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Mohar, 84 others give up arms

By V. T. JOSHI

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A NEW chapter was written into the annals of crime in India today when 85 outlaws of the Chambal ravines, led by Mohar Singh, bowed to a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi and laid down their arms, muttering "Jai Bhavani."

Thus, the "change of heart" mission of the forces of peace led by Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan chalked up its first success today.

The outlaws surrendered formally to the Sardarya leader, touching his feet, at a unique ceremony. Mohar Singh (38), who carries a reward of Rs. 2 lakhs on his head, was expected to give himself up only on Sunday along with the second batch. It was, however, decided in a last-minute change of programme that he should lead the first group into the custody of law.

SECOND BATCH

Madho Singh, who will lead the second batch, was present at the historic event. Later, he left for the ravines with a fleet of eight jeeps to fetch those who would surrender with him.

Among those who gave themselves up today were three lesser-known dacoit chiefs, Saru Singh, Panchan Singh and Naresh Singh.

About 7,000 people who watched the mass surrender near the Gandhi Ashram, burst into lusty cheers as Mohar Singh, accompanied by Sarup Singh, mounted a dais and laid down their arms.

Shortly after, they were led to a shamiana, marking their formal custody by the police.

SETHI GREETED

The bandit chiefs were soon brought back to the dais. Sitting in a chair, Mr. P. C. Sethi, shook hands with them and exchanged greetings.

After their brief meeting with Mr. Sethi, the dacoit leaders were taken back to the shamiana. More outlaws mounted the dais and laid down their arms in front of Mr. Narayan, who gave each of them a copy of the Ramayana.

At the request of Mr. Narayan, the gold-plated images of Goddess Durga on the weapons were returned by the police to the dacoits.

Among the arms were many sophisticated weapons, including light machineguns, self-loading rifles and telescopic rifles.

After the ceremony, the bandits were taken in buses to the Gwalior central jail. They were not handcuffed or put in fetters contrary to the earlier understanding.

A public apology was read out on behalf of the surrendering dacoits by Pandit Narayan Puri, who was acting as Mohar Singh's "secretary." The bandits appealed to society to give them a chance to begin a new chapter in their life.

After the function, Madho Singh also met the chief minister briefly.

Earlier, the dacoits surrendered informally to Mr. Narayan in the dais bungalow in Pagar. Tilaks were applied on their foreheads and they were welcomed back to society.