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Privilege move against Masani

NEW DELHI - Left Front members in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday raised a privilege issue against former MP and a veteran of the now defunct Swatantra Party, Mr Minoo Masani, for his remarks against the members of the House in a newspaper article published on March 15.

CPI-M member Rupchand Pal, raising the matter during zero hour, said the author had described the members as "a mob of howling hooligans". This, he said, was a clear case of contempt of the House. He urged Speaker Shivraj Patil to condemn the remarks and refer the matter to the privileges committee.

His party colleague Somnath Chatterjee wanted the government to express its views on the matter.

Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar (SJP) said the language used in the article deserved comment by the Speaker, he asked the Speaker to either condemn the remarks or refer the matter to the

privileges committee.

Mr Chandrajit Yadav (JD) said it was an article and not a news item. The speaker should write to the author and ask for an explanation. Mr Chitta Basu and Mrs Geeta Mukherjee also registered their strong indignation at the language used in the article.

Leader of the opposition L K Advani (BJP) said the language used against members of the House as a whole was "surprising". However, he said, there had been occasions when both Indian parliament and the British house of commons had ignored the use of "extreme epithets."

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee (BJP) said Mr Minoo Masani was an ex-MP and recalled how, as a parliamentarian, he was a stickler for decorum. He felt the remarks should be ignored.

Mr Nitish Kumar (JD) supported Mr Vajpayee, saying Mr Masani was an old freedom fighter.

Mr Inderjit (Cong-I) said there must be some kind of a reprimand from the Speaker. Mr Chatterjee asked whether such a matter would be ignored if any other person used such language.

The speaker said he had received several notices on the issue. He said the usual practice was that the person concerned was asked to explain his manner of speech and a decision was reached thereafter.

Mr Patil was appreciative of the fact that everybody had spoken with restraint and responsibility. He said the author of the article was a very respectable person who could use language in a deft manner. At the same time, he took note of the point that Indian parliament and also the British house of commons had chosen "not to take note" of such cases.

Mr Patil said he would examine the matter and also consult the members to reach a decision.

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