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Joint Declaration Still Possible, Says Masani

NEW DELHI, Feb. 13.

The Swatantra Party President, Mr. M. R. Masani, has expressed the hope that it would be possible for the four-party Front led by the Congress (O) to issue a joint declaration setting out a common programme on the eve of the elections.

Addressing a Press Club luncheon meeting in New Delhi Mr. Masani said the Swatantra Party in fact wanted a common programme before the Front was formed though it could not be agreed upon. Still, his party had decided to join the Front because it thought "asquint-eyed uncle is better than no uncle at all."

Mr. Masani did not agree that there was any contradiction between the manifestos of the Front partners. While his party had adopted the Congress (O) resolution of June last year as its manifesto, the Jan Sangh manifesto also was no different from this.

CLASH BETWEEN FRONT PARTNERS

In reply to a question, Mr. Masani admitted that in some constituencies the Front partners were clashing with each other. This could not be avoided. For instance North East Bombay Constituency was left as a free constituency by the Front. Though the Jan Sangh had set up its own candidate there, Swatantra Party could not but support Gen. Cariappa.

'ALL THE MORE FRIGHTENING'

Mr. Masani said the threat to the Constitution lay in the Prime Minister's desire to make the Lok Sabha poll serve as a mandate for amending the Constitution through Parliamentary action. The threat was all the more frightening to him because Mrs. Gandhi had not spelled out the changes she wanted to make in the basic law.

He agreed with a questioner that the people were supreme but contended that Parliament was not sovereign. Constitutional amendments must be made through a referendum of the people, he said.

Besides the Constitution, Mr. Masani regards the "change of government" as an issue in the elections.

Mr. Masani said Mr. Morarji Desai's talk of merger of the Congress (O) and the Jan Sangh should be viewed in the long-term perspective and not in the context of the present elections.

It was, however, true that merger discussions had been held

from time to time among "like-minded parties". He recalled how his own party had probed merger with the Jan Sangh and the B.K.D. in the past.

Mr. Masani described as a 'lie' the 'propaganda' of Mrs. Gandhi that the Swatantra Party stood for *status quo*. The Swatantra Party had stated in clear "terms the 'radical changes' it wanted to make, Mr. Masani added.

In the name of socialism, Mr. Masani alleged, the country was being led to total slavery which exists in China and the Soviet Union.

About the recent hijacking of the I.A. plane, Mr. Masani said, he fully supported the stand taken by the Union Government on this issue.

MASANI'S WIFE'S SUPPORT TO CONG-R

Mr. Masani dubbed the support of his wife and son to the Ruling Congress as "misguided" but added that he had "no hard feelings".

He said 20 years ago he held socialist views which he now knows "to be incorrect".

Mr. Masani recalled what he was told by a friend at that time: "If you are not a socialist at 21, you have no heart and if you are still a socialist at 41, you have no brain."

Mr. Masani said he ceased to be a socialist by the time he was 41.

The Congress R candidate who is being supported by Mr. Masani's wife and son, is Mrs. Subadra Joshi, contesting the Chandni Chowk seat in Delhi.

NO HARM IN COALITION GOVTS.

The Jan Sangh leader, Mr. Balraj Madhok, said in Bombay on Friday that the days of one-party rule were over. It was not going to return till two major parties emerged after polarisation, he said. Poll adjustment in the present election might prove to be an initial step in that direction. Mr. Madhok told pressmen.

He said it was wrong to think that coalition Governments would affect stability. Most democratic countries of the world have had coalition Governments at one time or the other. It was only in one-party totalitarian States like USSR and communist China that one found stability of the type Mrs. Gandhi was talking about, he said.