

Tehran. There he was warned by prison authorities that "we are going to settle scores with all of you in a bloody way. Tell your fellow inmates they had better make up their minds."

Another ex-political prisoner, a witness to the massacre, says: "There is no question that the carnage was planned well in advance. Long before it began, Lajevardi and Haj Davood, head of the Qezel Hesar prison, repeatedly told us that if they felt the regime's existence was seriously in jeopardy, they would not leave a single prisoner alive. We were told that they had put aside grenades to lob into every prison cell if the prison came under attack by Resistance forces."

Another prisoner wrote: "When it was announced that Khomeini had accepted the cease-fire with Iraq on July 18, 1988, and described it as 'drinking a chalice of poison,' they took us with all our belongings to solitary cells. The trend of transferring prisoners to solitary cells was accelerated on July 24, a week before the massacre began. On July 25 or 26, a prison guard came to our cell and gave us a form to fill in. I was sharing the cell with Reza Shemirani and Amir Abdollahi, who were later executed during the massacre. The form asked one's name, surname, father's name, political tendency, whether one had been re-arrested, and one's signature. In a highly unusual way, the guard did not utter a word and left us to fill in the forms. We wrote 'Mojahedin Organization' as our 'tendency'. When the guard returned, we were even more surprised as he asked us why we had not written the name of the organization in full. (Up to that time, if a prisoner mentioned the name of the 'Mojahedin', he or she would be severely tortured.) So we wrote 'People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran' and handed him the completed forms. He smiled and walked out."

An ex-political prisoner recalls the days preceding the launch of the massacre: "The early signs of the regime's decision to liquidate political prisoners surfaced in the autumn of 1987, when prisoners were separated into two groups of Mojahedin and non-Mojahedin. In Gohardasht prison, those condemned to life imprisonment were transferred to Evin and the rest were divided into two groups of under- and over-ten-year terms. Families of some prisoners were told that the prisoners' fate would be decided after June."

Visits banned

The most ominous sign that something was afoot came in mid-July, when all of a sudden family visits were banned. Families, anxious to hear about their loved ones' fate in jails, were turned away from prison gates with no clear explanation. This total darkness continued for three months.

Inside, guards spread the word that an "amnesty committee" had been formed, which would interview each prisoner in order to issue a general amnesty. Few believed the guards, but the move, coming in the wake of the ban on family visits, gave rise to