

Kurds seize border town in renewed Iran fighting

From Liz Thurgood in Tehran

Violent demonstrations and gunbattles at the weekend have left at least 44 people dead and approximately 100 wounded in the two troubled Iranian provinces of Kurdistan and Khuzestan.

Three men were executed last night in the port city of Khorramshahr after being blamed for an attack on a mosque in which six people died.

The men, believed to be Iranian Arabs, were accused of throwing bombs into a memorial congregation in the mosque. The attack prompted reprisals by Islamic Revolutionary Guards on the home of the Arab spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khaghani, in which four people died.

The renewed violence came amid official warnings that "professional agitators" were trying to destabilise the two key provinces which border the Western frontier with Iraq. In Tehran, meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister yesterday held talks with the new Iraqi Ambassador at which it was agreed to "promote cordial and friendly relations."

The Kurdistan border town of Marivan was yesterday said to be under the control of autonomy-seeking Kurds after heavy fighting on Saturday in which at least 30 people died. A spokesman for the Governor's office in the Kurdistan provincial capital of Sanandaj confirmed the report and said 100 airborne troops had been airlifted into Sanandaj.

Kurdish sources said the Kurds in Marivan had threatened to fight if the Government tried to impose control by sending in troops.

The fighting in Marivan began, according to sources at Kurdish Democratic Party headquarters, after attempts by dispossessed landlords to collect tribute from local farmers who then marched on the local Imam Komiteh to demand "the expulsion of feudal elements." The KDP alleged that the Islamic militiamen then opened fire.

However, according to official State radio, the Islamic militiamen opened fire in self-defence when attacked by 300 men, including KDP members.

In Meshkinshahr, close to the Russian border in North-

west Iran, four farmers died yesterday during a dispute involving water rights. Shops and houses were reportedly burned down and fighting continued until authorities imposed a curfew.

AP adds: A prominent Tehran clergyman, close to Ayatollah Khomeini, was shot by unidentified gunmen yesterday in an assassination attempt as he left a mosque. Ayatollah Seyed Razi Shirazi was reported to be in satisfactory condition at a military hospital.

Reuter adds: Iran has reduced defence expenditure by 60 per cent as part of a £6 billions spending cut envisaged in an emergency 1979-80 Budget released yesterday. Approval of the Budget by the Revolutionary Council was expected within two weeks, according to the head of the Budget and Planning Organisation, Mr Ali Akbar Moirfar.

The Budget fixes daily oil exports at 3.3 million barrels in the fiscal year ending next March 20. Mr Moirfar said. Income from oil and other exports was estimated at about £10 billions, slightly down on the previous year.

