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Printed in Great Britain by
Lowe & Brydone Printers Limited, Thetford, Norfolk

Limits to Oil Wealth

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of higher prices. Among those arrested were two of Iran's more successful businessmen, Habib Elghanian and Mohammed Wahabzadeh. As much as 40 per cent of all goods lying on the Iranian had built up a large plastics business with extensive retail outlets; while Wahabzadeh was mainly concerned with cars, being an agent for BMW. A summons was also served in absentia on Habib Elghanian, so continuing to clutter the port. 13

Summary.

More importantly, an important opportunity to overhaul the country's distribution network was wasted. Reducing the middle man's profits did not solve the key question of getting goods quickly and efficiently into the market. The technocrats in the Ministry of Commerce would have liked to have seen this happen but the political will that the most vigorous action was taken in those areas where the middle class had been most affected - for instance the rising

The obstructive tactics of the merchants, mainly the traditional

of buying and maintaining a car. Wahabzadeh was accused of merchants of the Bazaar, proved too strong; and the Shah was neither ready nor willing to risk a confrontation. Indeed to mollify the merchants,

posing draconian price controls in a severely overheated economy, Commerce Minister Fereidoun Mahdavi was removed on 7 February 1976. He had been the main champion of reorganising distribution - including the creation of a model market like London's Covent Garden Street, sent out to check prices and decide sometimes with complete

(a scheme which was shelved with his demise).¹⁴ Some considered it the correct price for a product. The price war was the first significant that the bigger names prosecuted in the anti-profiteering or 'litkal' test of the newly formed single party, Rastakhiz; and on at prices campaigns were often outsiders - members of the Bahai sect, like Sabet, or Jews, like Elghanian - who were resented by the Bazaaris. Oil as a Variable

Oil as a Variable
The dampener on the boom came not from inside Iran but outside. Oil sales failed to meet expectation and revenues fell. By December 1975, as a whole the price campaign was a failure. Official indices went down for six months but black-market prices for essential commodities previous year. For the year as a whole the average daily production was sharply. The shortages were not relieved, and if anything became almost 12 per cent down.¹⁵

Throughout the summer sales had been slack. A surge of buying just prior to the biannual OPEC meeting in Vienna in September 1975 proved a temporary phenomenon. Continued world recession and a mild European winter kept international demand sluggish. Iran was especially affected because of the nature of its crude oil: a 'light' crude of high quality with a low sulphur content; and a 'heavy' crude with a higher sulphur content suitable for fuel oil.¹⁶ The heavy crude was most similar to that of Kuwait, while the light competed with the high-volume crude of Saudi Arabia. Normally Iran exported a ratio of 52/48 light/heavy. However, the mild winter severely affected demand for fuel oil, and through the complex OPEC pricing system that differentiated various types of crude, Iranian heavy oil became uncompetitive, especially when both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia reduced the price of their

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had been prominent religious figures, while his elder brother became Grievances of the Clergy

an ayatollah (see Appendix C). He first studied under the latter, then Inside Iran the basic bone of contention with the regime of the moderate moved to Isfahan, then to Arak before settling in the holy city of Qom. clergy led by Ayatollah Shariat-Maderi was the increasingly ambivalent Here he quickly earned a reputation so that even before he was 30 his role of religion. The Shah exploited religion when it suited him and philosophical teachings attracted a keen following among seminary ignored it when it contradicted development needs. To this were added students. He refused to see Islam in a narrow religious context but re-a host of major and minor irritants. The loss of land owned by the garded it as an all-em bracing moral force. In 1941 he wrote a book mosques as a result of Land Reform remained a nagging sore - though strongly attacking Reza Shah - the beginning of a sustained attack on not as great as some would contend since compensation had been paid the monarchy and Pahlavis. His writings appeared to be strongly influ- and important religious endowments at Meshed and Qom had been ended by nationalistic and moral considerations. Seeing Iran increasingly retained. A greater complaint was the Shah's scheme to redevelop dominated by Britain and Russia and witnessing the changes wrought the Holy Shrine at Meshed which involved the destruction of large on society during the Second World War, he determined to free Iran segments of the old city. It was a classic instance of something being from all foreign influence. His views have been remarkably consistent, imposed from on high, wholly unaware of local opinion. The scheme, his sole solution for Iran being an Islamic republic. 37

