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Swatantra party heading for split

"The Times of India" News Service

NEW DELHI, August 5.

THE Swatantra Party was today heading for a split following the decision by its national convention to merge the party with the Bhartiya Lok Dal to be launched on August 29.

Amidst noisy scenes marked by a scuffle among some delegates, the national convention adopted a resolution by 407 votes to 53 authorising the party President, Mr. Piloo Mody, to dissolve the party and merge it with the new party on a date to be decided in consultation with the Swatantra national executive.

The group led by Mr. M. R. Ma-

sani, former Chairman of the party, voted against the merger resolution. Later, at a news conference addressed by Mr. Masani, representatives of the Swatantra units in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Delhi and Haryana announced their intention to keep the party alive in these states if it was eventually merged with the BLD.

Mr. Masani, who expressed complete disagreement with his senior colleagues on the merger issue, accused the leadership of having tampered with the party constitution to change the composition of the national convention. As a result, U.P. had been given undue weightage at the convention. Of the 483 delegates who were originally present from all over the country, 209 came from U.P. He was confident that the result at the convention would have been different if the U.P. delegation had not been so large. Things had been managed in such a way as to give preponderance to U.P.

HEATED EXCHANGES

Mr. Masani said that the trouble began at the convention when Mr. M. L. Jatav, acting president of the Delhi unit of the party, questioned the authenticity of delegates from U.P. He asked if the party had such a popular base in U.P., why did it fare so miserably in the assembly elections early this year. This evoked strong protests from Mr. H. K. Srivastava, a member of the national executive from U.P., and led to a scuffle on the platform.

According to other delegates, the proceedings of the convention were marked by heated exchanges between the pro-Masani group and the pro-

Masani sceptical of new party

Continued from page 1 column 5

mergerists led by Mr. Mody who had the full support of party leaders from Andhra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat, Orissa and U.P.

Although the Masani group found itself in a hopeless minority, it is determined to retain the party's identity at least in five states after the national executive formally fixes the date for dissolution and merger with the BLD.

Mr. Masani said that the new party would not provide a national alternative as claimed by Mr. Mody and others. With the Congress (O) and the Jana Sangh having refused to merge themselves with the BLD, how could it be possible to evolve a two-party system? he asked. So long as the Jana Sangh and the Cong (O) were in existence, the new party would be a non-starter. The only national alternative could be provided by Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan. The new party would not be able to implement the Swatantra programme and ideology.

He said there was no question of a split or indiscipline in the party now. But if it was dissolved in terms of the convention resolution, the various units opposing the merger move would decide their future course of action.

At Mr. Masani's news conference, a resolution adopted by the Swatantra state council in Maharashtra on July 6 was read out. It said that in the event of a resolution to dissolve the party being adopted by the national convention, the Maharashtra unit would continue to retain its identity as the Swatantra party and also its flag.

Mr. Mody who released the resolution of the convention at a separate news conference said that he would call the national executive two days before the launching of the BLD and announce the party's dissolution almost simultaneously with the formation of the new party.

The resolution welcomed the move to form a national alternative by the amalgamation of all political forces, other than the Congress and the Communist Parties. It expressed satisfaction over the fact that a common programme had been evolved for the new party acceptable to the Swatantra. It said that a final announcement about the dissolution of the Swatantra party should be made by Mr. Mody after the national executive had reviewed the situation. The convention was confident, that the new party would further the objectives of the Swatantra party.

The resolution said that those members who did not want to join the new party would be free to carry on such non-partisan activities "which eschew all elections as they may choose, in any name other than the Swatantra."

The convention authorised Mr. Mody to inform the Chief Election Commissioner about the proposed dissolution of the party and request him to freeze the Swatantra symbol to avoid its undue exploitation.

Mr. Mody said that Mr. Masani was against the timing of the merger and not against the basic idea of forming a viable national alternative.

Notice of Resolution to be moved at the Seventh National Convention of the Swatantra Party on August 4 and 5, 1974 in New Delhi.

The Seventh National Convention of the Swatantra Party has carefully considered the proposal placed before it that the Swatantra Party be dissolved along with the similar dissolution of six other parties so as to facilitate the formation of a new Party.

The Convention notes that of the seven parties that are expected to dissolve to enable the formation of the new Party, the others being confined to particular States or parts of a State.

The Convention is firmly convinced that the Party's principles and policies continue to be valid and that had the policies of Government been formulated on the basis of the said principles, our country would not be in the present critical situation.

The Convention is equally convinced that the new Party will mark no advance in the search for a truly national alternative comprising as it does those who, though for the present have consented to get together on a general programme are bound to disagree in regard to the interpretation of a vague and general statement of policy.

Moreover, with opposition parties like the Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh continuing their individual existence, the objective of a two-party system and its electoral benefits will continue to elude us. On other hand, there is real danger of the ruling Congress on the one side and the Jan Sangh on the other being the direct beneficiaries of such a development.

The National Convention of the Swatantra Party does not consider the time or occasion opportune for the disappearance of the Swatantra Party from the Indian political scene and therefore **rejects** the proposal to dissolve the Party.

Proposed by:

Seconded by: