

formerly Jan Sangh stronghold for urban lawlessness and unrelenting inflation—now at 25 percent. In New Delhi six out of seven constituencies went to the Congress where it had lost all of them in the last elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the heart of the gangetic Plain and India's largest state where the Congress was swept from power in 1977, this time the Congress took the state with ease. In the south, where the Congress won in the last election, the margins were huge in its favor. The only national exception was West Bengal where the Communist Party-Marxist (CPM) was carrying the state.

Winners and losers

Leading the winners among individual political leaders was Gandhi, who won by a landslide margin of over 200,000 in Medok. Other notable winners were Congress General Secretary H.N. Bahuguna and numerous Congressmen including Mrs. Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi. Two other contenders for the Prime Ministership, Jagjivan Ram (the Janata head) and Charan Singh (Lok Dal and current Prime Minister) also won their seats as did former foreign minister and Jan Sangh leader Vajpayee.

Political pundits saw the voters as "apathetic" and "uninterested" but returns showed the contrary. Almost 60 percent of the total eligible voters cast their ballots (300 million voters). Some areas recorded much higher percentages.

After 24 hours of returns, no other party except the Congress had recorded double digit returns in the number of seats won. The Times of India explained the verdict in the following terms: "By electing Mrs Gandhi as their nominee to the Lok Sabha in an overwhelming majority, the people of India have given themselves another chance to renew the task of building a viable nation-state. This is the essential significance of the unprecedented victory of the Congress (I)."

The challenge ahead for Mrs. Gandhi

This defines the challenge ahead for Mrs Gandhi. Some indicators of the critical issues were evident in the first announcements following the Congress mandate. Gold and silver prices fell massively and the stock market stabilized for the first time in two and a half years. Commodity speculators and black marketers who enjoyed a field day under the Janata waited to hear from the new government. The reflection of this was the immediate fall in prices of essential commodities in all areas. One analyst, interpreting the stabilization of the stock exchange, said that it reflects that a consensus exists within the population throughout all walks of life who want economic growth.

Soviets poised

Iran break-up looms; what after Khomeini?

For months, this publication has reported details on a special plan of the British Special Intelligence Services to "balkanize" the Middle East into feuding principalities and tribal regions.

In particular, *EIR* has emphasized that this plan—named "the Bernard Lewis Plan" in honor of the Princeton University-based British Islamicist who authored it—was the basis for replacing the Shah of Iran by the British with the unstable and chaotic Ayatollah Khomeini regime: Iran was destined to be split into pieces, to trigger similar break-ups in Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and elsewhere.

In the past days Iran witnessed unprecedented levels of ethnic and regional unrest and, from all appearances, the Lewis scheme has taken on a life of its own. However, there is a growing danger in the situation that Lewis and his colleagues did not count on: The Soviet Union has made exceedingly clear with its move into Afghanistan that it will not permit the disintegration of the states on its southern flank into warring principalities. If Iran continues to deteriorate there is little doubt that the Soviets will intervene militarily to end the instability. In the meantime, the Soviets are prepared to use their influence inside Iran to secure the situation as best it can.

In addition, Soviet Ambassador to Iran Vinogradov reportedly told Khomeini last week, that if Iran falls under the sway of an anti-Soviet "Islamic Pact" or agrees too readily to aid the insurgents inside Afghanistan, the Soviets will not stand idly by.

"Death to Khomeini"

Since the weekend of Jan. 5, outbreaks against Khomeini have broken out on an unprecedented scale in both Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in northwest Iran, while civil and religious strife has erupted in Baluchistan in the southeast and in pockets in the oil-rich area of Khuzistan in the southwest.

In Kurdistan, in a case described by France's *Le Figaro* newspaper Jan. 8 as that of "rats leaving a sinking ship," the Khomeini-appointed governor-general of the region quit his post and joined the ranks of demonstrators who were protesting acts of repression by Kho-

meini's revolutionary guards and demanding greater regional autonomy.

Iranian source report that the Kurds and the Azerbaijanis are linking up, a process mediated through secular nationalist forces in the National Front, dissident military units, and supporters of deposed Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar.

Of the two northwestern areas, the unrest in Azerbaijan is far more significant.

The intensity of opposition to Khomeini has reached unprecedented proportions. Hundreds have either died or been wounded in pitched battles between local supporters of Iran's influential Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari and the revolutionary guards. For the first time since February, signs have appeared in Tabriz, the main urban center of the region, reading "Death to Khomeini!" and posters of Khomeini have been burned in the streets.

Second, most of Iran's intellectuals, merchants, and politicians either hail from Azerbaijan, or have adopted the area as a base of opposition to Khomeini. Azerbaijanis comprise the largest population grouping in Iran, numbering upwards of 10 million.

The third factor in Azerbaijan is Shariatmadari himself. By all accounts, Shariatmadari is the second most important religious figure in Iran after Khomeini, and the recent unrest in Tabriz is, in part, a street-level manifestation of an increasingly bitter struggle between the two men. This week that intensified as Shariatmadari supporters threatened to march on Khomeini's headquarter city of Qom to "liberate" their leader, who is now under effective house arrest by the Qom religious mafia.

The Shariatmadari Option

Signs are growing that Shariatmadari could become the rallying symbol for a nationwide, not just regional, opposition to Khomeini. He has emphasized that the mullahs, or clergy, should not run Iran's political life; for this reason, he has been looked to by various "secularist" and "middle-class" political elements throughout Iran.

As one observer noted: "For Khomeini, if a doctor in Iran was pro-Shah, he should be sent out of the country. For Shariatmadari, this is tantamount to national suicide. He's a pragmatist, whom the technicians, and middle-class merchants can live with, while Khomeini believes 'small is beautiful' and allies with the 'little man' as the base for his power."

In an article entitled "Khomeini Threatened More and More By Shariatmadari," *Le Figaro* Iran correspondent Thierry Desjardins reported Jan 8, "all the opponents of the Khomeini regime, and they are becoming more and more numerous, will rally to the side of Shariatmadari, who has become a standard-bearer not

only for his compatriots in Azerbaijan but also for all the regional groupings." This includes the Bakhtiari tribe, which maintains primary loyalty to former Premier Bakhtiar, now in exile in Paris. Support for Shariatmadari also extends to liberal opponents of Khomeini's "theocratic dictatorship"; merchants who resent the economic chaos induced by the Qom ruling group; and "all the groups of the left whose eyes have been opened by Khomeini's recent attacks on the Soviet Union," the journalist adds.

"Today," Desjardins concludes, "Shariatmadari is exactly in the same position (as Khomeini was before February). He wants to reunite the separatists, the elements nostalgic for the Shah, the liberals, the left and the merchants, but at the same time, he knows that if he attacks the Imam's regime frontally, Khomeini could still bring into the streets against him millions of demonstrators recruited in the most miserable quarters of Teheran. Shariatmadari must therefore let things drag.

"Very curiously, Khomeini thus finds himself today in the position of the Shah, who asked himself whether he had to hit back forcefully and immediately or if it were preferable to wait until his adversary exhausted himself."

The implications of the Desjardins analysis—which is borne out by parallel reports from Iranian emigré sources—are enormous. If Shariatmadari is indeed being put forward as a national "standard-bearer" against Khomeini, then it is certain that major *outside* forces are seeking to ride the Shariatmadari momentum to transform the Iranian internal situation to their advantage.

One suggested hypothesis centers on the French role, given the French connection-points to various anti-Khomeini Arab forces in Saudi Arabia and Iraq and the French government's commitment to avoiding a superpower showdown in the sensitive gulf region.

From the standpoint of its internal divisions, Iran's Jan. 25 presidential race takes on an interesting light. Sources report that the two main contenders are Abolhassan Banisadr, currently economics minister, and Admiral Madani, currently governor-general of Khuzistan. Banisadr, an advocate of the "Cambodianization" of Iran's economy through depopulating Iran's cities and sending people "back to the land," is favored by Khomeini. Madani, a "Pan-Iranist" ideologue who has gained support among certain Iranian military and professionals, is banking on the same base that is moving behind Shariatmadari, and is reportedly favored by him.

Should the two leading ayatollahs of Iran each make public their choice for president, sources indicate, the national confrontation could peak by election-time. One rumored possibility is that Madani, who has won Khomeini's confidence over time, will win a promise on Khomeini's part to remain silent on the presidential race, and will therefore emerge on top.