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The President's Report on political developments since
the General Council meeting in Madras on July 21, 1970

On 21st July, 1970, the General Council at its meeting in Madras - unanimously adopted a Resolution and authorised me to enter into appropriate arrangements for the consolidation of national democratic forces in the following terms :

" Recognising the grave threats facing the country, the General Council of the Swatantra Party welcomes the call given by the All-India Congress Committee of the Organisation Congress at its meeting in Delhi on 28th June, 1970, for a consolidation of national democratic forces to meet the threat of communist subversion and open up the path of ordered progress resulting in a better and richer life for the people. The Swatantra Party whole-heartedly responds to the Congress Party's appeal.

The Swatantra Party has been urging such a movement for the past twelve months since the possibilities of a worthwhile polarisation of forces in Indian politics opened up with the split in the Congress Party and the National Executive of the Swatantra Party adopted resolutions on the subject at its meetings on August 30, 1969, and February 16, 1970:

The issues on the basis of which the AICC has invited all democrats and patriots to come together are :

- (a) the unity and security of India;
- (b) the defence of the constitutional liberties of the people and preservation of democratic institutions;
- (c) the maintenance of law and order; and
- (d) establishment of a secular society based on principles of social and economic justice and equality of status and ensuring effective opportunity to all to earn livelihood and attain a basic minimum standard of living.

The programme provides a constructive and pragmatic approach to the country's problems and a useful basis for discussion. While there would always be room for differences of opinion on details, the General Council responds positively to the AICC's call.

There is little time to lose and it is essential that concrete steps be taken forthwith for the consolidation of National Democratic forces. The General Council therefore authorises the President of the Party to enter into appropriate arrangements. "

In pursuance of the mandate given to me, I lost no time in developing contacts with leaders of other like-minded parties with a view to fostering the kind of development which was envisaged by our General Council. Unfortunately, the process of dithering on the part of the Congress(O) leaders that had started immediately after the passing of the AICC Resolution on June 28 continued unabated and little progress could therefore be made.

At last, after a long period of personal efforts, I wrote on 13th October to Mr. Nijalingappa, the President of the Congress(O), Mr. Atal Bihari, the President of the Jan Sangh, and Mr. Charan Singh, the President of the BKD, inviting them to join actively in performing two

essential fundamental tasks, viz., (1) the formation of a national democratic bloc in Parliament with a common leader and a common discipline on the basis of a concrete agreed programme based on the AICC Resolution of June 28; and

(2) the creation of an electoral pact with a common programme adopted by the Parties who would join in putting up only one candidate in each constituency in the General Elections, whether they were held in 1972 or earlier.

On 27th October, I wrote again to Mr. Nijalingappa, Mr. Morarji Desai, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Chaudhary Charan Singh, following up my earlier initiative and making it clear that we of the Swatantra Party were not interested in the SVD model which Dr. Ram Subhag Singh was then peddling. I pleaded with them that a meeting of the Presidents of the four parties, viz., Swatantra, Congress(O), the Jan Sangh and the BKD, should be called early in November before Parliament met.

Unfortunately, the only response I received from Mr. Nijalingappa was to be told that the Working Committee of their Party would be meeting on November 12 and 13 and that we would have to wait till then.

When the National Executive of our Party met in Delhi on 8th November, I reported to them on the absence of any progress and the National Executive adopted a Resolution expressing its sense of disappointment on the following terms :

"Having received a report from the President of the Party on his discussions and correspondence with the Presidents of the Congress(O), Jan Sangh and B.K.D., the National Executive recorded its disappointment at the absence of any progress and the failure to bring into existence a bloc of nationalist and democratic parties and groups in Parliament in time for the session commencing on 9th November, 1970.

While approving the initiative taken by the Party's President, the Executive felt that the ball was squarely in the court of the Congress(O), which, having adopted its AICC Resolution of June 28, was failing to cooperate in its implementation.

