

4470

The Times of India

Feb 14 1972

P.M.'s gamble will fail, prophesies Masani

By A Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, February 13. earlier, all others were campaigning for him.

THE Swatantra leader, Mr. M. R. Masani, said today that the proliferation of candidates contesting Lok Sabha elections had made the entire poll a gamble.

He was disappointed that instead of the anticipated straight contests, most Lok Sabha seats were being contested by a very large number of candidates.

Speaking at Press Club luncheon here, Mr. Masani said that as hoped the formation of electoral fronts had not led to polarisation of political parties into clearly defined Right and Left groups.

He admitted that in some constituencies the "alliance" partners would clash with one another. This could not be avoided. The North-East Bombay constituency was left as a free constituency by the four-party front. Though the Jana Sangh had set up its own candidate there, the Swatantra Party could not but support Gen. Cariappa.

He parried a question whether his party would support Mr. George Fernandes, (SSP) in Bombay and said, "We are not supporting any candidate against him."

NO GRIEVANCE

Asked about the Jana Sangh's reaction to the Swatantra decision to support Gen. Cariappa in North-East Bombay, Mr. Masani said that the Jana Sangh could have no grievance since it had set up its candidates against the Swatantra nominees in Junagadh and Dandulka.

He added, "The Jana Sangh is sitting on its hands and has not moved a muscle to get me a single vote in Rajkot."

Mr. Masani, however, denied reports that the Congress (O) was not working for him in Rajkot. Except one Zila Parishad President, who had himself claimed the ticket for the Rajkot seat

The Swatantra Party leader said Mrs. Indira Gandhi's gamble in dissolving the Lok Sabha and forcing a mid-term poll would fail. He felt that instead of emerging stronger the Prime Minister would become weaker after the poll.

Mr. Masani said that the propaganda by Mrs. Gandhi that the Swatantra Party stood for the 'status quo' was a "lie". It was Mrs. Gandhi who was supporting the status quo policy which had ruined the country in the last 20 years.

In the name of socialism, the country was being led to the same kind of total slavery which existed in China and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Masani said that his party stood for radical change. In the field of development it would give priority to agriculture, consumer industries and heavy industries in that order.

PAKISTAN ASSAILED

It stood for removal of restrictions on the movement of foodgrains, progressive decontrol and curb on disproportionate investment in the public sector.

Answering questions, he said that he stood behind the Government's stand on the hijacking of the Indian plane. He blamed the Pakistan Government for granting political asylum to the hijackers without ensuring the safety of the Indian plane and the cargo. At the same time he deplored Mrs. Gandhi's failure to condemn the Jordanian hijackings a few months ago.

Replying to another question, he said that Kashmir was a part of India. Pakistan had no 'locus standi' on this issue after its aggression on India in 1965. The idea that Kashmir be placed under the joint trusteeship of the United States and the Soviet Union was Mr. C. Rajagopalachari's personal view and not the stand of the Swatantra Party.

Mr. Masani felt that it would be possible for the four-party alliance led by Congress (O) to issue a joint declaration setting out a common programme on the eve of elections.

He said that the Swatantra Party wanted an agreed common programme before the front was formed. Although all the four parties could take a long-term perspective and not in the context of the present elections.

Mr. Masani described the support extended by his wife and son to the Congress (R) candidate for Chandani Chowk seat in Delhi, Mrs. Subhadra Joshi, as "misguided." But he had no hard feelings, he said.

He said, "Twenty years ago I held socialist views which now I know to be incorrect."

He recalled that an elder friend had told him 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."

"I used to be a socialist at the time I was 41," he quipped.