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Swatantra against bloc or front in Parliament

NEW DELHI, March 20.

THE Swatantra Party has decided against forming any bloc or front in Parliament with its alliance partners.

"Experience has shown that the idea of a bloc is no longer worth pursuing," Mr. M. R. Masani, the Swatantra chairman, told pressmen here after a meeting of the party's Central Parliamentary Board today.

A statement unanimously adopted by the board directed the party members in Parliament to "function on their own and articulate the distinctive Swatantra approach and policies."

PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Mr. Masani made it clear at the same time that the decision would apply only to its parliamentary group, reconstituted today with Mr. Dahyabhai Patel as its chairman in place of Mr. N. G. Ranga, who was defeated at the polls.

The decision not to join hands with its electoral allies—the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, and the SSP—inside Parliament did not necessarily mean that other party units should not form their own adjustments and alignments. They could do so "for State purposes and if there are elections to the Assembly."

It was also clarified that the decision does not mean "we are averse to a merger of our parties into a new party." Replying to a question whether the Swatantra would take the initiative for a merger, Mr. Masani said he did not think so "unless the general council of the party decides otherwise."

The general council as also the na-

tional executive of the party have been convened to meet by the middle of next month, either in Madras or in Bombay. On the agenda would be an "agonising reappraisal" of the poll results that has left the Swatantra completely routed.

At today's parliamentary board meeting, there was only a "preliminary" review of the elections. Some "fundamental thinking" still required to be done, Mr. Masani said. The council and the executive meetings are likely to be held for this purpose, tentatively on April 17 and 18.

BOARD "INTRIGUED"

The board said that the party was "intrigued" to note the "incredibly huge majorities" for the ruling Congress which "appear to bear little relation to all other manifestations of public opinion."

While accepting the popular verdict, the Swatantra Parliamentary Board said, "The attempt to claim that the Prime Minister and her party have been given a mandate to amend the Constitution as they wish is unfounded and belied by the figures of voting."

Mrs. Gandhi's was still a "minority" Government, claimed Mr. Masani for the ruling Congress had not succeeded in getting more than 43.64 per cent. of the votes polled. It had failed to reach anywhere near getting a majority of those who voted or even one-fourth of the entire electorate.

The Swatantra Party took the view that the newly-elected Lok Sabha "does not reflect fairly the will of the people, which has been grossly distorted by an absurd over-representation of the ruling party and a cruel under-representation of all Opposition groups, including the Swatantra Party, in terms of the popular support mobilised by them."

Mr. Masani attributed this "distortion" to the election system, dubbing it "faulty and archaic." He stood instead for the system of proportional representation.

In one respect, the elections had made the Government "clearly accountable" to the people for its actions. It could "no longer take shelter behind any excuse such as dependence on the communists and other parties."

The Parliamentary Board said the success of the ruling party was due to "revival of the cult of personality and the use of money power."

"Among the reasons for the defeat of the alliance candidates was the absence of a common programme." This had proved to be "a gift to the Prime Minister." The Swatantra Party had been insisting on a common programme and was opposed to the slogan of "Indira hatao," Mr. Masani said.—P.T.I.

Masani says he is a victim of the front

NEW DELHI, March 20: An architect of the four-party alliance, Mr. M. R. Masani (Swa.), said today he was one of its victims.

The Swatantra Party chairman was asked at a press conference here if the alliance had done any good to his party.

The front had "mixed" results, he said. Surely, the Swatantra, had gained from its electoral allies in certain constituencies, while in others it had the adverse effect.

"Take my own case," said Mr. Masani who lost his Rajkot seat. "I am one of the victims of the front, even though I am its architect."—P.T.I.

Swatantra group 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. Piloo Modi, secretary and whip.

The Swatantra parliamentary party today elected Mr. Dahyabhai Patel chairman of the party in Parliament.—U.N.I.