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AP News

Iran hangs man convicted of spying for Israel

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Iran on Tuesday hanged an Iranian convicted of spying for the country's archenemy Israel, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Ali Akbar Siadat had been accused of providing Israel with classified information on Iran's military capabilities, including details about military maneuvers, bases, operational jet fighters, military flights, air crashes and missiles, IRNA reported.

Separately, another Iranian was hanged Tuesday for membership in an exile opposition movement, IRNA reported.

Over the past decade, Iran has stepped up its domestic military production, including missiles capable of reaching Israel and beyond — aiming, Tehran says, to defend the country from Israel and the U.S. amid Iranian concern they might strike its nuclear facilities.

According to IRNA, Siadat confessed to spying for Israel starting in 2004 in return for \$60,000, as well as an additional \$7,000 each time he met with Israeli handlers. IRNA said he met up with Israeli intelligence agents during "foreign trade" trips to Turkey, Thailand and the Netherlands and that he transferred data through a digital camera, transmitters and laptop.

IRNA reported that Siadat was arrested in 2008 while planning to flee Iran. There were no details on whether Siadat was a government employee or how he obtained the classified information.

There was no immediate comment on the execution from officials in Israel.

IRNA said Siadat was hanged in Tehran's Evin prison. Earlier in the week, Iran's judiciary announced that a spy for Israel would be executed soon after an appeals court confirmed the man's death sentence. It said the trial was held in the presence of his lawyer.

Espionage is punishable by death under Iranian law. Iran and Israel have been enemies since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, with Tehran periodically announcing arrests of people suspected of spying for Israel.

In 2008, Iran executed Ali Ashtari, an electronics salesman who was convicted of relaying information on Iran's nuclear program and other sensitive data to Israel's Mossad spy agency.

And in 2000, a court convicted 10 Iranian Jews of spying for Israel in a closed-door trial and sentenced them to prison terms ranging from four to 13 years. All were released before serving out their full sentences after international pressure.

Iran faces increased pressure from the West over its controversial nuclear program that Israel, the United States and others contend is intended for nuclear weapons making. Tehran denies the charge, insisting the program is for peaceful purposes only, such as generating power.

IRNA also reported that another Iranian, identified as Ali Sarami, was hanged on Tuesday in Evin after being convicted of membership in an exiled opposition group, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq Organization. It said he had been arrested several times since 1982 for membership in the group but had continued his activities each time. He was detained in 2007 for the last time and was sentenced to death, IRNA reported.

MEK in a statement Tuesday claimed Sarami's wife and daughter as well as two other supporters were arrested while protesting outside Evin prison after his execution. It said Sarami, 63, has spent a total 24 years in prison from various incarcerations under the shah and clerical rule. Though arrested in 2007, his death sentence came after mass opposition protests that were held in December 2009, the group said.

The MEK said that before his arrest, Sarami visited a son who is staying at Camp Ashraf, an MEK base in neighboring Iraq. Iranian authorities have arrested other people in the past in part for visiting relatives in the camp. The London-based rights group Amnesty International reported in August that in addition to Sarami, six others in Iranian prisons are facing execution after being sentenced to death for MEK links.

The MEK is a bitter opponent of Iran's ruling clerics. It was founded in the 1960s and opposed the rule of the U.S.-backed shah, but then after his fall in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, it carried out attacks against the cleric-led government that came to power. MEK and its affiliates were deemed foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department in 1997.