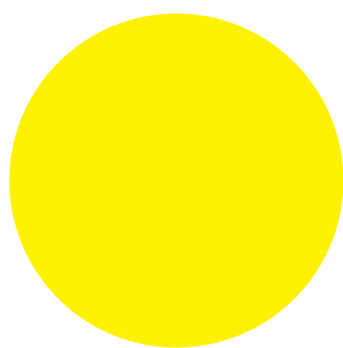


Iranian society needs 'peace journalism' more than ever:
Senior media expert

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Iran Daily

Vol. 8184 • Sunday, August 09, 2026 • Mordad 18, 1405 • Safar 25, 1448 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages



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Mecca Pact signals eroding trust in US security role

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

Amid heightened regional tensions following the US-Israeli military aggression against Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey have signed a defense pact. With Pakistan as the only Muslim nuclear-armed country on one side and Turkey, a Muslim country with significant military capabilities and a NATO member, on the other, the pact clearly carries a message for the international community.



Speaking to Iran Daily, international affairs expert Omid Khazani said the Mecca Pact was in fact a response to the United States, following the weakening of trust in defense arrangements with Washington amid Middle Eastern tensions in the aftermath of the war in Iran. He said that although the three countries had Iran partly in mind when concluding the pact, their deeper concern

was Israel's aggression and the United States' inaction in the face of it.

IRAN DAILY: What message does the Mecca defense pact carry, and what does it mean for the region's security equations and extra-regional actors?

KHAZANI: In my view, this will not have radical effects on the region, but it will not be without consequences either. Ultimately, when tensions escalate, any country seeking to harm one of these countries will have to take a step back and reassess the situation, because such a crisis could trigger defense alliances and cause tensions to escalate further.

However, it cannot be considered comparable to NATO in terms of its ability to fundamentally alter the region's overall equations, particularly from a defense standpoint.

Can this agreement be seen as an effort to establish independent regional mechanisms for providing security following a decline in regional countries' confidence in the US role in providing their security after the war in Iran?
Yes, absolutely. The security and

defense partnership that existed between the United States, as a security, trade and economic partner of the Persian Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, has now become shaky. Despite having various military bases in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and even Iraq and Jordan, the United States has failed to provide security for these countries. So, these countries have sought to draw on the military capabilities of regional powers.

This is particularly true for Saudi Arabia, which is the world's largest energy exporter. It is certainly compelled to rethink its security arrangements and will undoubtedly take a different approach toward the United States.

In practice, the United States prioritized the defense of Israel. It even tried not to use its Patriot systems extensively, and the defense systems of these countries effectively fell apart. At any moment, Iran could have chosen to target their infrastructure as well. Therefore, this defense alliance can also be seen as a response to the United States.

What security and strategic concerns have driven each of the

three member states toward such an agreement?

The circumstances and characteristics of these countries are different. In principle, Turkey does not have particularly serious security and strategic concerns because it is a NATO member. Although verbal disputes between Turkey and Israel have intensified recently, and Israel has also threatened Turkey in one way or another, Turkey is a NATO member, and the United States, as Israel's main ally, cannot attack another NATO member in defense of Israel. However, it cannot be said that the Turks are taking this issue lightly.

At the same time, Turkey, as the heir to the Ottoman Empire, has seen its sphere of influence in the Middle East diminish over the years and wants to regain that influence in the region. From this perspective, the collective defense pact can also be significant for Turkey because it allows it to restore its traditional influence in the region, which is accompanied by economic influence as well as security and defense influence.

Pakistan, meanwhile, is economically dependent on Saudi Arabia. It relies on Saudi Arabia for loans, en-

ergy and economic assistance. Saudi Arabia certainly cannot provide Pakistan with direct support in its crisis with India, but Pakistan benefits from Saudi Arabia economically and in terms of energy supplies and the loans it receives.

What impact could this agreement have on Iran? Should Tehran view this development merely as a defense arrangement among the three countries, or should it also consider it in the context of the emerging regional security architecture?