and the Shah's close identification with it, was so unpopular that bull-Like several other of the clergy, suspicious of Mossadegh's ties with dozers and construction equipment was frequently bombed or sabo- the Tudeh Party, Khomeini took his distance from the National Front tagged .38 A more significant, and gratuitous, affront to the religious during the 1953 oil nationalisation. The overthrow of Mossadegh left community was the imposition of the monarchy calendar in 1976. This Khomeini as one of the leading opposition figures and by 1962 he had helped convince some of the moderate clergy that the Shah was bent on established himself as a formidable presence, as well as one of Iran's destroying the Islamic roots of Iran.

leading ayatollahs. He opposed the Shah's proposals for land reform There was also a groundswell of discontent over the Shah's efforts to and the emancipation of women - the two pillars of the White Revolu- cow the clergy. Dissident voices inside Iran like Ayatollah Taleghani and tion - at two levels (see Chapter 4). At one level he contested the Ayatollah Rouhani were jailed for alleged subversive activities which legality of the Pahlavi dynasty and its prerogative to introduce such far amounted to no more than challenging the Shah's use of torture and

reaching reforms. At another he was challenging the regime which he political repression (see Chapter 8). The imprisonment of well-known figures like Ayatollah Taleghani alienated ordinary people far more authority of the clergy. The other clergy did not really share his per- than tough police handling of the former politicians or the guerillas. sonalised crusade against the Pahlavis and the monarchy, but they Attempts to brand religious persons as political subversives rarely suc- supported his concern that traditional areas of authority were being ceeded, even if official propaganda tried to insinuate that these persons eroded as the modern state assumed responsibility for education, birth were being manipulated by Marxists. 39

control, marriage and family laws.

At least three other factors were a source of friction with the clergy.

This was why the Ayatollah's arrest in June 1963 provoked such (I) Corruption. This has already been mentioned but it should be riots. The clergy were fully behind him. Yet once Khomeini had taken stressed that corruption even extended to the management of religious up his forced residence in Najaf, Iraq in late 1964, the more moderate affairs. For instance the chief officials concerned with organising the clergy were relieved that such an uncompromising figure should be out pilgrimage to Mecca were found guilty in 1976 of taking bribes from of the way. Khomeini retained, however, a following in Iran, especially

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pilgrims. (2) The uncertain nature of state financial support. The at Qom where seminary students continued to commemorate the riots. clergy were constantly concerned that the authorities would use state From his Iraqi exile he refused to drop his crusade, denouncing the support for endowments and religious institutions as a means of con- lavish Persepolis celebrations organised by the Shah in 1971 and calling trol. Increased financial costs as a result of the inflation since 1973 had for a boycott of the Rastakhiz Party when it was established in 1975. weakened their financial independence.41 (3) The rise of Bahaiism.

But it was not until 1977 that the same forces that helped form a Bahaiism is not officially recognised in Iran as it is considered an here- broadly united front of religious protest in 1963 began to coalesce again. tical Moslem sect whose founder was executed in Tabriz in 1851. This

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doctrine was based on the idea that certain holy men could be used as a disturbances at least 70 persons were killed - the bloodiest incident means of communication between the people and the awaited, but since 1963.

hidden, Twelfth Imam. 42 Despite tremendous persecution Bahaiism

The spontaneous response to this anti-Khomeini smear campaign, prospered, earning itself the reputation of a freemasonry that in turn

and the government's heavy-handed reaction, transformed the situation. produced much slanderous gossip about Bahai ritual. The traditional The secular constitutional protest movement lost the initiative to the clergy feared the growing presence of such 'heretics' in positions of religious inspired opposition, and the moderate clergy, still in the power - whether close to the Shah (like his personal physician) or in majority, found themselves being outmanoeuvred by the more radical business, like the banking magnate, Hozbar Yazdani. It was also held pro-Khomeini supporters. It is also probably correct to trace the begin-against Hoveida that his father was a Bahai. (One explanation for nings of the clergy's awareness of their power to this incident at Qom. Khomeini's strong anti-Israeli feeling has been the presence of the M-over that it should come from Qom itself was no accident. This Bahai international headquarters in Haifa.)