The Executive reiterated the Party's well-known opposition to the resort to heterogeneous, hotch-potch and opportunistic combinations and once again reaffirmed its willingness to cooperate with all those parties and groups which were prepared to go ahead on the basis of the AICC Resolution of June 28 as a provisional programme of agreed action.

The need for such coming together becomes all the more urgent in view of the possibility of an early dissolution of Parliament."

On the 10th of November, I wrote to Mr. Nijalingappa conveying our National Executive's view and pointing out that, now that the opportunity to form a bloc in Parliament had been lost, greater importance should be attached to our second proposal - the commencement of discussions for the creation of an electoral pact for the next General Elections which might confront us very shortly.

On 14th November, Mr. Nijalingappa wrote to me that the Congress Working Committee had at its recent meeting decided that "all democratic parties should work together in close cooperation in order to effectively meet the grave threat to democracy..... whether in regard to mid-term

poll or any other important matter including our functioning in Parliament. It will be seen that this letter contained no commitment of any kind to move ahead in a concrete manner.

On 17th November, I therefore wrote to Mr. Nijalingappa conveying to him our deep disappointment at this continuing procrastination.

All these approaches seemed to produce no results. So, on 2nd December 1970, I sent the Congress(0) President a letter that set a time limit for the continuance of our negotiations and made it clear that if, by 31st December, 1970, firm arrangements were not made for a pact at the national level for elections to the Lok Sabha, we would reluctantly have to conclude that nothing was possible and to make our own dispositions. In the course of that letter I wrote :

"I am dropping you this line to share with you the concern that many of us feel about the way in which time is slipping by without any major breakthrough on our part towards our common objective.....

"I had also explained to you how, as the weeks pass, what we would all wish to see will become more and more difficult in so far as an electoral pact for the next General Elections to the Lok Sabha is concerned and you had reassured me that it was now a matter of a few days or at the most weeks.

"Quite frankly, if, by the end of 1970, firm arrangements are not made and set in train for a pact at the national level for election to the Lok Sabha, we shall reluctantly have to conclude that nothing is possible and make our dispositions accordingly. I do hope you will kindly see that any such inordinate delay in your Party taking a clear stand in this matter will be obviated. I have shown this letter to Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, President of the Jan Sangh, and he is in agreement with what has been said in the last two paragraphs of this letter. "

At last, on 20th December, it was found possible to persuade Mr. Nijalingappa, Mr. Morarji Desai and Mr. Vajpayee to agree to announce the formation of a Democratic Front to contest the next General Elections to the Lok Sabha. A draft announcement was agreed upon and it read as follows :

"Mr. S. Nijalingappa, President of the AICC, Mr. M.R. Masani, President of the Swatantra Party and Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, President of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, have announced the decision of their parties to form a Democratic Front to contest the next elections to the Lok Sabha.

In order to offer the country a democratic alternative which it so urgently needs we have agreed to come together to fight the elections on an agreed programme of action. We appeal to other democratic parties, groups and individuals to join the Front.

Our endeavour will be to put up one agreed candidate for each Lok Sabha constituency throughout the country who will be supported by all our parties.

The working out of an agreed programme, for which the AICC Resolution of June 28 will provide the basis, the allocation of constituencies and the nomination of candidates will be carried out by a Coordinating Committee of the Presidents of these and other parties and one other nominee of each President."

I sent a copy of this to Rajaji on the following day. From a perusal of the text it will be seen that all three of us had agreed to work together to prepare an agreed programme for which the AICC Resolution of June 28 would provide the basis.

Unfortunately, this step forward was followed by the usual vacillation and delay. The announcement of the formation of the Front was again put off, with the result that I had to depart for Bombay leaving a signed copy with Mr. Nijalingappa so that it could be released during my absence from Delhi.

On 25th December, I sent a telegram from Bombay to Mr. Nijalingappa, Mr. Morarji Desai and Mr. Vajpayee in which I urged that in view of the latest developments it was more than ever necessary that the announcement of the electoral alliance should precede the announcement of the dissolution.

Unfortunately, this too had no effect and the Prime Minister was able to announce the dissolution of Parliament the following day without our having announced the formation of the Front. We thus missed a valuable opportunity to take the initiative.

