Iran hangs man as Israeli spy after 'unfair' trial: activists

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By AFP

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Mohsen Langarneshin, reportedly aged 34, was hanged at dawn at Ghezelhesar prison in Karaj outside Tehran, several human rights groups said.

His mother and father held a vigil outside the jail during the night, pleading for his life to be spared, images on social media showed.

The Mizan news agency of the Iranian judiciary confirmed he had been put to death in the morning, describing Langarneshin as a "high-ranking spy" who supported operations inside Iran by Israel's Mossad intelligence agency.

The rate of executions is again surging in Iran with at least 339 people hanged already this year, according to figures from the Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) monitor that include the latest executions.

The hanging also comes as President Donald Trump reaches out to Iran for a new deal on its nuclear programme, with the threat of US military action if talks fail to produce an agreement.

"Mohsen Langarneshin, who was sentenced to death in an unfair judicial process based on confessions obtained under torture and charged with espionage for Israel, was hanged at dawn today," said IHR director Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam.

"The Iranian authorities' execution machine is accelerating every day, taking the lives of more people," he told AFP, describing the executions as "extrajudicial killings".

The US-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, which had campaigned over his case, said Langarneshin had been convicted by a Revolutionary Court presided over by judge Abolghasem Salavati, who is under US and EU sanctions.

"He denied all charges, stating that his confessions were extracted under torture," the group said.

The Iran-born British actor and activist Nazanin Boniadi wrote on X: "The bloodthirsty Islamic Republic has executed yet another innocent."

'Do not execute my child'

Mizan said Langarneshin was implicated in the killing of Guards colonel Sayyad Khodaei, who was gunned down by two motorcyclists on his way home in Tehran in May 2022.

Activists also shared a video of Langarneshin's mother recorded on Tuesday where she makes a plea for his life after a last meeting with her son at the prison.

"I just came from the last visit with my son. I need your help. Please pray for my child. May my child be saved. I do not know if he will see sunrise tomorrow."

Insisting on his innocence, she added: "They will not accept our evidence. We have many documents. We have proof of his innocence, but they (the judicial authorities) reject everything."

IHR said that in a phone call from prison, Langarneshin had said he had been forced by security agents into confessing "nonsense" that he had parked a motorbike with a camera mounted on it for surveillance.

Western analysts believe Mossad agents do operate inside Iran as shown by sabotage attacks and assassinations, including that of Iran's top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in 2020.

But activists say the culprits are normally whisked out of the country before Iran's security services can react, leaving innocent scapegoats to take the blame.

According to the New York Times, Fakhrizadeh was assassinated using a machine gun that had been assembled by Mossad agents close to his home and then fired remotely after they had left.

In January 2024, Iran hanged four members of its Kurdish minority on charges of spying for Israel. They were convicted of collaborating on a plan to sabotage a defence site in Iran's third city Isfahan.

At risk of execution is Iranian-Swedish academic Ahmadreza Djalali, who was arrested during a visit to Iran in April 2016 and sentenced to death in 2017 on charges of spying which his family says are false.