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Al Jazeera

Iran 'uncovers Israel spy network'

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Iran's state media has reported the arrest of a "network of spies" linked to Israel's Mossad intelligence service it blamed for the murder of an Iranian nuclear scientist.

The station on Monday aired the footage of a young man identified as Majid Jamalifash, who it said was the "main element" behind the assassination of the scientist.

In a statement, the intelligence ministry said Israel had used European, non-European and some neighbouring countries to carry out the assassination plot.

"The ministry ... has identified and arrested members of a spy and terrorist network linked to the Zionist regime," the station said on Monday quoting the statement.

Iran does not recognise the state of Israel.

"The network of spies and terrorists linked to ... Mossad was destroyed. The network was behind the assassination of Masoud Ali-Mohammadi."

A remote-controlled bomb killed the Tehran University scientist in the Iranian capital on January 12 last year.

Israeli training

Iran blamed the United States and Israel for Ali-Mohammadi's death, a charge Washington has rejected as "absurd".

Jamalifash reportedly said Israeli officers trained him in a military base near Tel Aviv in surveillance and counter-surveillance techniques, as well as how to collect "information from a specific place and sticking a bomb under a car".

He also said he had practised detonating bombs in that base "several times", according to the state television's website.

Tensions are running high between Iran and Israel which has not ruled out military strikes if diplomatic efforts fail to resolve a row over Iran's nuclear programme.

Western sources have said Ali-Mohammadi, a physics professor, worked closely with Mohsen Fakhrizadeh-Mahabadi and Fereydoun Abbassi-Davani, both named in UN sanctions resolutions because of their work on suspected nuclear weapons development.

Another Iranian nuclear scientist was killed on November 29 by a car bomb in Tehran, with Iranian officials saying it was an Israeli or US-sponsored attack on its atomic programme.

Death penalty

Under Iran's penal code, imposed since its 1979 Islamic revolution, espionage can carry the death penalty.

In December Iran hanged an Iranian man convicted of spying for Israel.

Another Iranian man was hanged in 2008 for allegedly working with Mossad. Israel denied any link to the case.

Iran and Israel have been arch-enemies since the Iranian revolution, and Tehran periodically announces arrests of people suspected of spying for Israel.

Israel, believed to be the only country in the Middle East with nuclear weapons, the United States and its allies, accuse Iran of using a civilian nuclear programme as cover to build atomic weapons.

Iran denies the charge, saying it wants to use nuclear power to generate electricity.