At last, on 1st January, 1971, Mr. Nijalingappa, Mr. Morarji Desai, Mr. Vajpayee and I met and it was agreed that the Presidents of the three Parties should meet the press together on Sunday, the 3rd of January, late in the evening after Mr. A.B. Vajpayee returned to Delhi from Ambala, where he had a speaking engagement that day. At the proposed Press Conference which we had called, it was intended to issue the Statement referred to earlier. Mr. Vajpayee left a signed copy of the statement with me in case he was delayed.

At this meeting on the 1st, it was also agreed that Mr. Morarji Desai, Mr. Ashok Mehta, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and I should start work immediately on the text of an agreed programme of action which would be finalised by the Coordinating Committee when it met on 15th January and which would be presented as the Election Manifesto of the Democratic Front. On the 15th of January, the Coordinating Committee was also to receive a list of candidates prepared by each Party and make the necessary adjustments and allocations of constituencies and finalise the nomination of candidates.

On the 3rd of January, however, things began to go wrong. Several leaders of the SSP for whom Mr. Nijalingappa had been waiting arrived in Delhi, including Mr. George Fernandes, Mr. Madhu Limaye, Mr. Ram Sevak Yadav, Mr. Rabi Ray and Mr. Raj Narain. They spent the entire afternoon at the Congress President's residence working, as a Delhi newspaper described it, like "a demolition squad" and by evening they had virtually broken down his resistance and persuaded him to agree to let the SSP enter the Alliance and, in return, to drop the agreed programme and also to drop the word "democratic", which the SSP considered objectionable, wherever it was mentioned in the draft Statement referred to above. On learning of this, I called in for consultations Mr. Dhyabhai Patel and Mr. H.P. Nanda who were then in Delhi. We agreed we could not be a party to any such move.

That evening, when I went an hour before the press conference to Mr. Nijalingappa's place, carrying the requisite number of copies of our Statement to be released to the press, I found the SSP leaders in possession of Mr. Nijalingappa's office along with Dr. Ram Subhag Singh. Mr. Nijalingappa threw up his hands in helplessness and told me that it was for me to come to some settlement with the SSP leaders.

In the course of the discussion that followed, I firmly declined to agree to a mere electoral adjustment without a common programme. When the deadlock could not be resolved, I left Mr. Nijalingappa's place after informing him that I was unable to agree to such a scuttling of the Alliance without consulting my colleagues of the Party's National Executive. Mr. Nijalingappa initially told the press to go away as I had asked for time to consult my Executive when it met in Madras on the 13th of January.

A little later, however, Mr. Vajpayee turned up from Anbala. He and Dr. Ram Subhag Singh got together and decided that the SSP's statement should be accepted on the spot and edited the Statement accordingly. It was given to the Press in the following words :

"Mr. Nijalingappa, President, All-India Congress Committee; Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, President, Bharatiya Jan Sangh; Mr. Ram Sevak Yadav, Chairman, Central Parliamentary Board, SSP; and Mr. George Fernandes, General Secretary, SSP, have announced the decision of their parties to form a front to contest the election to Lok Sabha with a view to defeating the present Government which is taking the country in an authoritarian and anti-democratic direction.

In order to offer the country an alternative which it urgently needs, we have agreed to come together to contest the elections. We appeal to other parties, groups and individuals who share these objectives to join us.

Our endeavour will be to put up one agreed candidate for each Lok Sabha constituency throughout the country who will be supported by all our parties.

The allocation of constituencies and the nomination of candidates will be carried out by a co-ordinating committee of these and other co-operating parties."

Mr. Vajpayee read this statement to the press and cheerfully told them:

"We were three yesterday and we are still three today ---- the only difference is that Swatantra is not here but the SSP is here. "

The Jan Sangh President then went on to observe : "A common programme is needed only for an alternative government Did we not after the 1967 elections when the Congress Party was defeated in several States come together to chalk out common programmes and form governments ? "

Mr. Nijalingappa, on his part, explained the abandonment of a common programme by saying: "This is not the time. It is like pulling the cart before the horse. "

When the pressmen came to interview me at my residence later that evening to ask for my comments on the coup that had just taken place, I made the following statement to them :

"It is with deep disappointment that I shall have to leave for Bombay tomorrow morning.

