



Director of
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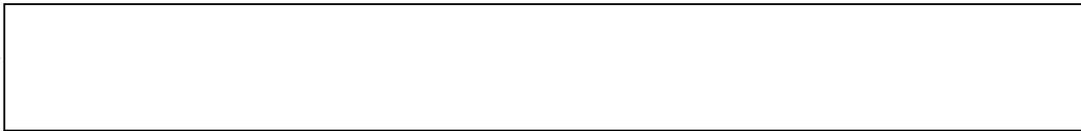
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IRAQ: Domestic Politics

Iraqi President Saddam Husayn is moving to broaden his base of support and neutralize some of the criticism of his one-man rule.



Saddam, who lacks the personal popularity enjoyed by former President Bakr, seems to be trying to develop a constituency outside the Baath Party. He has been making highly publicized efforts to show his concern about chronic shortages of consumer goods and services; he also has been visiting residential areas of Baghdad and local marketplaces, hospitals, schools, and factories.



Saddam's politicking coincides with the government's announcement of plans for elections to a National Assembly and a Kurdish legislative council. A ministerial committee has begun preparations for the balloting, which could come late this year or in early 1980. Although the outcome of the voting is certain to be determined in advance, Saddam probably sees an election as useful in developing a personal following that would make him less dependent on the Baath Party organization.



Preparations may now be under way for the Baath Party congress and elections that were scheduled for last January. One of Saddam's closest associates reportedly is drafting the congress manifesto, and Saddam himself probably is selecting the candidates who will fill the party leadership positions made vacant by the executions in August of those in the party who sought to curtail his power when he became president.



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