Iran has established a number of red lines, stating that if any country takes action against Iran's interests, Iran will carry out a retaliatory operation.

But it is highly unlikely that if Saudi Arabia were attacked, for example, by Iran or Iran's allies, Turkey and Pakistan would immediately enter a war with Iran or with Iran-aligned forces.

It should not be assumed that because this is called a collective defense pact, an attack on one country would immediately lead the other countries to declare war. Even NATO, which has a very long history of collective defense agreements,

dating back roughly 75 years to the post-World War II period, does not have such an automatic operational mechanism. Countries retain a degree of independence in making decisions.

However, Iran can view the issue from two angles. First, regional countries providing their own security from outside, are now turning to regional countries instead of making defense agreements with the United States and through the presence of US military bases in their territories. This is something Iran would prefer. From another perspective, these regional defense and security agreements do not necessarily constitute a threat to Iran. After all, Iran's regional defense doctrine has always been based on the principle that regional security should be defined through the participation of regional countries. If these countries replace the United States, there should certainly be a quiet welcome from Iran for such a development.

Besides, it is true that this agreement comes against the backdrop of tensions between Iran and the United States and Israel, and Saudi Arabia certainly had Iran partly in mind when entering into the pact.

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President: No interest above preserving unity, cohesion in current situation

National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Saturday that no interest is above "preserving unity and cohesion," urging political parties and social groups to maintain solidarity amid the country's difficult conditions caused by the US aggression. Speaking at a press conference held to mark National Reporter Day, Pezeshkian said, his sole motivation is to serve the Iranian people based on justice and fairness, while acknowledging the country continued to face significant challenges. "I have no motivation other

than serving the people of my country based on justice and fairness. Clearly, we have many problems, but we are trying to overcome them together," he said. Responding to a question about his assessment of cooperation among political parties over the past year and during the wartime, Pezeshkian thanked political parties, political movements and social organizations for helping strengthen national unity and cohesion under the current difficult circumstances. The president said it was essential to avoid actions and positions that could undermine social cohesion.

Pezeshkian said political groups bore an important responsibility in shaping public opinion and safeguarding social stability, adding that their restraint had helped prevent tensions from escalating. "It was enough for any one of them to strike a discordant note and rally some people in the country against these measures. The same remarks being made today about hardships and rising prices could have been exaggerated and prompted people to protest. But the cooperation and solidarity shown by these political movements is commendable, and I hope this unity and cohesion will contin-

ue," he said. During the press conference, Pezeshkian also addressed other issues, including the economic problems resulting from the US-Israeli imposed war on Iran, and reiterated that the issue of people's livelihoods remains one of the most important concerns of his administration. He said that American and Zionist enemies had thought that they would overthrow Iran through a military offensive, but the Iranian Armed Forces, on the one hand, and the presence of the people in the streets, on the other hand, prevented them from carrying out their evil intentions.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (C) speaks with reporters and attendees during a press conference marking Iran's National Reporter's Day in Tehran, Iran, on August 8, 2026. president.ir

Iran says Strait of Hormuz reopening hinges on US actions

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Saturday said that talks with Oman on the legal framework and management of navigation routes through the Strait of Hormuz is "approaching the final stages" but cautioned that the reopening of the strategic waterway hinges on other conditions. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Iranian president's press conference, Araghchi said, "Negotiations with Oman on the legal mechanism and management of the Strait of Hormuz regarding the designation of the Strait of Hormuz transit route are under way and we are very close to an agreement, but the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz is subject to other conditions, including compensation for breaches of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding by the United States." He was referencing to a June agreement reached between the US and Iran to end the US-Israeli aggression against Iran. Araghchi blamed the US



Vessels are anchored in the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from Musandam, Oman, on August 3, 2026. [REUTERS](http://reuters.com)

for the current situation in the strait from which a fifth of the world's oil and gas is exported. He accused Washington of breaching the Islamabad agreement by establishing new routes in the strait, warning that the violation of the agreement by undermining Iran's role in management of the strait is by no means acceptable to Iran. Iran and the US signed the agreement in June to end the cycle arising from the latest bout of unprovoked American-Israeli aggression against the Islamic Republic, which had begun on February 28. Under the understanding, Iran agreed to allow fee-free maritime transit through the strait for a

period of 60 days. In compliance with the MoU, the Islamic Republic devised a special maritime route for vessels to cross the chokepoint, warning vessels against using illegal routes. The US has, however, been trying to escort transit through the strait along an illegal passage-way, prompting Iran to confront every instance of Washington-instigated transit through the chokepoint and shut the corridor until Washington ended its interference in regional maritime movement.

