

Eight executed in Iran after blast on train

From Liz Thurgood
in Tehran

Eight Arab-speaking Iranians were executed yesterday in the southern city of Ahvaz in apparent retaliation for an earlier bomb explosion that ripped through three compartments of a train, killing at least eight and injuring 22.

Among those executed were several Arab guerrillas who according to the Government news agency had been involved in an earlier wave of sabotage last summer. More specifically, they were found guilty by an Islamic court of bombing a Mosque in which eleven died, blowing up railway tracks, and attempting to damage key oil plants.

The executions followed four days of unrest in the provinces of both oil-rich Khuzestan and Kurdistan in the West where Iran's rebellious minorities were keeping up pressure on the central authorities for political autonomy.

The worst incident of violence struck on Wednesday when a Tehran-bound express train was hit by a powerful explosion just outside Ahvaz, some 400 miles South-west of Tehran. The fire was put out by rescue teams but yesterday Islamic Guardsmen and teams of volunteers were still searching the wrecked wagons for more bodies.

The latest wave of sabotage in Khuzestan started on Sunday when the aerial of a tall microwave telecommunications tower was toppled, damaging sensitive equipment and cutting telephone links with Tehran. On the same night the Governor's office in the port city of Khorramshahr was rocked by an explosion breaking all the windows, and shooting was heard close to the naval headquarters. No casualties were reported.

yet come forward to claim responsibility for the sabotage.

Recalling the Rex cinema fire in August 1978, a tragedy which was to prove a turning-point in the struggle to overthrow the Shah, the State radio said that its similarity to the train explosion showed "what hands are now at work."

In Sardasht, Kurdistan, close to the mountainous border with Iraq, five Islamic Guardsmen were killed on Tuesday night and eight were wounded when rebel Kurds ambushed a motorised column.

According to reports reaching Tehran, at least six different Kurdish towns have been hit in the new unrest and with one exception the targets have been either the local gendarmerie stations or the unpopular Islamic Guardsmen. On Monday a shop selling Islamic newspapers and reading material in Sanandaj was set alight and partially demolished in a bomb attack.

In Tehran, gunmen yesterday kidnapped a convicted radio commentator, shot him through the head and abandoned his body. Taghi Rouhani was later taken to hospital. Sources said the kidnapping was a protest by extremists against what was considered to be a lenient sentence. Mr Rouhani was kidnapped just before boarding a plane which was to have taken him to exile in south Iran.

Another bomb attack and shooting were reported on Tuesday night near an oil distribution depot. No group has ^{ite} Reuter adds: Iran's ousted oil chief Hasan Nazih said in a letter, published yesterday, that it would not be safe for him to come out of hiding and face charges in the revolutionary court.

He also said that his wife and family had been searched with "unprecedented violence" by armed men sent to his home. Mr Nazih was sacked last week as chairman of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) after a long dispute with the Moslem clergy