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Hindusthan Times 9/1/71

Swatantra joins opposition Front

No minimum programme

From S. Gundappa

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Madras, Jan. 8 — Revising its earlier decision, the Swatantra Party today decided to join the Congress(O)-Jan Sangh-SSP Front forged in Delhi on Jan. 3 to fight the forthcoming general election to the Lok Sabha without insisting on a joint minimum programme.

The national executive of the party unanimously decided to join the Front, "so that there shall be one agreed candidate for each Lok Sabha constituency, throughout the country, who will be supported by all the participating parties in the Front."

The resolution made it clear the party had joined the Front on the clear assurance, given by Mr Nijalingappa at a news conference in Bombay, on Jan. 5 that no Communist Party would be allowed to associate itself with the Front.

The executive meeting, which was attended by Mr C. Rajagopalachari and Mr N. G. Ranga, backed the Party President, Mr M. R. Masani (who had walked out of the Delhi talks) to the extent of recording its disappointment at the abandonment of the efforts at establishing a democratic alliance with a common programme.

It also "fully justified" Mr Masani's move in asking for time at the Delhi meeting to consult the national executive when suddenly faced with a new proposal.

Minimum plan

Mr Masani, when asked whether his party would make renewed efforts for a common minimum programme, said the Swatantra would be delighted if that could be achieved, but doubted if it could come about. The absence of a common element, he said, would give credibility to their claims to provide an alternative Government at the Centre. "It is for our Front partners to consider it."

Asked to spell out the party's stand if the SSP were to go in for seat adjustments with the CPM, Mr Masani said: "We will cross the bridge when we come to it." As far as the Swatantra was concerned, "we will not touch the Communists with a barge pole," he said.

PTI, UNI add: Mr Masani said he would be contesting from Rajkot constituency. "It has returned me twice and I would contest from there this time also."

The Executive postponed the National Convention of the Swatantra Party, scheduled to be held in Bombay on Jan. 30 and 31.