Temporary route Araghchi said that Tehran and Muscat are currently discussing a temporary route rather than a permanent one.

"Given the technical and legal complexities, for now we are talking about a temporary route. Before reaching an agreement on a new route, a temporary route will be considered as the basis for the main route. In this regard, negotiations have been held between the military and naval forces of the two countries based on existing maps, and once those talks are concluded, the new route will be determined," he said. Oman's Foreign Ministry also said on Saturday that negotiations with Iran about the future administration of the Strait of Hormuz were "positive and constructive". The ministry said that "ongoing negotiations regarding navigation arrangements in the Strait of Hormuz are proceeding in a positive and constructive atmosphere", and urged against any actions that might jeopardize the progress.

Iran's share of Caspian Sea not addressed in legal convention due to disputes: FM

International Desk

Iran's share under the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea has yet to be determined because of disagreements on the baseline and the delimitation of the seabed and subsoil of the sea, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Saturday. Speaking to reporters, Araghchi said the issue of Iran's share had therefore been excluded from the convention altogether and deferred to bilateral and trilateral negotiations. But, he didn't name the countries that Tehran should negotiate with. Araghchi said the Caspian Sea convention had been referred to Iran's Parliament by the previous administration in 2018 and 2019 for consideration. "The Convention on the Caspian Sea was referred by the previous government to parliament in 2018 and 2019 for a decision. Meanwhile, the other four Caspian littoral states have accepted the convention, and acceptance by the Islamic Republic of Iran is subject to approval by the parliament," he said. Araghchi said all Iranians shared concerns about safeguarding the country's interests but accused opponents abroad of pursuing other agendas. "We are all concerned about the country's interests, but those who exploit the issue outside the country are pursuing the interests of others," he said. "Countries such as Russia are seeking the swift implementation of the convention, and one of its features is that there will be no foreign military forces in the Caspian Sea," Araghchi added.



His remarks came as the Iranian government has decided to urgently submit the convention to the parliament for ratification. According to Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, the decision was based on three main considerations: changes in the security environment around the Caspian Sea, the need to strengthen economic and commercial cooperation among littoral states, and the resolution of certain legal issues concerning the sea. Gharibabadi noted that the security situation around the Caspian has changed significantly over the past two years, particularly as the presence of non-littoral actors in the region has increased as a result of decisions by some coastal states. The convention, signed by the leaders of Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in the Kazakh port of Aktau in August 2018, takes effect only once all five littoral states ratify it. The other four completed the process long ago. Tehran, alone, held back.

