

Draft constitution invests supreme powers in Khomeini

Iran takes further step to theocracy

From Liz Thurgood
in Tehran

Iran has taken another step towards a Government of theologians by investing supreme religious, and by implication political, authority in Ayatollah Khomeini.

The decision, contained in article five of the country's draft Constitution, was announced yesterday. Of the 65 council members present, only eight opposed the move and four abstained.

The article paved the way for legalising the position of Ayatollah Khomeini as Iran's Head of State. Should the position fall vacant, a council of

limit on the position has been set.

Article five, as stated: "During the absence of Imam Mehdi, the command and religious leadership of the Islamic republic of Iran will be entrusted to a just, enlightened, courageous, and wise man who has been recognised and accepted by the majority of the people.

"In cases where one person does not (command) such a majority, a council of qualified jurists fulfilling the above conditions will be formed. The members of the council will be determined by law."

According to an expert of Islamic law: "Article five gives the country's leader supreme religious authority and virtually uncontested support in dealing with State matters." Another described the position as "unprecedented in the Shi'ite Moslem religious hierarchy."

NINE more people were executed in Iran yesterday, for offences including heroin smuggling and sodomy. The executions took place in central Hamedan Province, the North-eastern town of Gonbad-Kavus, the Kurdish city of Sanandaj, and the town of Baneh.—Reuter.

clergymen would be authorised to take over.

The announcement supported recent leaks from the Council of Experts (Majlis-e-Khebragan), that supreme power in Iran would be invested not in a President or Prime Minister, but in a higher body of theologians. National sovereignty was also expected to be switched from the people to Allah, dramatically lowering the status of the Iranian Parliament as a legislative body.

The new post (Velayat-e-Faghih), was seen as an integral part of the Shi'ite Moslem faith embraced by the majority of Iran's 35 million people. The Velayat-e-Faghih is not an elected position — the leader emerges through a national network of mosques and theological schools — and no time

The new position has drawn little criticism. Only Mr Ramatollah Moghaddam-Maraghaie, one of 18 secular experts, has pointed out the possible pitfalls. "How can we be sure in the future that we will have a leader like Imam Khomeini?"

On paper, the Velayat-e-Faghih gives the country's leader absolute powers, more wide-ranging than the Shah's were. But in practice, much will depend on the will of Iranians to make the new system work democratically.

The original copy of the 151-articled, draft constitution, released in June, contained no mention of yesterday's announcement. The Imam Mehdi, revered as the hidden Imam (leader), disappeared at the age of seven in the early part of the ninth century. It is believed that he will return in the last days of the world as a saviour-like figure.