

Six decades in news business

Mohammad Bolouri, father of Iranian event journalism, reflects on 60 years of professional endeavors.



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The name Mohammad Bolouri holds a significant and esteemed place in Iranian press, particularly in the field of investigative journalism. With over 60 years of experience in the press and contributions to various newspapers and publications, he is widely rec-

ognized as the pioneer of Iranian event-based journalism. Through his uncovering of the important events of Iran, he brought forth the most high-profile and newsworthy criminal cases in post-Revolutionary media.

At the age of 87, Bolouri, who remained an active journalist until a few months ago, when he experienced the loss of his wife, possesses a unique perspective as one of the few individuals to

have witnessed the atmosphere of journalism before and after the Revolution, navigating its highest levels of tension and adventure in the events department. He carries with him numerous untold stories of this era, incidents and events that only he himself is fully aware of and capable of recounting.

Currently, Bolouri leads a tranquil retirement away from the commotion and pressures of

the news and journalism world, dedicating his time to his son's family and his young grandson, finding joy in writing stories. I had the privilege of visiting him at his home one early spring day, where we delved into his remarkable career, cherished memories, and insightful perspectives on investigative journalism spanning several decades. Below, you will find a comprehensive account of our conversation.



IRAN DAILY

Mr. Bolouri, kindly share with us some insights about your life and how your journey as a journalist began.

I was born on February 28, 1937, in Qaem Shahr, into a working-class family. My father worked in a textile factory in Mazandaran Province. Being the eldest son in a family with one brother and two sisters, I completed my primary and secondary education in Qaem Shahr. Due to the financial constraints faced by my family, I moved in with my sister's family to continue my studies. As my brother-in-law's job required relocation, we moved to different cities from time to time. In my fifth year of high school, we settled in Tehran, and I had the opportunity to enroll in the renowned Dar ol-Funun high school for my sixth grade.

During my time at Dar ol-Funun, I had the pleasure of being taught by Mr. Torbati, who was not only a high school professor but also a university lecturer. His area of expertise was Persian literature. He took a liking to my writing style, and most of our class hours were spent discussing and reviewing my essays. Towards the end of the school year, he approached me with an opportunity. We visited the office of *Keyhan* Newspaper, where he introduced me to the editor and highlighted my talent for writing. During that period, two influential newspapers in the country were seeking aspiring writers, and they had sought the assistance of university professors to recommend individuals with exceptional writing skills. Training facilities for journalists were nonexistent at the time, and although some related courses were offered in universities, the students lacked a solid foundation in journalism.

How did you come to work in the events department of the newspaper?

Back in the year 1957 when the idea to establish an events section in the newspaper arose, *Keyhan* was in search of someone to provide coverage on various occurrences such as murders, accidents, conflicts, and the like. Prior to that, such news items were sporadically scattered across different pages, lacking a designated section solely dedicated to events.

After seven or eight months of working there, I proposed to the editor that we initiate a dedicated events page. This was the time following prime ministership of Mohammad Mosaddeq, a period marked by the Shah's resurgence to power and a decline in parliamentary prosperity. As a result, public interest in politics dwindled. This void in political news prompted people to develop an inclination towards following news related to events. With my suggestion, the events page made its inaugural appearance in *Keyhan* Newspaper, marking the birth of the first dedicated events page in the Iranian press.

Subsequently, we observed an increase in newspaper sales as people showed a curiosity in staying updated on events. Following our example, even *Etemad* Newspaper introduced its own events page, stimulating further public interest and engagement with events-related news.

Did you have a model or inspiration to guide your writing of events news?

No, there was no independent model for events news in the country, and we didn't have a foreign example to follow in this particular field. I was assigned two assistants to support me. Initially, I would visit the medical examiner's office alone to gather news about various incidents. Whether it was a case of someone being killed or a suicide, I would gather information from the medical examiner and add depth to the story. If it involved a suicide, I would visit the home of the deceased and inquire about the reasons behind it. If it was a story intertwined with love, I would seek out the person involved and uncover their side of the narrative, presenting the story in a storytelling format. I didn't simply report the incidents in a dry manner, stating basic facts. Instead, I delved into the story, capturing details from the perspectives of the family and individuals involved, fashioning it into an incident-story. This writing style was new and captivating to the readers.

Were you genuinely interested in writing events news, or was it merely a professional pursuit for you?

I have always had a genuine passion for storytelling,

and since my high school days, I have been writing short stories. Additionally, in terms of my personality, I have always been enthusiastic and active. Therefore, I actively sought out adventures and compelling subjects. Discovering a captivating story and presenting it in an engaging and fictionalized manner were two aspects that coexisted in the realm of writing news about events, and that is precisely what I was seeking.

Now, at this point, would you briefly outline your accomplishments in the realm of events news coverage and the pursuit of investigative reports?

