

Kurds plan show of strength

From Nicholas Cumming-Bruce in Tehran

Thousands of Kurds, including more than 1,000 Pesh Merga guerrillas, assembled yesterday in the western town of Mahabad in preparation for a day of demonstration called by the outlawed Kurdish leader, Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini.

Army and Revolutionary Guard units in the town remained in their barracks as crowds converged on the town and posters went up in support of Kurdish leaders banned by Ayatollah Khomeini in August.

Sheikh Hosseini called for Kurds to march to the graves of those people killed during fighting between Kurdish guerrillas and security forces and afterwards to call on the families of those killed, in a show of strength and defiance to the central government.

Guerrillas are to protect the demonstrators today, but will not join the demonstrations,

which are scheduled to pass close to the Army and Revolutionary Guard barracks.

Kurdish guerrillas are manning check points around the town, the centre of Kurdish resistance to the Government until the Army moved in in September. The town was brought back under rebel control last week.

The Army and the Government have issued separate statements to the effect that they will not take any offensive action against the Kurds.

The Interior Minister, the Hashem Sabbaghian, was quoted yesterday as saying that the Government would halt all military operations in Kurdish areas to allow negotiations by a four-man ministerial team sent to find a settlement to the issue, which has dogged the Government since March.

The Armed Forces chief of staff, General Hossein Shaker, confirmed that the Army would not initiate any armed ope-

rations but that "aggression and provocation directed at the Armed Forces will be severely confronted."

In Tehran, Islamic groups have planned a march on the United States Embassy there after prayers at Tehran University.

The march follows a series of attacks on the US by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Criticism has also been levelled at Britain by Iran's Charge d'Affaires in London, Ali Afruz, who has returned to Tehran for consultations with the Government. In an interview with the Tehran Daily Jumhuriya Eslami, Dr Afruz accused Britain of adopting a hostile attitude towards the Islamic Revolution.

"Western Governments, in particular those of Britain and America, are openly working against our revolution," Dr Afruz said. "The British police have adopted a hostile position against the Islamic Revolution

