full-fledged alliance with an agreed programme could provide such an alternative.

"The abandonment of the effort at a common programme had proved to be a gift to the Prime Minister and her party who had used it with devastating effect throughout the campaign."

Asked whether he agreed with the view that the party could have won more seats if it had contested the elections alone, Mr. Masani said in some constituencies the party won because of the Front and in some other lost for the same reason. In his own constituency of Rajkot, the Front partners scuttled his election, he said.

—UNI.

### Swat. leader

NEW DELHI, March 20.

Mr. P. K. Deo, Swatantra member from Orissa, was today elected leader of the eight-member Swatantra group in the Lok Sabha.

Mr. H. M. Patel will be the deputy leader and Mr. Pilo Modi, secretary and whip.

The Swatantra Parliamentary Party which met here today also elected Mr. Dahyabhai Patel chairman of the party in Parliament.

—UNI.

*Personal*