

Kurds lose mountain stronghold

From Reuter in Tehran
Iranian Government forces last night recaptured the Kurdish guerrilla stronghold of Saqqez after a three-day battle, the official Pars news agency reported.

The agency quoted the commander of the 28th infantry division based in Sananda' as saying the town fell to a relief column.

There was no independent confirmation of the report as telephone operators reported all lines to the hill town were cut.

The Pars report indicated the column first relieved a stranded army garrison on the edge of town which had been under heavy mortar and light artillery fire from Kurdish guerrillas.

Helicopter gunships pounded the town with rockets and machine gun fire throughout the day, according to eye-witnesses.

There was no reliable estimate of casualties available, Kurdish

guerrillas, under the leadership of the banned Kurdish Democratic Party, hold the northern stronghold of Mahabad although a battle between army tanks and guerrillas using rockets and artillery was reported to be raging 20 miles outside the town yesterday.

The battle halted at nightfall when the tanks were no longer able to make use of reconnaissance helicopters to pinpoint guerrilla emplacements.

In a speech the mark the end of Ramadan, the normally moderate Tehran religious leader, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, cursed the KDP and branded its members as Communists. Using a Persian curse, he said: "Dust on their heads. The name of the KDP brings back very bad memories."

In a reference to Ayatollah Khomeini, he said: "The leader of the Revolution himself asked me why are you defending these people, and now you see how they have made the

leader angry. Now they must be punished. There is no place for them here. They must leave. The revolution is an Islamic one and everybody who chooses another path must be suppressed."

The KDP leader, Abdulrahman Qassemloo, said in Mahabad that the Kurds were prepared to negotiate with the Central Government if four conditions were met. Mr Qassemloo, dressed in traditional Kurdish baggy trousers and a dress top with a pistol on his hip, listed the conditions as: suspension of further troop reinforcements to the Kurdish region; the release of prisoners; the freeing of all Kurdish hostages; an end to accusations of Kurds alleged to have taken part in the fighting. The Kurdish leader said that if the conditions were not met his side would continue fighting.

Mahabad was completely in Kurdish hands and the guer-

rillas were armed with G-3, Kalashnikov, M-1, and Czechoslovak-made Berne automatic rifles. Old men running the administration at the KDP offices all carried pistols.

State radio yesterday broadcast half-hourly appeals to the people of Saqqez not to help what it described as counter-revolutionary elements which had entered the town and were attacking the garrison with mortars. The radio said that soldiers in the garrison did not want to fight in order to avoid bloodshed. It said that three officers, six sergeants, and seven privates at the garrison had been killed.

The army had units at Mian-dowab, northeast of Mahabad, but Kurds held the road between the two towns and had built sandbag emplacements along some stretches. The guerrillas were using captured army jeeps and lorries for transport.

Kenneth MacKenzie adds

from Ankara: With reports of growing political unrest in provinces of south-eastern Turkey, the Minister of the Interior, Mr Hasan Fehmi Gunes, has started a 10-day tour of investigation of the most sensitive areas.

In the past two weeks political violence has increased, despite governmental claims to the contrary.

The authorities are primarily worried about reports of escalating unrest in south-eastern Turkey particularly in Urfa province, where a local pro-Kurdish group has perpetrated a series of terrorist outrages, including the murders of prominent Right-wingers and the wounding of a justice party deputy. The authorities are alarmed that the secessionist organisation — led by a Left-wing faction known as the Apoists — may be attempting to set up "liberated zones."

Ayatollah Taleghani