city had refused to allow the attributes of modern Iran to permeate: there are no bars, cinemas, alcohol stores or luxury shops. It is a city The Power of the Mosque

whose life revolves round the mosques and the seminaries so that it All these elements combined to make the religious community inside could claim to have been 'unpolluted' by the Iran of the Pahlavis. Iran deeply concerned when they too detected that the Shah's Great

The clergy had a genuine constituency - the conservative mass of Civilisation was fading into the distance and being replaced by popular the population who were puzzled, confused and bitter about the discontent with no apparent change in the system of government. How-contradictory policies and broken promises of the Shah. These were ever, first they were neither militant nor organised, and indeed seemed people who did not read newspapers and inherently mistrusted govern- to have little sense of their own potential power.

ment and who saw the mullah and the mosque as the repository of Since 1976 when the first group of Iranian pilgrims was allowed to traditional values. At first the clergy's power was used to organise visit Shiia shrines in Iraq, Ayatollah Khomeini had been able to keep in protest funeral processions for those killed in clashes with the security closer touch with his supporters inside Iran.⁴³ Tapes of his sermons forces. These drew on the Iranian tradition of large, highly emotional attacking the regime were smuggled in with increasing frequency and mourning processions. At 40-day intervals these continued from Janu- he was well able to exploit the regime's more tolerant attitude towards ary until August 1978. In the meantime, Khomeini, still in Iraq, was mosque pronouncements in mid-1977. His tough rhetoric from outside transformed into a mythical symbol of the hidden Imam, who one day raised the pitch of religious protest. By the autumn of 1977 the tenor would return to the Shiia faithful. ⁴⁷ But if the growing surge of protest of sermons had changed and in many instances was becoming openly to the Shah's regime took an increasingly religious aspect, it was not hostile to the Shah, while others called for observance of the Constitu-

entirely attributable to the power of the clergy. The Bazaar and the
tion .44 With Khomeini once again in the public eye, the tempo of
rootless urban proletariat played an important role.

protest quickened. The Ayatollah's own determination was hardened
The Bazaar

by the mysterious death of his son, Mostafa, in Iraq on 23 October,
apparently the work of SAVAK.⁴⁵ Whether or not this belief was true

The Bazaar is the hub of urban life in Iran. It serves not merely as a
the authorities certainly began to blame Khomeini for the emerging
commercial centre but also as a unique type of community centre. It
religious unrest. On 7 January 1978 the leading Persian language daily,
includes one, or several, mosques, public baths, the old religious schools

Etelaat, published an article attacking and slandering Khomeini. ⁴⁶ It
a?d nymeraus tea houses. With so much activity condensed in a rela-
quickly filtered through that the article had been ordered by the

t1vel)f small area, communication within the Bazaar is quick and easy,
Information Minister, Darioush Homayoun, an ambitious apparatchik

and as a result the Bazaar has traditionally been the main source of
who had gained the post for his zealous activities in Rastakhiz. The

P<;>litical mobilisation. This was true of the constitutional movement at
next day in Qom theological students staged a sit-in. This was broken

J the turn of the century and it was true of the pro-Shah counter demon-
up by security forces, an action which quickly provoked violence
strations that ensured his return in 19 53.

with the security forces shooting at the demonstrators. In two days of

l]he independent financial strength of the Bazaar has been a vital

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element in its power. Despite the modernisation of the economy, the
tion whose new wealth permitted them to buy property outside the

Bazaar still controls over two-thirds of domestic wholesale trade and
Bazaar a\ea yet whose tradition made them work in, and continue to

accounts for at least 30 per cent of all imports. ⁴⁴ At the same time

identify With, the Bazaar. The merchants themselves were resentful of
through its control of the carpet trade and other export items like nuts

the government's challenge to their privileges. The more so when they
and dried fruits, the Bazaar has access to foreign exchange which has

saw business taken from them in the name of the state now being con-
not been channelled through the official system. Likewise its traditional

ducted for the benefit of friends and associates of the Royal Family. ^{5t}
money lending and money changing have continued. One unofficial

An indication of the residual Bazaari attitude towards the Royal

estimate put Bazaari lending in 1976 at 15 per cent of private sector

Family was the virtual absence of royal portraits in the Bazaar area. ⁵²
credit.⁴⁹

