

IRANIAN STUDENTS

The Enemy Within

IRAN'S much-vaunted Islamic revolution appears to have finally spilled over into India. Chanting *Allah-o-Akbar* and wielding primitive weapons like lathis bristling with nails, bicycle chains, knives and iron rods, a group of 100 pro-Khomeini Iranian students attacked 25 anti-Khomeini counterparts under cover of darkness in Aligarh on June 9. The bloody battle left 14 of them seriously injured and one of them, Shahram Mirani, dead.

A sense of solidarity was evident among the victims who were treated in Aligarh's Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital. The hospital's wards were full of knots of Iranian students. More sat outside in the corridors braving Aligarh's sweltering mid-summer heat. All the students preferred to remain anonymous; when camera flash bulbs popped, every one of them hurriedly covered their faces. Identification would be dangerous, said their anonymous spokesman, their families back in Iran might be attacked. The attack itself meant that they had all been consigned to the bracket of 'infidels'.

Exception: In a first information report (FIR) filed with the Aligarh police, Behram Behrar, one of the anti-Khomeini students, alleged that the victims had recognised as many as 34 attackers, yet all of them had not been arrested last fortnight. But there was a disturbing exception to the violence this time: the attackers had been led, said the students, by Hussain Barkhordari, a second secretary in the Iranian Embassy in Delhi who is officiating as the press attache. The assistant proctor of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) reportedly recognised Barkhordari, who completed his B.A. in Sociology from Aligarh last year, in an embassy car an hour before the attack.

It was clear that the Aligarh police had been caught off guard by the attack. The majority of AMU's 300 Iranian students belong to the anti-government faction; and Vice-Chancellor Saiyid Hamid said he felt that the pro-Khomeini students

had received reinforcements from outside. According to observers here, the Union of Iranian Students' Islamic Associations, the national forum of pro-Khomeini students, is headquartered in Aligarh. The union had held a secret meeting, attended by representatives from all over the country, from June 1 to 5 in Aligarh. The day before the attack, the anti-Khomeini students complained to the Superintendent of Police, P.P.S. Sidhu, that they apprehended an attack. Sidhu reportedly ordered all Iranians from outside Aligarh to quit the town by noon on June 9. The order was ignored, but Sidhu assured the students that evening that the outsiders had left the campus. Shocked by the attack, Sidhu visited the injured

Injured Iranian students in Aligarh and (inset) Shahram Mirani: importing the revolution



students on June 12, bearing gifts of fruit and an apology for not having ensured their safety.

There was also a tense struggle throughout the night on June 10 over the body of Mirani. Mirani was a Kurd, a militant minority in northwestern Iran which has been engaged in a constant civil war with the Government. His parents in Kermanshah insisted that they wanted their son's body back. When Vice-Chancellor Hamid and District Magistrate Panna Lal Punia contacted the Iranian Embassy, they were told brusquely that the Government of Iran had nothing to do with Mirani, and that he was not a citizen of Iran.

It was true that Mirani has acquired refugee status in India, and was registered thus with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Delhi. The Aligarh authorities therefore contacted Fazul Karim, UNHCR's *chargé de mission*; but Karim, too was helpless: his logistics did not allow for refugees' bodies to be flown back to their countries of origin. The all-night tussle between Hamid, Punia and Sidhu and the students finally ended at 7 a.m. on June 11, when Mirani's body was buried with Shia rites in AMU's cemetery.

Denial: Predictably, the Iranian Embassy issued a strong denial on June 12, saying that Barkhordari was nowhere near Aligarh when the attack occurred. The embassy's press note ended by saying that "all investigations are being carried out without this embassy being informed, and the body of the deceased student has been buried without our consultation". This was patently untrue, for both Hamid and District Magistrate Panna Lal Punia had told INDIA TODAY that the embassy had been quite uncooperative. Embassy officials, meanwhile, refused to meet the press.

The Government of India's ambiguous attitude towards dissident Iranian students in the country is not surprising. Many of the dissidents had participated enthusiastically in the revolution that toppled Shah Reza Pahlavi in February 1979; many of them had had their movements restricted by the Government of India in February 1978 when the Shah visited India. India's economic links with Iran have grown since

the revolution; throughout the Iran-Iraq war, for instance, Iran has continued to supply precious crude oil to India, and trade between the two countries is expected to boom. There is therefore a reluctance to take a stand on the cruelty of the Iranian regime towards its opponents, even if such cruelty were to take ugly forms in India.

There are more than 20,000 Iranians in India at the moment; the majority of them are students. Most of them, under the All India Iranian Students' Associations, are marked as enemies of the Islamic regime. The dissidents belong to various political groups; major among these are the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, the Islamic guerrillas who are engaged in a bitter struggle with Khomeini's Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) in Iran; the Akkaiyat (minority) faction of the Fedayeen-e-Khalq, a Marxist-Leninist group that believes in an Islamised Communism; the Peykar (struggle) party; and the Rah-e-Kargar (workers' path).

