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-- More Lebanon News --

Family of missing Iranian denies defection claims

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

TEHRAN: The family of a former Iranian general who has mysteriously disappeared denied on Monday reports he had defected, describing him as a loyal servant of the Islamic Republic who had moved into olive trading. The family of Ali Reza Asghari, a former deputy defense minister who vanished while on a private trip to Turkey, has made a complaint to Ankara's Embassy in Tehran over his disappearance, Iranian news agencies reported.

Asghari, 46, "took retirement at his own request two years ago and was doing business in olives and olive oil in Syria," his wife Sima Ahmadi said.

"All of these [reports] are enemy propaganda. There was no request for political asylum as there was no problem with the authorities. He was very attached to his family," she said.

The Washington Post reported last week that Asghari had left his country and was cooperating voluntarily with Western intelligence agencies while the Sunday Times of London alleged he had been spying on Iran since 2003.

"I am certain that my father was abducted by Israel and the United States because of the services he rendered to the Islamic Republic and the revolution," added his daughter, Elham Asghari.

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Iran has charged that Asghari may have been kidnapped by Western secret services amid Israeli and Turkish press reports that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) or Israel's Mossad spy agency snatched or helped the Iranian defect.

Former officers with Mossad have said that Asghari had been instrumental in the founding of Hizbullah in the 1980s.

Israeli media claims that Asghari had information on Iran's nuclear program have been denied by Iranian officials and the Washington Post also said the issue was not at stake. - **AFP**



Tags: Former, Hizbullah, Iran, Islamic, Israel, Tehran, Turkey, Washington, Washington

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