Publication: Guardian 1821-2000; Date: Aug 29, 1979; Section: None; Page: 8

ISLAMIC JUSTICE : Eleven Kurdish rebels die in front of a firing squad, outside Sanandaj after being condemned at summary trials

Ayatollah discourages negotiations as Kurdish team puts peace terms

Khomeini kills hopes for peace in Kurdestan

From Liz Thurgood in Tehran

The chances of a peaceful settlement between the Iranian regime and the rebel Kurds were apparently shattered yesterday when Ayatollah Khomeini advised against negotiations and repeated his orders to "crush the rebels."

The order came in a letter naming a religious aide as the Ayatollah's special envoy to the beleaguered western province of Kurdestan where more than 500 reportedly lost their lives during the last two weeks.

"Your purpose is not to negotiate with the criminals and their leaders," the Ayatollah told Mr Hojjat-o-islam Kermani, "they must be crushed." Mr Kermani, a little know figure in the Shi'ite Mosque, was told to provide whatever help the Government forces might need "to restore peace to the region."

The Ayatollah's instructions followed the execution yesterday morning of nine officers and eleven civilians at the Kurdish town of Saqqez which was captured by the Army on Sunday. It was the first reported case of members of the armed forces being sent before the firing squad since the February revolution.

Kurdestan was calm again yesterday amid reports that an unofficial ceasefire was in force along the Kurdish fronts and a Kurdish team in Tehran was to open peace negotiations with the Prime Minister.

But Kurds at headquarters in the stronghold of Mahabad, just north of Saqqez, said heavily armed rebels in the mountain passes around the town were keeping a wary eye on columns of Government tanks and troops deployed on the plains below.

The Ayatollah's order to "crush the rebels" took observers by surprise, coming among reports that a five-man team of Kurds from Mahabad's revolutionary committee was in Tehran to offer peace terms to Dr Mehdi Bazargan's Government. Earlier yesterday the team said that the clergy had promised to broadcast a formal ceasefire later in the day.

The Kurdish team was reported to be prepared to lay down arms if the Government agreed to make no further Army advances on Kurdish positions; returned Government guardsmen, loyal to the Ayatollah to their bases outside Kurdestan; halted the execution of alleged Kurdish rebels; and, recalled Sheikh Khalkhali, the militant hardliner named by Ayatollah Khomeini to preside over Kurdish trials.

A member of the Kurdish team said Ayatollah Taleghani, one of Iran's three ranking politico-leaders, had agreed to their demands on Monday evening, and that they had been invited to a meeting with the Revolutionary Council, the country's supreme lawmakers, later yesterday.

Talks are also reported to have taken place on Monday with the Deputy Prime Ministers, Mr Sadegh Tabatabai, and Mr Mostafa Chamran, who is also the country's security chief.

The high level Government contacts were partially confirmed by an official spokesman who added that the Prime Minister was scheduled to meet the team. Mr Tabatabai said the Prime Minister was ready to hear the Kurdish proposals. The Kurdish team is believed to be staying in Tehran today.

Less than two weeks ago Ayatollah Khomeini, as newly-named Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, ordered a general mobilisation and warned that he would hold the Government and armed forces responsible unless they crushed the Kurdish rebellion within 24 hours.

The Kurdish Democratic Party has claimed that about 10,000 men have arms and are prepared to fight "till the last drop of their blood."

A gruesome picture of Kurds and gendarmerie officers blindfolded and falling to the ground dead before a Government firing squad was shown on the front page of Ettela'at yesterday. The picture was taken on Monday outside Sanandaj after summary trials by Sheikh Khalkhali. Yesterday's executions brought to 68 the number of Kurds reportedly executed during the past two weeks on charges of rebellion and killings.

The Iranian authorities broke a whip during a public flogging in the streets of Tehran yesterday. The victim, a fruit seller convicted by a special court designed to control prices, had been sentenced to 25 lashes. The lashing was halted midway and a second Islamic militiaman brought in to administer a more severe flogging, but the whip's handle broke.

© Guardian News and Media Limited

Doc_Number: KP000156