Yet such resentment was insufficient to turn the Bazaar merhcants into

Precisely because the Bazaar possessed such political power, the organisers and financiers of the nationwide anti-Shah protests that Shah sought over the years to diminish it. This was done firstly by emerged in 1978.

building new state schools, new housing and new shopping centres out-

Politically; the Bazaar has had to be opportunist to survive. However, side the Bazaar, while within the Bazaar streets were 'widened' - a the bul-k, of kazaaris could be classified as conservative, devout Moslems euphemism for imposing a modern grid-iron pattern of roads on the and providers of important funds to subsidise religious activity. When, old narrow alleyways (which also made security easier to enforce). therefore, the mosque sermons became more anti-Shah and open criti- Secondly it was done by the modernisation of the banking system and cism was voiced of the tremendous waste of national assets and the the entry of the state into the distribution system. State corporations corruption of national character by foreigners, the Bazaar and its were set up to import and distribute basic foodstuffs like wheat, sugar leaders were an audience that needed little conversion.

and meat, or to import essential raw materials like cement or steel.

The first concrete indication of a new militant link between the These corporations appeared in the wake of the 1973 boom when the mosque and the merchants was a curious struggle to prevent the Bank subsidies on foodstuffs were increased and the need to manage raw Saderat - known as the Bazaaris' friend - falling under the control of material supplies was paramount. To cut out the Bazaari middlemen in a Bahai. At the end of 1977, Hozbar Yazdani, the Bahai and self-made 1976 the government sought to improve the nationwide distribution millionaire, had acquired a 51 per cent stake in the medium sized of foodstuffs, and conceived of building a new market in Tehran, based Iranians Bank. He was manoeuvring to take over Shahriar Bank (in on London's new Convent Garden. 50 A third move to break the Bazaaris' which several wealthy Iranian families were important shareholders) hold was the price freeze and anti-profiteering campaign initiated in and had just raised his stake in Saderat, Iran's largest private com- August 1976 (see Chapter 6).

mercial bank, to 26 per cent. On the orders from the Shila clergy, In one sense these moves were an essential part of modernising the the Bazaar merchants organised a campaign of sustained withdrawals. economy. For instance the Bazaar merchants had a ruthless strangle- The campaign was so effective that the central bank, Bank Markazi, was hold on the distribution of foodstuffs which was mercilessly exploited obliged to intervene and Yazdani - reportedly on the Shah's orders - at the expense of the poor farmers. However, the Bazaaris interpreted sold out his interest in Saderat. 53

these actions as a calculated attack on the Bazaar as an institution; an

Once demonstrators began getting killed by the armed forces, the impression which the government did nothing to alter. At another level

Bazaar offered financial support to the victims' families. More important, there was no urban renewal in the Bazaar area and no effort to preserve it, the Bazaar was willing to finance strikes. At first in May 1978 it was what was valid in Bazaar life - or for that matter to provide an acceptable substitute other than moving into the ranks of the middle class. In September onwards, they helped support large sections of the striking many instances the cost of new housing for those anxious to move workforce, whether civil servants or oil-workers. There was no precise point when this support transformed from protest into backing for The net effect was to establish a fairly clear-cut division between revolutionary change and the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty. The those who could afford to leave and those who were obliged to stay in most important Bazaar, that of Tehran, was occupied for the first time by tanks on 11 May 1978, but as early as January there had been

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shutdown protests. Certainly this was the beginning of increasingly With passions running high this transformed the demonstration into a frequent shutdown protest strikes. These protests were made in a riot, spearheaded by such youths, attacking the symbols of Iran's new different frame of mind from the constitutionalists' and intellectuals'. wealth (the banks), its political bankruptcy (the headquarters of the Rastakhiz Party), its cultural corruption (the cinemas) and its moral decadence (liquor stores). Mixed in with this was some unashamed loot-

were also part of the constitutionalist movement.

ing and a strong element of Azarbaijani resentment at being neglected

The Tehran Bazaar leadership was provided by a five man Bazaar

by

the central government. (Since 1946 the Shah had visited Tabriz

Merchants Association which existed in defiance of attempts to impose

only once.) Radical students from Tabriz University had also played a

officially sponsored guilds controlled through the Rastakhiz Party.

