

Straight from proposed economy minister

Economic reforms should be 'gradual': *Madanizadeh*

By Mehdi Heidari

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INTERVIEW

Ali Madanizadeh, recently nominated as Iran's minister of Economic Affairs and Finance by President Masoud Pezeshkian, sat down for an in-depth interview to lay out his vision for economic reforms. He stressed that he has never been a political figure, but rather, as an expert and academic, he has always taken it upon himself to assist governments in tackling economic challenges and improving people's livelihoods. The text of the interview follows:

IRNA: Please introduce yourself to our readers.

MADANIZADEH: I am Ali Madanizadeh, born in 1982. My academic journey kicked off with the National Mathematics Olympiad, and after picking up a bronze medal at the International Olympiad, I got into the Sharif University of Technology, where I studied electrical engineering. Later, I shifted gears toward the humanities, heading off to Stanford University to study Computational Mathematical Engineering, with a focus on economics and management from a mathematical perspective. Eventually, I decided to pursue a PhD in economics at the University of Chicago.

Why did you switch from electrical engineering and mathematics to economics?

From the outset of my electrical engineering studies, I was looking for a field where I could make a real impact on society. However, after a year or two, and drawing on advice from various professors both inside and outside the university, I realized that the humanities have a greater influence on society. So, I dug deeper into the humanities and, after consulting with experts, decided to move towards economics and management. After completing several courses in this area, I concluded that economics was more in demand in our country and also fit well with my background and skills. That's why I set my sights on economics.

After completing your PhD, you returned to Iran. Was this a calculated economic decision, or was there another reason?

My switch to economics was always about learning so I could come back and give back to the country's economy. I never had any plans to stay abroad. In fact, I returned to Iran just 10 days after graduation.

What have you been up to in the 12 years since your return, both in academia and policy-making?

Right from the start, I believed the root of the country's economic problems boils down to a lack of deep academic research. I've always thought that our economic issues are highly complex, and you can't just lift solutions straight out of foreign textbooks and roll them out here. That's why I saw the need for serious research into Iran's economy and for training economic specialists. Academic work has always been a cornerstone of my career. Alongside my university work, I



wanted to get to grips with the Iranian economy and put my knowledge into practice. So, I teamed up with the Central Bank of Iran through its Monetary and Banking Research Institute, where I led the modeling department and worked on the recession recovery project at the time. Later, I was one of the project leads for banking system reform, helping to roll out those changes nationwide. I was also involved in efforts to head off the banking crisis.

What did you do at the Plan and Budget Organization?

At the Plan and Budget Organization, I took on the design and implementation of budget structure reform as an economic advisor. Then, I moved over to the Information Technology Organization, where I picked up operational and management experience. I

also played a part in drawing up the transformation roadmap for the previous government, and during this time, I collaborated with other scientific bodies like the Parliament's Research Center. When I returned to Sharif University in 2013, I set out to balance academic work with policy-making, training a new generation of economists and economic experts, and conducting research in areas like monetary policy, currency, budgeting, oil, foreign trade, and macroeconomics.

Since 2021, I've been the dean of the Graduate School of the School of Economics and Management at Sharif, aiming to bring out the best in the next generation of young economists and managers.

You've been in Iran through three administrations: Rouhani's, Raisi's, and Pezesh-

kian's. Did you work with all three presidents, and how did that come about?

I've never been a political figure. As an expert and academic, I've always felt it's my duty to help tackle economic and livelihood issues, regardless of which administration is in power. Political factions don't matter to me — I see it as my responsibility to help any government that asks.

You often emphasize a data-driven, scientific approach to economics. Can Iran's economic issues be solved this way? Is an academic perspective enough, and how can textbook solutions be applied to real-world problems here?

Limiting academic content to what's in textbooks isn't the right approach. That's why we talk about applied research: you



Ali Madanizadeh, the proposed Iranian minister of economic affairs and finance

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An Iranian man looks at shelves in a supermarket in Tehran as the prices of some goods increased.

● MAJID ASGARIPOUR/WANA

have to get to know the country's economy, analyze its economic, structural, and institutional context, as well as its social and political background, and then see what economic science can teach us in these areas.

Our ongoing studies have shown that, in fact, the outcomes of scientific work hold true and can be implemented. It's not as if we're in a world of our own — even if there are differences, we still need to stick to scientific, data-driven, and evidence-based methods to get to the bottom of issues and make the right calls. Anything that's different needs to be tackled head-on using scientific methods and evidence, so we can make informed decisions, instead of insular ones.

How can the country's major energy shortage — which has impacted both industry and daily life — be addressed?

In recent years, we've strayed from economic science and technical expertise, and the policies rolled out over the past few decades have landed us in our current predicament, where economic malaise has taken hold. Despite being among the world's top countries in oil and gas resources, we're now running short on electricity, gas, and gasoline, and even having to import these commodities — a clear sign of mismanagement and flawed policy-making.

Can we just flip a switch overnight and solve the problem? Clearly, that's not the answer. Countries that have gone down that road have run into serious crises. These issues must be sorted out through a gradual, step-by-step plan to get back on track. This is not something that can happen without bringing people on board and opening up a dialogue with the public.

When it comes to fixing the energy shortage, we can't turn a blind eye to social issues or the differences between regions, individuals, and communities. Without considering the political, social, legal, and societal aspects and capacities, nothing will change. We can't make sudden changes without regard for people's livelihoods. While the current situation already works against the poor, abrupt shifts could be even more damaging.

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