

# Iranian forces pursue retreating Kurds

From Liz Thurgood  
in Tehran

The Iranian military continued to consolidate its hold on recaptured towns and villages in Kurdistan yesterday, as 20,000 Kurds were reportedly retreating to the small town of Sardasht with the Army closing in behind. The retreat coincided with the expulsion of another Western correspondent for his coverage of the Kurdish rebellion. Terry Povey of the Middle-East magazine, based in London, was told this morning by a Ministry of National Guidance official to leave Iran within one week of "false reporting."

Mr Povey's expulsion brings the number of Western correspondents expelled since June to 15. On Tuesday, the Government ordered the Associated Press bureau here to close.

Government forces are believed to control all strategic areas in the western province of Kurdistan and 60 Kurds have been arrested in the continuing mopping-up after Monday's collapse of Mahabad, the Kurdish stronghold.

But, according to reports in Tehran yesterday, 20,000 Kurdish gunmen have joined the flood of civilian refugees from recently-captured Kurdish towns and villages heading for Sardasht, near to the Iraqi frontier. Sardasht is believed to be the last Kurdish stronghold after six months of intermittent fighting against the Government. The Army was reportedly preparing to move against the small town yesterday.

Mahabad was yesterday described as almost deserted, despite appeals from the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mostafa

Charmran, for the "deceived" Kurds to return and "repent their indecent action."

Contrary to first reports, Monday's casualties were light and, it appeared that the Pesh Merga's two-hour exchange of fire with the military was designed to allow the main Kurdish force to retreat towards Sardasht.

The feared Ayatollah Khalkhali, who has sent more than 80 Kurds to their deaths, was reportedly planning to leave for Mahabad yesterday, despite instructions from Tehran to return to the capital. His presence in the province was expected to worsen the hostility between the Kurds and central authorities.

In an effort to return Kurdistan to normal, the Prime Minister, Dr Mehdi Bazargan, has met Ayatollah Khomeini. A senior Govern-

ment official who also attended the talks later said that medical aid and food supplies were being airlifted into the province where fighting has raged for almost three weeks.

The airlift followed an earlier pledge by the Prime Minister to set aside one day's oil revenues (about \$65 millions), for each province, including Kurdistan. However, some of Iran's provinces are considerably more heavily populated than others, and the plan has been criticised as "unfair."

Meanwhile, there were indications that the regime was trying to find a peaceful solution to the problems of another unhappy ethnic minority, the Turkomans from North-east Iran.

According to the Government news agency, a six-man team of Mullahs from

Turkoman Sahra has arrived in Qom for talks with Ayatollah Khomeini. The talks centre on new development projects for the area and the return of rich farmland seized during the previous regime and sold cheaply to the Shah's favourite relatives and generals.

The arrival of the team in Qom followed unofficial reports that a unit of Islamic guardsmen had been sent to Gonbad-e-Kavous, where fighting flared last April between the Turkomans and forces loyal to the Ayatollah.

A Ministry of Agriculture team left for Gonbad last week to "acquaint itself with the problems facing the farmers." The Ministry was reported to believe that holdings of more than 50 hectares should be redistributed among the Turkomans, many of whom live in poverty.

The Government's apparent slowness in solving the Turkoman issue may lie in inter-departmental squabbling. The Interior Ministry, ostensibly responsible for internal security, was understood to want more gradual change. The Turkomans received 20 per cent of all crops recently harvested in the area, a figure that the Ministry would like to see increased to 30 per cent next year.

Meanwhile, a fire has been raging for two days near the Caspian port city of Enseli. A local official said that the blaze may have been started by farmers angered by the Government's recent expropriation of land in the area. Immediately after the February uprising, many villagers seized large tracts of rich farmlands that had been nationalised by the Shah.

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