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STAGE SET IN M.P. TOWN FOR SURRENDER OF DACOITS

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JAURA (Madhya Pradesh)
April 10.

This sleepy little town, which will witness the surrender of a number of dacoits later this week, is agog with excitement.

According to a spokesman of the Sarvodaya peace mission in the Chambal valley, the stage has been set for the ceremony which marks the triumph of the method of persuasion over the use of force.

The bandits, it is stated, have been staying in three camps for the last several days awaiting the function which will herald the beginning of a new chapter in their life. Many of them are accompanied by their wives and children.

FAREWELL TO ARMS

The outlaws, who have been terrorising people in different parts of this sprawling state for the last several years, are expected to bid a farewell to arms—and a life of loot and plunder—on Friday and Sunday.

Among the bandits expected to give themselves up to Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, Sarvodaya leader, is 38-year-old Mohar Singh, the shepherd-turned-dacoit, who carries a price of Rs. 2 lakhs on his head. He is wanted in connection with nearly 250 offences, including murder, kidnapping and dacoity.

There is still doubt in some quarters whether this most wanted bandit chief will surrender to Mr. Narayan. Sarvodaya leaders, who have established contacts with him, are, however, confident that he will do so. If he does, it will no doubt be the biggest achievement of the mission in the Chambal valley.

BHAVE'S MISSION

It was nearly 12 years ago that Acharya Vinoba Bhave launched his "change of heart" mission and succeeded in securing the surrender of 19 dacoits belonging to the gang of the legendary bandit chief, Man Singh.

The surrender ceremony this week will mark the second major successes of Sarvodaya workers in dealing with the age-old menace of dacoity.

According to a Sarvodaya spokesman, leaders of various dacoit gangs will have talks with Mr. Narayan at a dak bungalow, now in disuse, at Pagara, 12 km. from here, on Wednesday and Thursday. Nearly 150 to 200 outlaws are expected to formally surrender in two batches at prayer meetings, scheduled to be held at the Gandhi Ashram here on Friday and Sunday.

The police have already made arrangements to take the dacoits into custody and escort them to the central jail in Gwalior.

The Sarvodaya spokesman said Acharya Bhave would not be present at the function in view of his poor health, though some outlaws wanted him to attend it.

There is a possibility of the chief Minister, Mr. P. C. Sethi, who is accompanying Mr. Narayan to Gwalior

(by air), being persuaded to attend the surrender ceremony.

Mr. Sethi had stated last week that he would not be attending it and would like to leave the matter entirely to the Sarvodaya leader.

A little-known fact about the present mission is that efforts to secure the surrender of the bandits began as early as six months ago when Mr. S. C. Shukla was the chief minister.

Mr. Shukla had encouraged Sarvodaya workers to persuade the outlaws to take up a new way of life. He was in touch with Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan and the union minister of state for home affairs, Mr. K. C. Pant, in this regard.

The "peace efforts" were, however, preceded by a spell of stepped-up police pressure which, at least to some extent, brought the bandits face to face with the hard realities of the situation.

According to Sarvodaya workers, the bandit who was most responsive to their efforts in the initial stages was Madho Singh, who carries a price of Rs. 1 lakh on his head. (The Rajasthan and U.P. governments have also announced rewards of Rs. 25,000 each for his capture.)

PRACTISED HOMOEOPATHY

Madho Singh (40), who is a Thakur, served in the army for a few years. After leaving it, he practised homoeopathy for some time. He was later arrested on a charge of abduction. He was released on bail in 1961 and has been absconding since then. He is wanted in nearly 200 cases.

Madho Singh is now said to be a "completely changed man." Not only Sarvodaya workers but also senior police officers are confident that he will be among those who will surrender this week.

Among others expected to follow suit are Kalyan Singh, Makhan Singh, Harvilas and Kalicharan. Kalyan

Singh was arrested over a decade ago on the charge of abducting a girl. He jumped bail on the day of judgment and has never been apprehended.

The dacoit chiefs will surrender along with members of their gangs, whose strength varies from eight to 50. They will also give up their arms. Some of them, including Mohar Singh, are believed to be in possession of sophisticated weapons.

FASCINATING MISSION

Persuading the dacoits to give up their arms has been no easy task, according to Sarvodaya workers. The first hurdle was winning their confidence. They had to be assured that they could expect justice and fairplay from the authorities if they surrendered. Once they were convinced of the need to change their mode of life they had to be helped to make up their mind. "It was a fascinating and adventurous mission," a Sarvodaya worker said.

The problems that the workers faced were not merely psychological. When they launched the mission, they had only one jeep and a few "contact men" to assist them. Subsequently, they acquired three more jeeps, which increased their mobility.

Many people wonder whether the mission will have any lasting effect. But one thing that should be noted is that the mission has had a significant impact on the outlaws, many of whom have voluntarily agreed to surrender. This is no mean achievement.

Meanwhile, the claim that the dacoits have released some 80 kidnapped people without ransom as a gesture of goodwill—and an indication of their willingness to give themselves up—has led to a controversy. Officials are tight-lipped.

Sarvodaya workers, however, assert that the report is true. One of them pointed out that, at his instance, Mohar Singh had released two people who were working as his cooks. According to him, the bandit chief is now himself attending to domestic chores.

Narayan's talks with Indira

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NEW DELHI, April 10: Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan had a meeting with Mrs. Indira Gandhi on the eve of his departure for Jaura in Madhya Pradesh where 200 dacoits are expected to surrender to him on Friday and Sunday.

Mr. P. C. Sethi, chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, was also present at the meeting.

Mr. Sethi told newsmen that he was confident that the Sarvodaya leader's mission would be successful. He expected the number of surrendering dacoits to exceed 200 if the Mohar Singh gang also responded to Mr. Narayan's appeal.

Mr. Sethi said that the dacoits had so far released 60 of the 80 people kidnapped by them without asking for any ransom. This was an encouraging development.