part in transforming this demonstration. The toll was some 100 killed

These five men operated through a network of assistants who in turn

and over 600 arrested. ss This pattern of protest turned riot was to

had their own subgroupings and lesser heads that permeated throughout

repeat itself throughout Iran's major cities from now on.

the Bazaar in a pyramidal structure. This system enabled them to con-

The Role of Women

trol quickly large groups of persons through a mixture of personal

contact and money. It was not difficult to mount a demonstration with

In the first major outburst of anti-Shah feeling, at Tabriz, women do

hired help .54 The regime itself had been doing this for years. not seem to have played a prominent role. However, one of the remarkable features of the ensuing demonstrations was the large scale participation by the Bazaaris. The boom had created a fertile source of women. The chador, the traditional cloth with which women cover themselves, came to symbolise a form of protest: an identity with Islamic values and a rejection of the modernising process the urban proletariat that least benefitted from the boom. Often they were single males whose families remained in country villages. They The chador was first used as a form of political protest inside the were confronted with an alien culture, often forced to live on building sites or at great expense in slum conditions. Their earnings, which at But the presence of women in the demonstrations probably owed little first seemed high, were frequently illusory, eroded by inflation. From to the example in the universities. The bulk of the women taking part mid-1977 the economic slowdown, combined with efforts to peg rents in the demonstrations were working class and this was an important and house prices, provoked a sharp fall off in construction activity. This dynamic in the revolutionary process.s6 Women first appeared in large numbers in the mourning processions for those killed. Because the unskilled persons began to contract. Many became unemployed, and mourning processions were transformed into political protests, the this unemployment further coincided with a bad year for the agricultural women became part of this protest. Previously mourning processions cultural sector. Production of staple products like wheat, barley and rice declined on average 13 per cent in 1977 /8 pushing more men to the grounds had been permitted to demonstrate their feelings in public. towns in the hope of higher income. It was this confused, bitter new Therefore the political involvement of women was a natural evolution. urban proletariat which imbibed quickest the protest messages coming Their presence was not discouraged. On the contrary, the demonstrators realised that this unexpected female presence tended to The phenomenon of these 'rootless' males, mostly youths, was first unnerve riot police and the army, making demonstrations more difficult evident in Tabriz in February 1978 - the first place where serious anti- to challenge. It is also possible that the presence of women gave the Shah riots occurred. The Tabriz riot began as a demonstration of men greater courage to stand up to the police and army. sympathy and solidarity to. com~emorate ti:ose killed in Qom the /

This raises an important psychological question in the evolution of previous month. However, it rapidly turned into a vehement protest the opposition movement. The Shah's system of government depended against the Shah. The local Azarbaijani police refused to intervene and for its survival on two basic factors: a generalised acceptance of the troops were called in who responded violently and with their weapons. status quo and a deeply inculcated fear of sanctions. The small incidence

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well as being beaten up.

39. Rastakhiz, 11 June 1975.

11. See Index Vol. 7 No. 1 'Iranian Protests' pp. 15-24.

40. Tehran Journal, 25 November 1976. The administration also made it

12. The Tudeh Party was formed in 1941 under the umbrella of the evolving deliberately expensive to visit Mecca. The officially sponsored month long trip

Russian presence in Iran as a result of the Anglo-Russian occupation during the cost \$2,000 per head. Some said this was also designed to prevent pilgrims

Second World War.

journeying to Iraq.

13. Plan and Budget Organisation (PBO). Iran's Fifth Development Plan

41. International Herald Tribune, 15 January 1979.

1973-78, revised version, p. 401.

42. See Roger Stevens, *Land of the Grand Sophy* (London, Methuen, 1971),

14. Iran Almanac. *Echo of Iran*, Tehran, 1977, p. 411.

pp. 46-8.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

43. The March 1975 Irano-Iraq border treaty committed both sides to ease

16. There were no official figures for students studying abroad but the border crossing restrictions. The Iraqis eventually conceded an annual quota of

unofficial number was thought to be above 40,000.

130,000 pilgrims. Pressure by Shia pilgrims to visit the Iraqi shrines was said to

17. The most radical institution in Iran was the Arayamehr Technical

have been an element behind the Shah accepting to negotiate a border peace with

Institute, Tehran.

