

Iran signals guarded goodwill to Russia

From Liz Thurgood
in Tehran

The Tudeh (Communist) Party newspaper, Mardom, has reappeared in what is believed to be a guarded gesture of goodwill towards the Soviet Union.

The pro-Russian Mardom (People) was closed with 40 other "opposition" papers in mid-August. No reason was given, but government officials said the publications had been suspected of "conspiracy."

In an editorial marking its return on Tuesday, Mardom said the paper would continue its "revolutionary struggle hand-in-hand with the people." Previously a weekly, it also announced plans to start daily publication.

Observers, however, have noted that the reopening of Mardom coincided with reports that the Iranian Ambassador in Moscow was involved in talks on a substantial price increase for Iranian supplies of natural gas. Iran's Foreign Minister has been quoted as saying that Russia was buying Iranian

natural gas at only one-third the international price.

Last week Ambassador Mohammad Mokri said that under a new agreement the Soviet Union would pay Iran a new price backdated to February 10. The new price has not been disclosed, but the Ambassador's remarks have raised speculation that a review of the IGAT II gas pipeline project might be tied to the agreement.

The project, originally estimated to have cost \$3.5 millions and later delayed by the February uprising, was to have increased deliveries of natural gas to the Soviet Union, allowing Moscow to supply gas to Western Europe.

Soviet-Iran relations have been described as uneasy since Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in February. Among contributing factors have been Moscow's involvement in neighbouring Afghanistan and widely-publicised suspicions in Tehran that Russia was connected with troubles in Kurdistan.

The Khomeini Government was reported to be particularly annoyed by an article in Izvestia last month, saying that the Iranian revolution had collapsed into economic chaos, political repression, and ethnic suppression. The article was written by Alexander Bovin, whose public comments were thought to reflect official thinking.

In August, Khomeini's Government sealed the offices of the Tudeh Party and banned Mardom. Because of its unswerving support of Soviet policies and Iran's traditional distrust of her northern neighbour's intentions, the party is believed to command little support.

Since emerging openly earlier this year, the Tudeh Party has ostensibly supported Khomeini's Islamic policies. In recent statements, however, Tudeh leaders have issued warnings about the dangers of using the military to try to solve the Kurdish troubles and said that "a turn to the Right would intensify the class struggle."

Despite such populist sentiment, the party has long been shunned by Iran's Left-wing which, starting last month, defied the authorities by bringing out their own "opposition" weeklies.

Meanwhile, Khomeini has called for a total purge of the civil service and urged Iran's 40,000 oil workers to support their new chief, Mr Ali Moinfar, who replaced Mr Hassan Nazih earlier this week.

In remarks to the Prime Minister and his new Cabinet on Tuesday night and broadcast yesterday, the Ayatollah acknowledged reports of go-slows in Government agencies and said: "If they are supporters of the past regime, their names should be taken down and they should be purged."

In his first reference to the oil workers since last week's upheaval, he also called on the employees of the National Iranian Oil Company to "support (Moinfar), work for the country and not (Indulge) in go-slows."

Mr Nazih's dismissal came amid fears of major disruptions in the oil industry, but earlier this week oil officials said production had remained constant at four million barrels a day of which 3.3 million were exported.

Reuter adds: Iranian authorities said yesterday that Kurdish rebels had launched a wave of guerrilla attacks in the western border region and at least five members of the security forces were killed. There was no mention of guerrilla casualties. The most serious outbreak took place in the mountain town of Sardasth near the border with Iraq.

In Isfahan, Iran's second largest city, a Moslem clergyman was executed yesterday after being convicted of crimes including rape, sodomy, and seducing young girls, the official Pars news agency said.

UPI adds: Saboteurs bombed a north-bound train from the southern ethnic Arab city of Khorramshahr yesterday, killing five people and injuring at least 16 others.

