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Masani: PM's gamble will fail

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NEW DELHI, Feb. 13.

The Chairman of the Swatantra Party, Mr M. R. Masani, predicted here today that the gamble of the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi would fail and she would emerge weaker, not stronger, after the mid-term poll to the Lok Sabha. He was happy that to that extent democrats could relax since the threat to the Constitution would have disappeared.

Mr Masani, who was the guest speaker at the Press Club luncheon, was in his usual form touching several subjects ranging from Mrs Gandhi's quest for a blank cheque to rule to attempts to whittle down the Fundamental Rights and curtail the powers of the Supreme Court. "Even if she gets 99 per cent majority, she will have no right to change the Fundamental Rights which the Constitution had held could not be truncated," said Mr Masani.

Mr Masani said Karl Marx had held that the exploiters had expropriated the masses to the point of making them slaves. He quipped that Marx was right about the premises but wrong in his conclusion. "He should have said: Therefore let us all have property-owning democracy," Mr Masani said.

Planning criticised

Referring to the arguments heard about big and small property, Mr Masani said it was all designed to draw wool over the eyes of the public. He and his party wanted the people to have property rights and a certain control over their environments. The right to property was something which distinguished a free man from a slave. If one talked of curtailing big property today he would go to other things later. It might lead to the Government eventually dipping its fingers in peoples' bank accounts, insurance policies and provident funds. Where did one draw the line.

Mr Masani criticised the Planning Commission and the kind of planning which the country had experienced in the last two decades and said the result was planned chaos. There was shortage of coal and small coins. Indian Airlines, which was a monopoly, suffered from gross indiscipline.

"This is Government of drift and incompetence," said Mr Masani.

Mr Masani termed Mrs Gandhi's description of parties like the Swatantra as a "big lie." He queried whether there was a single item of the Government's accepted policies of the last two decades which she wanted to change. The Government continued to be a Quota Licence-permit raj wedded to excessive bureaucratic control and red tape. The Government still swore by the public sector - which continued to lose money.

In 1969-70, the public sector lost

all, he wanted the Planning Commission to be abolished and an indicative planning method to take its place.

Amidst laughter Mr Masani held up a brochure which the Swatantra had published, indicating its economic stand. Now Willy Brandt of West Germany was for pursuing the type of economic policies which would introduce enlightened socialism and not for the Kosygin-Brezhnev type of rigid Statism where everything and everyone withered. While Mrs Gandhi stood for the Karl Marx method, Mr Masani stood for the path advocated by Mahatma Gandhi.

A questioner asked for Mr Masani's reaction to the law and order situation in the country. Mr Masani acidly said: "Deplorable". It was an absolute scandal that murders in West Bengal ruled by the President should be a dime a dozen. Mr Masani squarely laid the blame for this at the door of the Prime Minister. It was the biggest blunder to have "a Communist like Mr S. S. Dhawan as Governor" to contain trouble caused by the Communists.

UP situation

Asked what he thought of the UP situation, Mr Masani said his personal view was that Mr T. N. Singh should have resigned after his defeat. He told a questioner that it was not true that the United Front was quarrelling over joint canvassing for the front candidates. In Rajkot, he was getting the active co-operation of the Old Congress workers.

About skyjacking, Mr Masani said he had condemned unequivocally. He deplored the Pakistan Government's attitude and the granting of asylum to the skyjackers. The "present policies and acts" of the Union Government were correct and he would back them, Mr Masani said. But he thought the Government found itself in a mess now because the Prime Minister had adopted a double standard about skyjacking. When she was asked about the anything about the act of skyjacking what use would it be to say anything about the act of skyjacking when nothing could be done about it. Now the Pakistan Government said much the same thing.



Mr M. R. Masani

Rs 40 crores. The Government still had a monopoly over All India Radio. Mr Masani had not heard of Mrs Gandhi wanting to accept the recommendations of the Chanda Committee report which would free the broadcasting system from the shackles of bureaucrats.

On the other hand, the Swatantra stood for radical changes. Mr Masani said his party wanted agriculture to be given the pride of place, progressive decontrol to be brought about, abolition of zonal and other barriers to free movement of foodgrains effected. Above