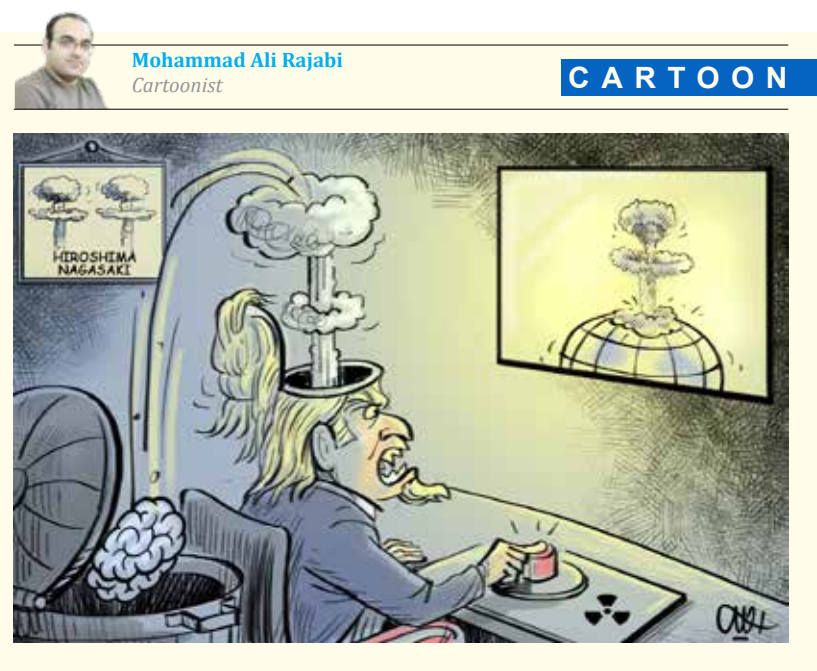
Iran to regional nations: Time to rely only on ourselves, embrace true brotherhood

International Desk

Iran called for greater regional convergence and cooperation, stressing reliance on regional capabilities towards exclusion of foreign interference. "When Muslims stand together, we can face every challenge by malicious outsiders head-on," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote in a post on X on Friday, Press TV reported. "Time to rely only on ourselves and embrace true brotherhood," he added. Araghchi's remarks came as the Islamic Republic continues to advocate for a regional approach to security in the Persian Gulf, rather than reliance on outside military powers. Also on Friday, Kazem Gharibabadi,

Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, said that security in the Persian Gulf had to be established by the countries of the region themselves, with all regional states participating in its provision. The diplomat said a consensus had emerged among countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf following the 40-day unprovoked US-Israeli aggression against Iran and following conclusion of a memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States. According to the official, the consensus was that regional security concerns had to be discussed and addressed by the countries of the region themselves. Gharibabadi described the consen-

sus as positive, saying Iran had consistently maintained that regional issues belonged to the countries of the region and that they had to be responsible for ensuring their own security. The US-Israeli aggression prompted the Islamic Republic to wage at least 100 waves of decisive and successful retaliatory strikes against sensitive and strategic hostile targets across the region. Iran's Armed Forces kept up the reprisal in the face of the United States' routine violations of the memorandum. Concluding his post, Araghchi praised "Iran's Powerful Armed Forces" for "showing their readiness, capability, and might in face of the world's most expensive military."



FAO forecasts Iran’s grain output at 21.6m tons in 2026

Economy Desk

Iran's grain production is expected to rise 11% in 2026 to 21.6 million tons, exceeding its five-year average, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in its latest Crop Prospects and Food Situation report. Iran produced 19.5 million tons of grain in 2025, while its five-year average stands at 21.4 million tons, according to the report. Wheat production is forecast to increase by 1.7 million tons to 13.7 million tons in 2026, from 12 million tons a year earlier. Paddy rice production is expected to remain unchanged at 3.9 million tons, according to Eqtesad-e Moaser. Production of other grains is forecast to rise by 400,000 tons to 4 million tons in 2026, from 3.6 million tons in 2025. FAO attributed the expected increase in Iran's grain production to higher rainfall, particularly from mid-December 2025 through February 2026, which increased soil moisture and improved crop quality.

Asia's third-largest grain stocks

Iran's grain stocks are estimated at 13.3 million tons in 2026, up from 12.4 million tons a year earlier, according to FAO estimates. Iran ranks third in Asia by grain stocks,

behind China, with 416 million tons, and India, with 83 million tons. Pakistan, with a population of nearly twice that of Iran, has grain stocks of 3.1 million tons, about one-quarter of Iran's level. Global grain stocks stood at 949 million tons this year, with Iran accounting for about 1.44% of the total.

