Kurds may wage mountain warfare

From Liz Thurgood in Tehran

The Prime Minister, Dr Baasargan, made an unexpected trip yesterday to the Kurdish town of Mahabad, the stronghold of the rebel Western province.

Dr Baasargan’s visit came soon after Government troops entered the strategic border town of Sardasht, believed to be the last remaining Kurdish stronghold. Kurdish refugees crossed the border into Iraq.

The Prime Minister was accompanied by several aides, one of whom was believed to be Mr Hashem Saffahian, the Interior Minister.

The Government’s successes in Kurdistan have been given prominence in the Iranian media, but the Kurds have been forced from their mountains from which they will engage the security forces in a long guerrilla war which Iran can ill afford.

It was not known whether the Prime Minister visited Mahabad with the blessing of Ayatollah Khomeini, it so the clergy may have suffered its hard stand on the Kurdish question. But observers in Tehran considered such a mandate unlikely, given the Ayatollah’s recent denunciation of the Kurdish Democratic Party, which assumed leadership in the Kurds’ struggle for autonomy.

When the fighting began in Kurdistan last month, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered Iranian air and ground forces to intervene. He also outlawed the Kurdish Democratic Party and ordered the arrest of its leaders.

Dr Baasargan was yesterday expected to attend memorial ceremonies for those killed a year ago when the Shah’s troops killed hundreds of peaceful protesters in a massacre now known as Black Friday.

Yesterday’s ceremonies, held at Tehran’s Baha’i cemetery of Behesht-e-Zahra, were led by Ayatollah Taleqani in the presence of more than one million people.

Despite the claims of the Persian-language press and State-owned television that most Kurds were flocking to greet the army as it took over the province, independent witnesses have reported a mood of opposition among the Kurds. On Wednesday, 3,000 Kurds marched through the streets of Mahabad, protesting against the presence of Islamic Guardsmen in the area and calling for the return of KDP leaders, Sheikh Ezeddin Hashemi and Dr Ghasemboz, who were believed to have fled to Iraq.

Meanwhile, Ayatollah Khalkhal, the Islamic judge who has sent more than 80 Kurds to their deaths during the past three weeks, arrived in Mahabad yesterday and ordered Kurds still holding out in the mountains to surrender and hand in their arms.
Khalili’s arrival followed a telegram to Ayatollah Khomeini from the Kurds asking Mahanid to be spared the summary justice of Iran’s revolutionary courts. Sixty Kurds were arrested after the collapse of Mahabad on Monday.