For a long time now the Swatantra Party's stand has been well known that a democratic alternative to the present government is what the country needs. It is our view that nothing less than a full-fledged alliance with an agreed programme and one

agreed candidate in each constituency throughout the country supported by all the parties to the pact can provide such an alternative.

We thought this was well understood and therefore, as you are aware, after protracted discussions it was arranged and announced that the Presidents of the Congress(0) and the Jan Sangh and myself would meet the press this evening and announce the establishment of the Democratic Front in a statement the terms of which were agreed upon by all three of us.

Unfortunately, it would appear some last minute rethinking has once again led to vacillation.

What is now proposed at the instance of the SSP is an attempt at a mere electoral adjustment without a Democratic Front and without a common programme.

I have no authority from my Party to agree to this proposal or to anything short of a principled electoral pact of the kind that was intended to be announced. I shall, therefore, place this new proposal before the National Executive of my Party when it meets in Madras on the 13th instant. It will be for that body to define the Party's attitude to this development."

It is a matter of record that editorial comment was unanimously in support of the stand I had taken.

Faced with this development, I considered it my duty as President of the Party to advance the date of the meeting of the National Executive, which had then been fixed for 13th January, to January 8 so that the Party might be able to take an early decision on this new development.

When the National Executive met in Madras on January 8, a draft Resolution prepared by me in consultation with the Vice-President, Mr. Dandekar, and our General Secretary, Dr. Cooper, was placed before the meeting. It was meant to be a compromise formula and its operative part, after expressing deep disappointment at what had happened in Delhi on 3rd January 1971 and approving of the action taken by the President, recorded the Executive's decision that "the Party should enter into electoral adjustments with the Front formed in Delhi on 3rd January and authorised the President to arrange for such adjustments. "

If this proposal had been accepted, our Party would have been in a position to keep its options open, negotiate with the Front as a whole for a fair allocation of constituencies for our candidates and then decide whether or not to accept the adjustments that were offered to us.

As it happens, however, Prof. Ranga vigorously objected to this proposal and pressed for an amendment which would substitute the words -

"The Executive decided that the Party should join the Front formed in Delhi on 3rd January, 1971. "

This amendment received the support of Rajaji and a large majority of the members present. The draft Resolution was therefore amended accordingly.

On the 11th of January, I deputed Mr. Dandekar, our Vice-President, and Dr. R.C. Cooper, our General Secretary, to represent us on the Coordinating Committee which was to meet in Delhi for the allocation of constituencies. It is for our two colleagues, who performed a difficult

and trying task with great patience and tact, to tell the General Council of their experiences on that Committee, the result of which was that the other parties awarded themselves a large number of constituencies, while taking advantage of our decency and reasonableness to cut us down to a mere 62 candidates in place of about twice the number we would normally have put up.

It is for the General Council to come to their own conclusions about the effect of our forming the Front on the fate of our candidates. My own impression is that, while in some constituencies our candidates were undoubtedly helped to get elected by our partners in the Front, in many others, the acceptance of the Front acted as the kiss of death, losing us a great deal of support from the minorities, the intelligentsia, the women and other classes and giving us little or no support in return.

In any event, the failure of the Front to present a viable alternative which would ensure a stable government to the country undoubtedly contributed towards Mrs. Gandhi's victory. It would have been difficult to be defeated by an opposition as inept and as disunited as that provided by the Front. It has been my view all along that the election was lost by the Front on the evening of third January.