Iran joins FAO's GPP-TAD program

Separately, Iran's permanent mission to FAO said Iran had officially joined FAO's Global Programme for the Prevention and Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GPP-TADs). Transboundary animal diseases are increasingly threatening animal health, livelihoods and the stability of global food systems, particularly in areas where prevention and preparedness capacities remain weak, the mission said, IRNA reported. FAO is calling on partners to work together on the prevention, preparedness and response to transboundary animal diseases. Without rapid and coordinated action, the world faces a growing risk of recurring animal health emergencies, each potentially more severe and larger in scale, capable of spreading across regions and even globally, with a direct impact on food production and food



security. FAO has called for investment and participation to support rapid and coor-

ordinated prevention, preparedness and response efforts to reduce the negative impacts of such diseases and ensure

food for all. More than 100 FAO member countries have so far joined the program.

US-Iran trade rises 23% to \$22m in H1 2026



Economy Desk

Trade between the United States and Iran rose 23% in the first half of 2026 to \$22 million, according to the latest data from the US Census Bureau. Trade between the two countries totaled \$17.9 million in the first

half of 2025, the data showed, as reported by Eqtesad Moaser. US exports to Iran rose 25% in the first half of 2026 to \$21.2 million, from \$16.9 million in the same period a year earlier. US imports from Iran, however, fell 20% to \$800,000 in the first half of 2026, from \$1 million in

the same period of 2025. The value of US-Iran trade remained small compared with the two countries' overall trade with the world. Iran ranked 174th among US export destinations and 200th among sources of US imports in the first half of 2026. In June, the United States exported \$2.8 million worth of goods to Iran and imported \$400,000 worth of goods from Iran, compared with \$3 million and \$100,000, respectively, in June 2025. Iranian news agency Tasnim, citing Census Bureau figures in late May, said trade dynamics shifted in March 2026, a month marked by the US-Israeli war on Iran that broke out in late February. In March, US exports to Iran totaled \$1.2 million, down 64% from \$3.4 million in March 2025, while US imports from Iran rose to \$300,000 from \$100,000 a year earlier.

Iraq in talks with Iran on mechanism to facilitate oil exports, minister says

Economy Desk

Iraq is in talks with Iran on a mechanism to facilitate its oil exports, Iraqi Oil Minister Basim Mohammed Khudair said on Saturday. The talks come amid the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which has affected Iraq's oil exports. Khudair said discussions had been held with Iran to allow Iraqi oil tankers to pass through the strait, but that the agreements had not yet been put into operation, Fars news agency reported. "Talks have been held with Iran to allow Iraq's oil exports, but these agreements have not yet been put into operation," Khudair told reporters. He did not provide details of the proposed mechanism, including the suggested route, potential export volumes or its timeline. The Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important energy transit routes, has been at the center of contention between Iran and the United States since the latter waged a war of aggression with Israel against the Islamic Republic in late February.



Iraq's Oil Minister, Basim Mohammed Khudair speaks during a press conference in Baghdad, Iraq, August 8, 2026. ● REUTERS

In response, Iran closed off the strait and began talks with Oman to establish a joint mechanism for shipping arrangements. Khudair said Iraq is currently producing about 2.7 million barrels per day of oil, about half of which is exported. He said Iraq's oil export ceiling this month is between 1.5 million and 1.75 million barrels per day. Iraq's oil exports have fallen by 75%, Khudair said.

Horticultural exports rake in \$4.3b: Deputy minister

Economy Desk

Iran's horticultural exports rose to \$4.3 billion from \$2.9 billion since July 2024, Deputy Agriculture Minister Mohammad-Mehdi Boroumandi said on Saturday. Iran's exports of horticultural and greenhouse products and foreign exchange revenue from these products have risen to \$4.3 billion from about \$2.9 billion at the start of the current government in July 2024, Boroumandi said, according to the Mehr news agency. Boroumandi said one of the key achievements in the sector had been an improvement in the foreign exchange balance of agricultural products. He said at a meeting on Saturday that, based on data registered in the Beneficiary Information System, Iran's horticultural production stood at 24.7 million tons at the start of the current government in July 2024 and had risen to 26.9 million tons. Despite problems and constraints in the energy



