Kurds lose mountain stronghold

From Reuter In Tehran

Iranian government forces last week recaptured the Kurdish guerrilla stronghold of Mahabad after a three-day battle, the official Pars news agency reported.

The agency quoted the commander of the 29th infantry division based in Sanandaj as saying the town fell to a relief column.

There was no independent confirmation of the report as telephone operators reported all lines to the town were cut.

The Pars report indicated the columns first relieved a strung out army garrison on the edge of town which had been under heavy mortar and light artillery fire from Kurdish guerrillas.

Helicopters poured down the town with rockets and machine gun fire throughout the day, according to eyewitnesses.

There was no reliable estimate of casualties available. Kurdish guerrillas, under the leadership of the banned Kurdish Democratic Party, and the northern stronghold of Mahabad although a battle between army tanks and guerrillas using rockets and artillery was reported to be raging 20 miles outside the town yesterday.

The battle boiled at nightfall when the tanks were no longer able to make use of reconnaissance helicopters to pin down guerrilla emplacements.

In a speech the mark the end of Ramadan, the normally moderate Tehran religious leader Ayatolah Hammad Taleghani, cursed the KDP and broadened its members as Communists. Using a Persian curse, he said: "Dust on your heads. The name of the KDP brings back very bad memories."

In a reference to Ayatolah Khomeini, he said: "The leader of the Revolution himself once asked me why are you dispensing those people, and now you see how they have made the leader angry. Now they must be punished. There is no place for them here. They must move. The revolution is an Islamic one and everybody who choices another path must be suppressed."

The KDP leader, Ahmad Rab Man Ghasemloo, said in Mahabad that the Kurds were prepared to negotiate with the Central Government if their conditions were met. Mr Ghasemloo, dressed in traditional Kurdish baggy trousers and bosses top with a plaid on his hip, listed the conditions as: - evacuation of further troops reinforcements to the Kurdish region; the release of all Kurdish prisoners; the freeing of all Kurdish hostages; an end to non-stop attacks and bombardments of Kurdish villages; and a halt to all violence and sabotage.

The army had units at Mesdowgh, northeast of Mahabad, but Khorshed held the road between two towns and had built sandbag emplacements along some stretches. The guerrillas were using captured army jeeps and lorries for transport.

Athenian MacKenzie adds from Adana: With reports of growing political unrest in provinces in southeastern Turkey, the Minister of the Interior, Mr Hasan Fabiog Gunes, has started a 10-day tour of investigation of the most sensitive areas.

In the past two weeks political violence has increased, despite governmental claims to the contrary.

The authorities are primarily worried about reports of operations carried out by small units in southeastern Turkey, particularly in Urfa province, where a local pro-Kurdish group has perpetrated a series of terrorist outrages, including the murders of prominent right-wingers and the wounding of a junior party deputy. The authorities are alarmed that the successor to the, recently disbanding, group - led by a leftist faction known as the Janissaries - may be attempting to set up "liberated areas".