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JP tells dacoits they won't be hanged

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NEW DELHI April 15—Perhaps more significant than the laying down of arms by the 85 Chambal dacoits yesterday was a ceremony held earlier at the Pagara dak bungalow where all the surrendering bandits were admitted to the Sarvodaya brotherhood. Mr Jayaprakash Narayan told his new brothers that he would stake his life to see that no one received death sentences.

The entry to Pagara was restricted to only those displaying "Shanti Mission" on their vehicles. When we reached Jaura, where the formal surrender took place later in the day a Shanti Mission man met us and agreed to provide the "passport" to Pagara.

The locals came from all villages and all directions of the Chambal and without a "Shanti Mission" pass. Most of them walked to the Pagara dak bungalow braving the heat to see the dacoits.

At the dak bungalow it was a curious sight to see the armed bandits clustered together under a single shamiana listening patiently to a series of Sarvodaya sermons. There was Mohar Singh rubbing shoulders with Madho Singh known rivals in "dacoitdom". Guttar dacoits shared the same dacee with the thakurs. And surrounding them were villagers pushing and prodding the frontliners to have a close and perhaps last look at the terrors of the Chambal.

Strange sight

When all the surrendering dacoits had collected a Sarvodaya worker announced that Mrs Narayan would apply "tilak" and Mr Narayan would embrace them. Mohar Singh the most dreaded dacoit leader of Chambal was the first to be admitted to the family. It was a strange sight to see Mohar Singh who had refused to bow down before the law for more than a decade touch Mrs Narayan's feet and lay his head at Mr Narayan's. He was visibly moved and so was the Sarvodaya leader. One could almost see a child-like gentleness descend upon a man who only moments ago had appeared ferocious. He was followed by Madho Singh the next in the dacoit hierarchy, and other leaders of smaller gangs.

S. N. Khanna adds from Twarior:

Mr Jayaprakash Narayan assured the surrendering dacoits that even if the courts of law decided that they should be hanged for their crimes they would not be executed.

He hoped the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh, U.P. and Rajasthan as also the Union Minister of State for Home Mr K. C. Pant, would respect the undertaking he had given to the dacoits for their faith in him.

Mr Narayan who was addressing a gathering at the Sarvodaya Shanti Ashram after the surren-

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JP assurance to dacoits

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der ceremony, said this was an unprecedented event which had no parallel in the history of any country.

Mr Narayan said they had seen how simple and humble dacoit leaders like Mohar Singh, Pan-cham Singh, Tilak Singh and Sarjoo looked.

He said he had embraced the bandit chiefs not because he respected them for their past crimes but because of their decision to change their lives radically and purify themselves.

Mr Narayan said this did not mean he was making heroes of them.

Later Mr Sethi, in his address to the Sarvodaya workers and villagers, said the process of surrender which had been initiated opened prospects for a peaceful life not only in Madhya Pradesh but also in the adjoining areas of U.P. and Rajasthan.

He said the administration and the Government welcomed the move which was in keeping with Indian tradition and philosophy.