For a period of seven or eight years, I held the responsibility of managing the events page at *Keyhan* Newspaper. Subsequently, I took charge of two or three other pages, which included the events and social sections. Eventually, I assumed the role of evening editor. During that time, the newspaper operated with two editors: one for the morning and one for the evening. The morning editor oversaw the top eight pages, which focused on daily news and current affairs, while I, as the evening editor, took charge of the subsequent eight pages, delving into reports, follow-ups, and investigative pieces concerning the day's events.

I had a team of seven or eight reporters whom I assigned to investigate and follow up on news and reports. Essentially, we aimed to provide readers with comprehensive insights into the day's events. This was a period roughly three to four years before the Revolution took place. As the newspaper established an editorial board, I assumed the role of general secretary, working alongside four other members. I held the editorship of the newspaper until 1982 when circumstances no longer supported my continued involvement, and I decided to request retirement.

During my final year as the editor of *Keyhan*, specifically in early 1982, the newspaper's daily circulation peaked at one million and one hundred thousand copies. The surge in sales was greatly influenced by the fervor surrounding the early days of the Revolution and the ongoing war.

However, the sales and circulation gradually declined afterward.

Subsequently, I ventured into the magazine industry for a period, taking on the editorship of five or six weekly publications and successfully increasing their circulation. I continued to cover events within those publications. In 1994, when *Iran* Newspaper was established, I received an invitation to spearhead the launch of the events page, and thus I inaugurated the events section of that publication, which was very effective for the circulation of the newspaper. Subsequently, with the establishment of *Etemad* Newspaper, I was invited by the editor of the newspaper to assume the responsibility of the events page and serve as his deputy.

Another report that gained significant attention was on the topic of heart transplants. As you may be aware, many individuals suffering from heart conditions require a transplant. Typically, organs are sourced from individuals declared brain dead. However, there is a scarcity of available hearts compared to the number of patients in need. Unfortunately, during this time, many patients awaiting a heart transplant succumbed to their conditions. The primary cause of this issue was rooted in cultural beliefs wherein the families of brain-dead individuals resisted the removal of the deceased's heart from their chest, following traditional burial practices. Moved by this observation, I began documenting such stories. For instance, I encountered a mother who selflessly donated her son's heart to a young girl. On certain occasions, I arranged meetings between them and encouraged the mother to place her ear against the girl's chest, allowing her to hear her son's heartbeat. I would then narrate these heartfelt encounters in a compelling manner to elicit emotions from readers. Over time, the topic of heart donation gained popularity among the public, resulting in the rescue of countless patients who would have otherwise faced certain death.

Currently, what are you engaged in?

My involvement with *Iran* Newspaper lasted until a few months ago, until the end of last year, coinciding

with the passing of my wife and my own illness.

Over the past few months, I have shifted my focus solely to writing stories. It's not a new endeavor for me, as I have previously published seven books featuring adventurous criminal tales, journalistic accounts, and historical narratives that I have penned throughout the years.

At present, I have two storybooks in progress, both of which I am concurrently working on. Each book has already accumulated about 200 to 300 pages. As of now, I do not have any plans to return to journalism. The current state of journalism no longer resonates with me, and the enthusiasm I once had for the field has subsided.

What kind of journalism do you prefer?

The type of journalism that captivated me for many years at *Keyhan* Newspaper is my preferred form – journalism that delves into events and reveals the truth. As journalists, our duty is to convey the interests and desires of the people, making them aware of the facts and the underlying issues prevalent in society.

Mr. Bolouri, based on your extensive experience in events and investigative reports, how do you define investigative journalism?

In my opinion, the definition of investigative journalism differs from the teachings of university professors who may have had little to no experience in a newspaper setting. Journalism is not something that can be solely taught academically. The practical aspects of journalism are learned in the editorial offices of newspapers. Investigative journalism, to me, means the pursuit of facts and addressing the demands and topics that

capture the interest of the people in society. We must ensure that our writing has the potential to alleviate people's pain.

What is the meaning of news? A news report aims to inform people about an event or occurrence that reaches their attention for the first time, shedding light on a specific issue that might not be clear to individuals or society. The follow-up on such matters should be captivating enough to warrant its publication in a newspaper. This holds especially true for issues that are discovered and brought to light for the first time, uncovering the depths and roots of events. To find such compelling topics and comprehend their various dimensions, one must possess an inquisitive mind. A reporter should possess an ability to keenly observe specific and intricate details, comprehending the interconnected aspects of the subject matter. Developing these skills requires exceptional capabilities, many of which are honed within the editorial office of a newspaper. In contrast to current practices, individuals aspiring to become journalists should first learn the craft within a newspaper and then further their knowledge through university education. Otherwise, the definitions provided solely in an academic setting may lead to confusion rather than clarity for the students.

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TO BE CONTINUED