Iraq.

18. Iran Almanac, 1977, p. 122.

44. This was especially noted in Tehran and Qom.

19. See Fred Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development* (London,

45. See Farouhy, *L Iran contre le Chah*, p. 176. Pelican Books, 1979), pp. 227-35.
46. The author has not seen the original and translations vary. According to
20. *Tehran Journal*, 22 January 1977. one version, the text insinuates Khomeini to have been a homosexual in the pay
21. *Kayhan International*, 21, 22, 23 January 1977. These were a series of of the British. articles on the opposition with clear official inspiration and seeming to be based 4 7. See Stevens, *Land of the Great Sophy*, pp. 41-5 for a precise account of on SAV AK interrogations of some important recently captured underground this aspect of Shiism. figures.
48. *Financial Times*, 12 September 1978.
22. These shorthand terms have stuck and became current during their re-
49. Estimate given to the author by a Bank Markazi official in September emergence in the 9-12 February 1979 convulsion. 1976.
23. Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, provides the most detailed 50. The scheme was drawn up with the aid of Britain's National Freight analysis of their ideologies but is unable to pin down the philosophy of the Corporation. Mojahidin (seep. 236).
51. The Bazaar campaign against Commerce Minister Mahdavi in 1975 was due
24. In 1975 a bomb was exploded in the Shah Abbas Hotel, Isfahan, the to this belief. country's best known tourist hotel. In July 1975 bombs exploded at the British
52. The Bazaar area was the sole public place where the Royal Portrait was not Council and American Information Centre in Meshed. visible.
25. See Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, p. 237. 53. *Financial Times*, 12 September 1978.
26. *Kayhan International*, 23 January 1977. 54. *International Herald Tribune*, 15 January 1979.
27. This was the view of Western embassies in Tehran. 55. Based on information supplied to the author by an expatriate Persian
28. For a digest of the incidents reported in the Iranian press in 1976 see/ran scholar who visited Tabriz as the riots ended. *Almanac*, 1977, p. 122.
56. See *Iran Almanac*, 1977, pp. 422-3.
29. The number of incidents reported in 1977 dropped. This probably 57. Comment to the author by Dr Bakhtiar, 3 July 1977.

reflected a decline in guerilla activity.

58. See Stevens, *Land of the Great Sophy*, p. 42. Many Iranians emphasise,

30. Ahmad Farougy, *L Iran contre le Chah* (Paris, Editions Jean-Claude as a national trait, the tradition of martyrdom.

Simeon, 1979),p. 164.

59. *Sunday Times*, supplement 19 November 1978. Roger Cooper counted 31. From June 1975 to November 1976 the author recorded 158 such eight rows of full graves with 14 to 17 plots each and over 20 rows dug and instances.

waiting at the main Tehran cemetery.

32. While the author was in Iran from 1975-7 there was only one instance

60. *Financial Times*, 14 December 1978.

of a foreign news organisation being contacted by the underground opposition.

61. *Financial Times*, 19 December 1978.

This was Agence France Presse in July 1976.

62. *International Herald Tribune*, 17 January 1978.

33. The religious community also shunned the international press. The first

63. The Regency Council was approved under Article 42.

serious effort by the clergy to contact the foreign press was in January 1978.

64. The Shah maintained up until before the 31 March 1979 referendum that

34. *Financial Times*, 12 December 1978.

he had not abdicated.

35. Denis Wright, *The English among the Persians* (London, Heineman, 1977),

65. Comment to the author by a prominent figure in frequent contact with p. 107.

the Shah during this period.

36. The 1907 supplement to the Constitution talks of a committee of at least

66. *Financial Times*, 12 September 1978.

five persons chosen from the 'ulemas'.

67. *Financial Times*, 8 November 1978.

37. This information is largely based on research carried out by Paul Balta of

68. *International Herald Tribune*, 25 November 1978. On this occasion 267

Le Monde. For Khomeini's birth date see Farougy,*L Iran contre le Chah*,p.160. political prisoners were released.

38. Information supplied to the author by an expatriate living in Meshed

69. *International Herald Tribune*, 28 August 1978.

in 1976.

70. *International Herald Tribune*, 10 January 1979.