

Artillery reinforcements called up to crush Kurdish insurgents

Iran pounds rebel stronghold in air attack

From Nassir Shirkhani
in Saqqez

Heavy fighting was going on in this Kurdish stronghold last night as government helicopters pounded rebel positions for the second day running.

The town was in Kurdish hands but the two sides were fighting it out with cannon and heavy machineguns around a government garrison at the edge of town.

Army sources outside Saqqez said yesterday that they were waiting for artillery reinforcements to rout the Kurds from the town of 40,000 people.

The rebels held an important road bridge south of Saqqez but diplomatic sources said that a heavy armoured column was heading south from the west Azerbaijan provincial capital of Rezaizeh.

Three helicopters were constantly strafing the town with machinegun fire and the shooting was too heavy for rescue teams to remove dead bodies from the streets. As night fell the helicopters began dropping flares every three minutes to light up their targets. US-built Air Force Phantom jets buzzed the town but did not open fire.

More than 600 Kurds are believed to have been killed since fighting broke out last week.

An Army officer said yesterday: "We had no artillery. That's why the Kurds are holding the town. If we don't have artillery we can't get them out."

Kurdish sources inside the town reiterated claims that they had killed 80 government troops in fighting yesterday although the authorities have denied the figure.

to withdraw the defensive positions, 19 km (12 miles) the town.

Khomeini ordered the Army and revolutionary guardsmen to coordinate their offensive and warned "violators and instigators" in the ranks that they would be tried as criminals. Strikes in the Armed Forces were banned, he said, and "in case of suspected conspiracy" the offenders would be tried by summary courts. The implication was that the guilty could face the death sentence for disobedience.

Iranian newspaper accounts since fighting erupted in the

A UNITED STATES spokesman said yesterday that he had no information about a reported invitation to Mr Andrew Young to visit Iran. The Iranian invitation was disclosed by a Foreign Ministry spokesman in Tehran. No date was announced for the proposed visit.

western town of Paveh last week have added up to 600 killed, nearly 200 of them in fighting outside Paveh in the town of Divan Darreh, Saqq and Mahabd.

In a warning to journalists broadcast on Wednesday night and repeated yesterday, Khomeini said "I am announcing my support for the law and order forces, the Army, gendarmerie, police and the revolutionary guards, and I do not permit that the pen should be used or steps should be taken to weaken them. Violators will be considered criminals and in case of the feeling of a conspiracy (they) will be tried in a revolutionary court."

Among the weapons in the hands of the insurgents are Soviet-made Kalashnikov automatic rifles and RPG-7 rocket launchers. They have also captured two 106mm recoilless rifles from government forces. The rebels said that the Army was within six miles of here last night but had 1 ter

Khomeini urged the Kurds in his message to "leave the traitors and join the nation and Islam." He said that Kurds who surrendered with their weapons would be pardoned.