Baha'i members fear group's extinction in Iran

Tribune Staff Writer

The recent hangings of 16 members of the Baha'i religion — 10 of them women in Iran brought a small group of East-bay believers together last week to talk about their faith.

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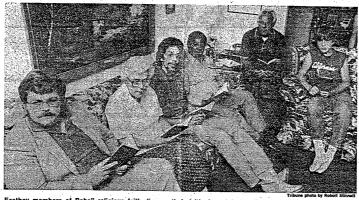
Baha'i, with about 4 million members worldwide and about 150 in the Eastbay, emphasizes universal spirituality and world peace, in the belief that those things lead to social stability and human equality.

The family home of Charles and Betty Garcia serves as the spiritual center of the Baha'i group in Oakland, where there are 65 members.

Iran's efforts to exterminate Baha'i assexpected to be the subject of an ABC 20/20 segment Thursday night, but it apparently was pre-empted by a report on Poland and the lifting of martial law.

The Garcias and their guests said Baha'is in Iran today are attacked as spies. American agents, prostitutes and Zionists by the Moslem fundamentalist government.

Most of the 140 Baha'i members executed since the 1978 revolution in Iran baye been, like the Garcias, elected officials of local spiritual assemblies, according to Richard McLaughlin, who beings to the Baha'i chapter in San Leandro.



"It is clearly a religious persecution," Twitty said. Baha's follow the laws of the country in which they live, he said, and they don't involve themselves in poli-tics.

The Baha'i ethic, Twitty said, is pragmatic almost to the point of being purtanical. "We have a big work ethic," said Twitty, 47, a mortgage loan counselor.

"Work is a form of worship," said Betty Garcia, the group secretary. "We all do useful work for humanity."

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She said Baha'i members aren't allowed to proselytize. They believe that all religions are one anyway and that, there is an inexorable progression in human faith. Therefore the Baha'i prophet, Bahaullah, is a spiritual descendant of Moses, Jesus and Mohammed.

Twitty said it was an "ironic" advantage of the persecution in Iran that the the faith is thereby becoming known by more people.

the faith is the history of faith," he "But that is the history of faith," he said. "Blood spilled leads to crisis and then to triumph."

Envoy denies Baha'i singled out

By Wanda MacClarin Tribune State Writer

The Iranian ambassador to the United Nations last week said many Iranians are extremely antagonistic to members of the Baha'i religion, and that his government considers Baha'i not a religion but a hostile political movement — but he denied that the Baha'i members in Iran are persecuted for their faith alone.

Dr. Said Rajale Khorassani, who heads the U.N. mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran, responded in a telephone interview from New York to the statements of the Eastway Baha'i group members, who believe hear co-religioned and executed harassed, imprisoned and executed market in the statement of the Eastway on their faith.

"We believe Baha' is not a faith. It is not a religion," Khorassani said. "It is a political movement strongly sup-

ported by the superpowers and the Zionists."

Khorassani said that if there is enough evidence that the Baha'i members in Iran are "Zionist agents, prostitutes, or American agents," they are punished accordingly in Islamic courts. He went on to say that a good number of Moslems have also been found guilfy of those "crimes," and they were imprisoned or executed just as Baha'i group members have been.

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