

Khomeini gives Libyans cool reception in Iran



Millions of Iranians lost their jobs after the revolution, and many attended a mass meeting in Tehran yesterday

From Liz Thurgood in Tehran

Iran's religious leaders are keeping a low profile about the arrival here of a large Libyan delegation, in the hope of discovering the whereabouts of the missing Imam Moussa Sadr.

The delegation of 70 men, led by the Prime Minister, Major Abdullislam Jaloud, went to the holy city of Qom after arriving for talks with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. But their reception was reportedly chilly and yesterday, the Ayatollah was quoted as telling the Libyans: "The problems can only be solved by the Tripoli Government."

The Libyans are believed to be keen to reestablish diplomatic relations which were broken when the Shah seized the three small islands of Abu Musa and the Two Tombs following Britain's withdrawal from the Persian Gulf eight years ago. They are also reportedly trying to prepare for a visit by Colonel Ghadafi.

But Iranian sources say there will be no meeting between the Colonel and the Ayatollah until the Libyans explain the whereabouts of Imam Sadr, who disappeared last September during Moslem celebrations. Moussa Sadr, an Iranian by birth, studied under Ayatollah Khomeini before travelling to the Lebanon, where he became a powerful political leader among the Shi'ite Moslems in Beirut.

The Libyans say that the Imam left Tripoli for Rome after a stormy meeting with Colonel Ghadafi. There he disappeared. But the Iranians are holding the Libyans responsible, and a month ago, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, one of Iran's most respected religious leaders, said that he believed the Imam was dead.

Yesterday's press carried a small statement from Major Jaloud blaming "the big powers" for exaggerating the Moussa Sadr affair, and so preventing the Colonel from visiting Qom.

Meanwhile, the Iranian Prime Minister, Dr Bazargan, has renewed his appeal for national unity, and warned of "grave dangers" if Iran's revolutionaries insist on sharing power with the Government. Dr Bazargan said that the controversial Imam committees, professing sincerity and revolutionary ideals, were "interfering with everything, making it difficult to get anything done."

The Prime Minister said the spirit of revenge was undermining his programme for reconstruction, in a reference to the revolutionary Islamic courts which have sent nearly 170 collaborators of the Shah's regime before the firing squad.

Reuter adds: Another 24 political prisoners have been released in Iran, and revolutionary tribunals have passed 11 prison sentences, according to Tehran newspapers yesterday.

One naval lieutenant was acquitted after trial at the Gulf port of Bandar Abbas, and 23 prisoners were released from Tehran's main gaol. Four agents of the Shah's secret police, Savak, were among those who received prison sentences.

Meanwhile, Iran's new revolutionary Government yesterday decided on new pay scales for Government employees. Under the new scales, the minimum monthly wage in the civil service will be about £180, while the Prime Minister and other senior officials will earn a maximum of £1,400.

Nicholas Cumming-Bruce adds: Iran's Kurdish Democratic Party yesterday claimed that 500 people had been killed in fighting in Kurdish areas in the North-west of the country during the last six days.

Army tanks and armed groups of Turkish-speaking Azerbaijanis and Islamic revolutionary guards were advancing into Kurdish villages last night, burning and pillaging, the KDP claimed.

Official radio reports said that the town of Naqaden was now quiet, but the KDP spokesmen in Tehran expressed fears that the continuing thrust by the Army and other groups into Kurdish areas was driving the KDP out of control. The KDP claimed that Army helicopters opened fire on the inhabitants of the village of Aliabad on Tuesday, killing five and wounding five more.

