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New Twist To Major Parties' Prospects

FROM OUR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, Monday.—The SSP's inclusion in the three-party front to fight the elections and the Swatantra Party's decision to stay out of it for the time being have given a new twist to the electoral prospects of the major parties. For one thing, it is likely to have an impact on the two important Hindi-speaking States of U.P. and Bihar.

This development has naturally heartened the Congress (O), but it is clear that the Ram Subhag Singh group has scored a point at the expense of Mr Morarji Desai and others of his view. It was Dr Singh's effort to widen the electoral front to include at least one recognized socialist party

The acquisition of strength by the Opposition parties as a result of the new electoral front was also underlined today by the sombre mood of Congress (R) circles, who are now having to reassess their chances in U.P. and Bihar, in particular.

Members of the Congress (R) are, on the other hand, drawing some comfort from the fact that if the Swatantra does stay out of the three-party front, it would adversely affect parties opposed to the Congress (R) in at least two States, Gujarat and Raja-

sthan, in which the Swatantra has a say.

The Congress (R) is also hoping that the SSP's inclusion in the front would precipitate a crisis in it, forcing a division in the party.

However, it is the expectation of members of the Congress (O) and the SSP that the Swatantra Party will ultimately join the three-party front. Mr Madhu Limaye, for one, voiced this opinion today. With the new understanding reached between Mr Rajagopalachari and Mr Kamaraj, it is felt that the Swatantra would not want to go it alone in the elections.

It is understood that Mr Masani's reaction to last night's developments arose out of his assessment that the SSP's inclusion in the front without an agreement on a minimum programme would open the flood-gates to the import of unacceptable policies.

It is the feeling in Swatantra circles here that, but for the question posed by the SSP's entry, the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra could have gone ahead to announce an electoral agreement, leaving the "minimum programme" to be hammered out at a meeting on January 15.

MINIMUM PROGRAMME

Mr Masani apparently feels that it is not enough to concentrate on displacing Mrs Gandhi, but that the front should present a credible alternative to the electorate in the form of a minimum programme. The SSP and the Ram Subhag Singh group in the Congress (O), on the other hand, would rather not import longer-term problems into the present specific question of fighting the elections to try to defeat Mrs Gandhi.

One result of the three-party front is the feeling in Swatantra circles that Mr Nijalingappa has been less than fair to them in the manner in which he announced the new arrangement. It is clear that much patient work will have to be done to bring the Swatantra within the fold of the present three-party front.

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