

3464

INDIAN EXPRESS.

5 JAN 1971

Old Congressmen hopeful of Swatantra return

By A Staff Reporter

THE gulf between the Swatantra Party and the anti-New Congress electoral alliance is not too wide to be bridged, according to reliable Old Congress and other sources in Bombay.

Old Congress leaders, at any rate, do not consider the obstacles to an understanding with the Swatantra Party insuperable. It was learnt late on Monday night.

Old Congress president S. Nijalingappa and Swatantra chief M. R. Masani were in the city at that time.

A prominent Old Congress leader said that efforts should be initiated without delay to rope in afresh the Swatantra Party, one of the original initiators of the "grand alliance" move.

A proposal that is being aired is

that the finer points of the common programme of action need not be discussed at this stage.

The Old Congress circles are optimistic that such points can be thrashed out after the election results are out, when the prospect of forming a coalition Government may present itself.

Morarji too

Mr. Morarji Desai also arrived in the city on Monday. Mr. S. K. Patil is understood to have met Mr. Desai as well as Mr. Nijalingappa.

A top Old Congress leader said "We are trying to contact Mr. Masani but he has so far not been available."

He revealed, however, that Mr. Masani would meet Mr. Desai on Tuesday morning. Later, Mr. Desai, Mr. Nijalingappa and Mr. Patil may get together.

"The difference is a small thing. We must overcome this difference as we have to build a strong demo-

cratic front to meet the challenge of the Prime Minister and the Communists."

Mr. Patil said "I am quite sure that Mr. Masani will come in and the Swatantra Party will be a part of the front. We want Mr. Masani in. The Swatantra Party is a necessary part."

A Swatantra leader said the process of electoral adjustments would go on till the last minute. He made it clear that his party was not against an electoral understanding.

"We are not going to fight all the 520 seats. Even the Prime Minister's party is not going to put up candidates in all constituencies. Where we do not contest, we shall support others."

Swatantra leader Piloo Mody also met Mr. Desai. However, he said that it was merely a social call.

The Old Congress president held discussions with several party leaders. Mr. Masani might meet him on Tuesday, a source close to him said.