

10 men killed in Kurdish clashes

From our Correspondent
in Tehran

TENSION continues to grow in the Iranian provinces of Kurdistan, oil-rich Khuzestan where the increasingly alienated ethnic minority groups of Kurds and Arab-speaking Iranians are demanding autonomy and changes in the newly-released draft constitution.

According to reports reaching Tehran yesterday, 10 young men died in clashes believed to involve land ownership rights in villages surrounding Mahabad, one of the large Kurdish centres close to the Soviet border in west Iran. In Mahabad itself, the police station was raided and weapons were seized by what the state radio yesterday described as "counter-revolutionaries." Among those arrested was an officer in the Shah's Javidan (Immortals) Guard which has been dissolved.

In a separate incident, 5,000 Kurds took to the streets of Qazvin, just south of Mahabad, on Monday to protest against article 13 of Iran's new draft Constitution which makes Shiite Islam the state religion. The Kurds are mostly Sunni Muslims and believe the constitution to be prejudiced against them.

The Government blames "counter-revolutionaries" for the unrest in the provinces, but in a cable sent to Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Prime Minister, the Kurdish Democratic Party claimed that Government forces are distributing arms, "thousands of rifles," to "landlords who have shown their loyalty to the Shah." The KDP specifically mentions the commander of a local base and the head of the Revolutionary Islamic militiamen in Orumiye and warns that such arms distribution can only lead to an intensification of violence.

In Khuzestan, meanwhile, several thousand Arab-speaking Iranians demonstrated in Abadan, a town for the removal of the province's Governor-General, General Ahmad Mesdani, whom the Arabs have accused of provoking last month's uprising. A five-point resolution was passed warning that if the constitution does not guarantee their demands for autonomy, "the Government will bear the consequences."

The demonstration was coupled with a warning from Arab leaders in Tehran recently for a meeting with the Prime Minister, Mr Mehdi Bazargan. "We feel that the area (of Khuzestan) is on the verge of explosion," wrote Ayatollah Issa Khazani in a letter handed to Mr Bazargan on Sunday.

"The Government's refusal to consider our rights is causing the Arabs to lose confidence in the central authorities." The letter went on to demand the immediate release of Arabs imprisoned after last month's fighting, the appointment of more Arabs in local government, and an end to censorship on the state-owned radio and television.

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The ultra-nationalist Pan Iranian Party, in a resolution announced yesterday, has demanded that the Government abrogate the treaties of Golestan, Karat, and Turkomanchai under which the Qajar Shahs lost huge chunks of Iranian territory to the Tsars during the nineteenth century.

Reuter adds: a man convicted of drug peddling, rape, and sodomy was executed by firing squad in the Caspian town of Sari, the official Paris news agency reported yesterday.