

Social reform requires collective agreement

National Desk

"We need your guidance. You can help outline pathways for the country to overcome its challenges and difficulties." These are the words of President Masoud Pezeshkian, addressing a group of sociology experts on Tuesday. The Iranian president emphasized that social and cultural changes require time, often measured in decades. Therefore, expecting substantial changes within the short period since he assumed office, especially given the complexity and diversity of issues, is unrealistic.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian
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Pezeshkian urged the experts present, as well as specialists across the country, to provide the government with actionable recommendations and support in problem-solving. He added, "I firmly believe that without consensus, societal progress is unattainable. Our goal is to achieve change through unity, inclusive participation, and the establishment of justice and fairness. When we uphold people's rights, they will join us in mutual understanding." He emphasized the significance of concepts like organizational unity, teamwork, and justice, which are fundamental in today's companies and institutions. He explained that for achieving consensus, change is necessary, but it is not a simple matter. This process must begin with clear communication. When inequality arises, the government must present these issues transparently to the public and explain the necessity of change. Referring to criticisms from some faculty members regarding universities, Pezeshkian noted that reforms are indeed being pursued and that some ideas are already in place. However, these must be examined with experts like those present. Universities should equip students with skills that will be valuable in addressing societal issues, as knowledge should evolve based on societal needs. Implementing changes in universities requires a common language for dialogue among all parties involved, and after establishing this common language, we must define the path for change. The government follows "the same path in selecting governors and ministers, which is, of course, a challenging process".

Dialogue versus revolutionary change

On the topic of rapid government reforms, the president observed, "Immediate and revolutionary changes can create conflicts, while dialogue can resolve many issues. I believe that those on the opposite side of the spectrum are also seeking justice and fairness, and we need to speak their language to get through to them. In a state of polarization and conflict, the only outcome is destruction for nations, and the net result is zero, which is why even taking one step forward with understanding and unity is preferable to a polarized environment". Referring to the theme of unity, Pezeshkian stated, "I have adopted the slogan of unity based on my beliefs and convictions. I am confident that by respecting each group's rights and acting justly, we can achieve consen-

sus. If we reach a fair resolution for each segment of society, differences in ethnicity, party, or background should no longer be a source of division." The president then addressed concerns raised by sociologists regarding the national education system. He noted that weekly discussions are held to address the educational challenges, especially the issue of inequality. "What kind of justice is it that students from a province with the bare minimum of educational resources are expected to compete on an equal footing with students from, say, Tehran, who have access to the best facilities? Why shouldn't we create an environment where our talented individuals can grow and thrive, regardless of where they are in the country? Solving these problems is no easy feat, but we're working to address them, and we've already had discussions on this topic at the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution." Pezeshkian further emphasized the importance of equitable job opportunities and criticized government sectors and ineffective personnel management. "In a fair system, compensation is based on effort and work. It is unjust that some work hard in society while others in certain offices receive equal pay with minimal effort." He pointed out the issue of [energy] deficits in the country, urging economists to provide practical solutions to resolve these issues without harming vulnerable populations. "It's irrational for some people to receive the lion's share of subsidies and resources, while others are excluded. I ask economists to propose actionable steps to address this problem." Pezeshkian turned to the different perspectives on the issue of the Islamic dress codes and the criticisms expressed by some of the attendees regarding the current policies in this area, saying,

"In terms of hijab, consider the other side of the story as well; development requires respect for the culture of society. If we mock the culture of society, there will be no possibility for change and understanding. Those who advocate for reform and change must also respect other cultural perspectives; otherwise, conflict arises. We must honor the culture of our society." At the start of the meeting, several sociology professors shared their perspectives. Rafiei, a sociologist, presented the latest survey data on various political, social, economic, and international issues, stating that contrary to popular belief, Iranians are not inherently political. He emphasized that citizens evaluate governments based on their performance rather than political affiliations, and called for reducing political confrontation and avoiding creating divisions between the public and the authorities.

Challenges of development and need to restore social trust

Taqi Azad Armaki, another sociologist, identified a fundamental issue in the lack of emphasis on development. He noted that although most governments prioritize development, they do not make it a central focus of their operations. He argued that genuine development requires cohesion, social belonging, and trust, and that the current critical issue facing Iranian society is a lack of these cohesive forces, which are essential drivers of development. Azad Armaki observed that Iran is built around three pillars: politics, religion, and family. He suggested that progress in the political system requires an accountable bureaucracy, as effective development is unattainable without a well-structured bureaucratic system. He also



A group of sociology professors and experts meet with President Masoud Pezeshkian at the Presidential Office on November 5, 2024 for a discussion on social issues.
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noted that the separation of religious and intellectual figures has left a void in the country's spiritual domain, causing a sense of meaninglessness among the people. He urged collaboration between religious and intellectual leaders to restore values, ethics, and culture to society, with the family as its focal point. Jabar Rahmani remarked, "Despite its potential, our society suffers from a type of exhaustion due to the excessive demands placed on it by politics and economics. At the same time, the state faces immediate social challenges, yet the country's infrastructure has become worn and deficient. Education is severely depleted, and civil institutions have systematically weakened. The government must address these issues urgently." The sociologist continued by addressing the deteriorating relationship between people and the environment, noting that neglect and exploitation of natural resources have endangered societal infrastructure, calling for prompt action in this area.



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Self-awareness and societal solidarity

Mo'ayedfar commented on the critical importance of self-awareness in current circumstances. "The country faces multiple crises, and fostering solidarity between the government and society is essential to overcome them. Since our entry into the modern world, idealism has persisted due to our historical background, but gradually we have moved toward self-awareness. However, certain elites remain entrenched in idealistic thinking, distancing themselves from society." This sociologist added that "some elites seek to play a role in society by preserving the historical identity foundations, but the governance limits their influence, though their participation remains essential for society". He called on the government to help enable these elites "to become active and provide opportunities for them to make a meaningful contribution in various institutions." During the meeting, Shahli-Bar emphasized that ideas like "giving a voice to the voiceless" need to become social movements within society. He highlighted the critical issue of housing, explaining that the high cost of housing is straining family budgets and has led to structural poverty in many households. He warned that if left unaddressed, the situation would worsen. The sociologist added that the dominant discourse for addressing the housing crisis has so far been the production of private housing, which has proven ineffective. Despite having 27 million housing units for 24 million households, many people still live in rental properties. He suggested extending rental contracts from a minimum of one