It is interesting that the Organiser, the journal of the Jan Sangh, in an editorial entitled "We Live and Learn" on 27th March, 1971, drew the following conclusions :

"The results hold a big lesson for the Alliance parties : the lesson is that it is better to have no alliance than a half-alliance. By failing to come out with an agreed common programme and a declaration to form a coalition if returned in a majority, the Alliance failed to offer a viable alternative to the Congress(I). In this situation they had the worst of both worlds

Even if the four parties had not entered into any kind of alliance, they could scarcely have fared worse; and yet critics would have turned round and said that they would have fared better if only they had united. "

It is a pity that the President of the Jan Sangh had failed to see all this on 3rd January when he so cheerfully joined in scuttling the alliance and contributing towards the electoral disaster that the Organiser has now described.

The question arises as to why on the 8th of January, 1971, we decided to accept the membership of the Front in its attenuated form as a lesser evil to not joining at all ? While the feeling that "half a loaf is better than no bread" and the desire not to put ourselves in the wrong with a section of public opinion, which would have blamed us if we had gone out of the Front, undoubtedly contributed towards our decision, a more decisive factor was that we lacked the self-confidence at that stage to meet the challenge and go it alone.

This was because the state of our Party organisation and the absence of adequate funds made us feel that it was too late in the day to think of functioning on our own and decide that, on balance, we should go into the Front.

In my view, the reason for this state of the Party organisation is that, since we adopted at our meeting of the General Council on November 15, and 16, 1969, our Mid-term Report appraising the record of the last

two and half years and lay down guide lines for the next two years and a half, we had woefully failed to carry out the tasks outlined in that Report.

Enclosed herewith for your perusal is a copy of the Mid-Term Report in Part I of which we have summarised our appraisal of the state of Party organisation. If you will kindly turn to page 17, you will see that we have drawn attention to the fact that State and District Committees functioned only nominally in several States, that several instances of indiscipline on the part of party functionaries and legislators had come to light; and that by and large the enthusiasm for the Party generated in the General Election of 1967 had not been maintained. We had then gone on, on pages 18 and 19, to spell out and list reasons for the absence of any meaningful activity of the Party.

In Part II of the Mid-Term Report, we had sought to define on pages 24 to 28 the tasks of the Party during the next two years and a half and to suggest that a new reorientation and a new emphasis should be given in the following respects :

1. The need for social change and the rapid modernisation of the social and economic structure and the fact that the Swatantra Party is not a party of the status quo should be stressed.
2. A genuine concern for the under-privileged including the tribal people should be felt and articulated. The Party should concentrate on issues of the day in which toilers on the farms and in factories and self-employed people are interested.
3. The generation gap, which has alienated Youth, should be bridged by a conscious approach to the young and an understanding of their needs.
4. The Consumer, the forgotten factor in Indian economics and politics, should be placed in the centre of the picture. A big task faced the Party in the way of organising bank depositors, share-holders, insurance policy holders and other sections of society in defence of their interests.
5. In a multi-lingual and multi-religious nation like ours, the maintenance of equality before the law and the protection of Minorities should be a major task for the Party. A more active policy of implementing the provisions and spirit of the Constitution in regard to Minorities needed to be pursued.

The Report then goes on to stress, on page 29, the need for what Gandhiji used to call "constructive work" to carry conviction to the people about our sincerity of purpose. The report went on to urge that:

"in the prevailing climate of cynicism about all politicians and their works, the people would judge a political party quite as much by the quality of its leaders and workers as by the acceptability of its principles and policies This calls for disciplined working and for strict adherence to high ethical standards of behaviour..... If the Swatantra Party is to make the grade in the coming years, it will have to eliminate all traces of cynicism and opportunism, connivances or excuses made for dubious personal behaviour or opportunist attitudes and measures. The Swatantra Party can never hope to succeed in the competition for "clever" politics with others in the field..... The stress on quality as opposed to quantity,

the readiness "to turn the searchlight inwards" and to "amputate the diseased limb" were therefore essential conditions to attempts to develop the Party's organisation and work."

I think members of the Council will agree that, if the office bearers and rank and file of the Party had buckled down to the tasks outlined by the Council in the Mid-Term Report, the conditions in which we faced the recent parliamentary elections would have been altogether different and so naturally would have been our electoral strategy and our attitude to alignments.