

15 sentenced to death by Saudi court in Iran spy cell trial

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Riyadh: A Saudi Arabian court on Tuesday sentenced 15 people to death and several others to prison terms in a case involving an alleged Iranian spy cell, a move that could further strain the already tense relationship between the two Mideast powers.

32 people, including 30 Saudis, one Iranian and one Afghan national, were charged in February for spying for Iran. A Riyadh criminal court handed down the sentences to them, whose names were not made public and it was not clear who and if anyone represented them in court.

There was no immediate reaction from Tehran on the verdicts and details about the case remain few.

Saudi state media reported in February that those charged were accused of establishing a spy ring in collaboration with Iranian intelligence and providing Iran with highly sensitive information on the Saudi military.

The reports said they also were charged with seeking to commit acts of sabotage against Saudi economic interests, inciting sectarian strife, recruiting others for espionage and participating in anti-government protests.

Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic relations to Iran after protesters stormed and ransacked two Saudi diplomatic posts in the Islamic Republic in January this year.

Those violent demonstrations came after Saudi Arabia executed a prominent Shiite cleric in January, along with 46 others.

Tensions have remained high between Shiite power Iran and the Sunni-ruled kingdom of Saudi Arabia all year long. On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said Tehran and Riyadh can and should cooperate to resolve regional crises.

Bahram Ghasemi told reporters that the recent OPEC agreement to cut oil production and the Lebanese presidential election in which an Iran ally who was elected president designated a Saudi ally for prime minister were both recent examples of Iran-Saudi cooperation.

- (With AP inputs)