Refugees: Officially, government officials in Delhi refused to go on record on the Aligarh incident. Unofficially, they said that they would prefer that the law took its own course and the guilty were punished. The fact is, however, that many of the dissident Iranian students in India can never hope to return to their country. They are constantly enrolling for new courses and thus staying on. At least 210 of them have had their passports cancelled by the Iranian Embassy, and are currently holders of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) certificates saying that they are refugees.

There are nearly 800 other Iranian refugees in India, all of them adherents of the Baha'i faith, a minority that has suffered, like the Kurds, immense persecution at the hands of the Islamic rulers of Iran. There are also 4,000 Afghan refugees, and close to 100 Indo-Chinese refugees, mostly from Vietnam and Kampuchea.

But the Government of India officially does not recognise the existence of any refugee; neither does it exercise its prerogative of granting visas to dissident Iranians whose passports have expired. The Iranian refugees, therefore, are technically illegal residents in India. But the UNHCR's Karim says: "We are thankful that the Government here has granted *de facto* asylum to these students." Apart from a monthly stipend of Rs 500, each student refugee also gets money to buy books and medicine, and the UNHCR provides legal help.

Fears: By June 15, 28 Iranian students had been expelled by AMU's disciplinary committee, which consists of the deans of eight of the university's faculties and is presided over by Pro Vice-Chancellor K.M. Bahauddin. Karim's fear was that some of them might be anti-Khomeini students, and

that they might be deported to Iran. "Deportation would be the bottom line," he said, "because they will most certainly go before firing squads the moment they return." But the Government was obviously aware of this danger, and there was no indication that any student would be deported. Reports also indicate that after Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati's recent visit, the Government of India has agreed to accept as many as 700 fresh students, who, allege anti-Khomeini students, are actually *hezbollahs* (Islamic hooligans).

Shahram Mirani's death has again underscored the tangled nature of Iranian politics. His friends fear that he may not be the last Iranian to die in this country. India could conceivably ban all political activity by Iranian students. If more blood is shed, however, the Government could find itself in a very sticky situation, torn between the compulsions of friendship with Iran and the humanitarian aspects of dissident Iranians being hunted out and attacked by their Islamic enemies. Until then, it has to contend with a sizeable population of Iranian students, most of whom can never hope to return home as long as Teheran is ruled by the Ayatollahs.

—CHAITANYA KALBAG

GOA

Storm Warning



AS GOA gets ready for the monsoon session of the Assembly there are signs that a political storm is in the offing. Infighting in the ruling party has reached awesome proportions and was worsened when the Congress(I) High Command decided to shuffle about the local leadership, appointing Sulochana Katkar as the president of the Goa Pradesh Congress Committee(I) in place of Irene Barros.

If the past is any indication the latest changes are unlikely to do anything for the already tarnished image of the party. In the last two years Goans have become accustomed to the constant bickering amongst the 28-member ruling party. Nearly all the members are busy consolidating their own positions and pay scant attention to the concerns of the party. This was amply in evidence during the last budget session, when the Government just managed to scrape by despite the fact that it has an overwhelming 28 members in a 30-member house. On two occasions it had to withdraw official amend-

ing bills following opposition from its own members. Says one legislator ruefully: "We have 28 chief ministers."

Weak Leadership: Part of the trouble lies in the fact that Chief Minister Pratap Singh Rao Ji Rane has not been able to consolidate his position. Rane who has now been in office for two years was originally chosen as a compromise candidate. He has, however, not managed to build his own base and is still facing strong challenges from his powerful lieutenants, Industries Minister A.N. Naik and Health Minister Wilfrid D'Souza. Rane makes no bones about his difficulties saying: "I do not want to blame anyone, but we have been running the Government rather casually. The casual attitude has cost us a lot."

Rane's position is further weakened because the Congress(I) High Command seems to be waiting and watching the situation instead of taking active steps to prop him up. Several legislators stress that they are watching for signals from the High Command. Rane adds: "We are trying to have balanced development, outside help is a part of it, one cannot develop in isolation."

In a way, the infighting which is the bane of the party is nothing surprising. The Congress(I) in Goa has an unusual, if somewhat unsavoury history. Two years ago when the Congress(I) returned to power at the Centre 20 legislators led by Wilfrid D'Souza, who had been elected on the Congress(U) ticket, decided that they should conform to the national trend and defected en masse to the Congress(I). Says Froilano Machado, speaker of the Assembly: "It was a unique experience." Most legislators readily admit that the mid stream switch was purely a matter of convenience. Rane confesses candidly: "We would not have lasted three months had we not opted for the Congress(I)."

Little Progress: But Rane's inability to grab hold of the party machinery is telling on the Government's performance. Rane has been trying hard to push through development projects in Goa but he has not made any significant headway. Despite his best efforts only 8 per cent of the land is under irrigation and the fishing industry remains stagnant, content



Rane: heavy price

to utilise the 5 km traditional zone. Says a legislator: "Improvement will not be possible unless Rane establishes himself." Rane claims however that his government has come a long way. He points to the fact that Goa has the highest per capita income in