and water sectors, horticultural production is expected to reach 27.6 million tons in the current year, which began on March 21, 2026, he said. Provincial estimates also point to production growth of about 12% in the sector. Boroumandi, who oversees horticultural affairs at the Agriculture Ministry, pointed to plans to expand tropical fruit production. "One of the Agriculture Ministry's key plans has been the development of tropical crops," he said. The area under banana cultivation has in-

creased to about 14,200 hectares from 12,400 hectares at the start of the government, he said. "Banana production has also risen from about 23,000 tons at the start of the government to about 36,100 tons, and we expect this to increase to about 44,000 tons going forward." "During this period, the country's greenhouse area has increased by about 600 hectares, while greenhouse production has risen from 3.2 million tons to 3.9 million tons." Boroumandi also pointed to expanded international cooperation in the horticultural sector, saying cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other relevant organizations had increased and that good progress had been made in products including saffron, pistachios and dates. "Joint projects with FAO have been carried out in the horticultural sector, and in some areas, long-standing cases dating back several years have also been resolved, including the issue of tea. Overall, production in these sectors has gained momentum," he said.

Mecca Pact signals ...

But Israel attacked six of its neighboring countries over the past year, while the United States, as the purported ally of the Persian Gulf states, demonstrated that it clearly prioritizes Israel's interests and, in some cases, even sacrifices its own national security for Israel's security. Therefore, such a pact also reflects a deeper consideration of US alliances with regional countries. Israel, for example, attacked Qatar and assassinated Hamas leaders there while the US did nothing. However, there is a serious question mark over how far these regional pacts will

actually move into a serious operational phase. Russia, for example, has a similar pact with countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, but none of them entered the war in Ukraine. Even Russia, as a member of such a pact, did not take serious action in Armenia's defense when Azerbaijan attacked Armenia. Therefore, countries will never put their core economic, political, social and geopolitical interests on the line for the sake of such pacts. These agreements certainly have their own benefits for the countries involved and send specific signals, but they should not be taken too seriously.

Recognized by Karajan, trusted by Gergiev

Alexander (Ali) Rahbari's 50 years at apex of world music

I'm glad Iran 'standing up' to criminal US, Israel



By Ali Reza Sepahvand
Freelance journalist

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Among Iranian conductors, few have succeeded in making the name of Iran resonate in the world's most prestigious musical venues as much as Alexander (Ali) Rahbari. Having been invited by more than 130 symphony orchestras around the world, including the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Berlin orchestras, London, Tokyo, Toronto and many other major ensembles, Rahbari is now a permanent guest conductor at the Mariinsky Opera in St. Petersburg, one of the world's most renowned opera houses.

In this exclusive interview with Iran Daily, conducted during his rehearsals with the Mariinsky Orchestra, Rahbari talks about his five-decade international career, his historic encounter with Herbert von Karajan, his cooperation with Valery Gergiev, the challenges facing Iranian classical music, the condition of the Iranian Symphony Orchestra, and his hopes for the future of music in Iran. As such, this is a conversation that goes beyond personal memories and achievements, and becomes a reflection on the position of Iranian musicians on the global stage. First, it is only appropriate that we better acquaint ourselves with who he is and what he has done.

Alexander (Ali) Rahbari, globally-renowned Iranian composer and con-

ductor, is currently a permanent guest conductor of the Mariinsky Opera in St. Petersburg. He graduated from the National Higher Conservatory of Music in Iran and the Vienna Academy of Music and Performing Arts.

At the age of 25, he became the director of the National Higher Conservatory of Music and the Tehran Conservatory for three years. He won the Gold Medal for Iran at the Concours International de Jeunes Chefs D'Orchestre (The International Contest of Young Conductors) in France. He won the Silver Medal for Iran at the Geneva International Conducting Competition in Switzerland. He has been invited by more than 130 symphony orchestras around the world, including Vienna, Salzburg, Berlin, London, Amster-

dam, Brussels, Toronto, Tokyo, Mexico and many others.

He has been a permanent guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, Belgrade Philharmonic and Brussels Philharmonic. He has served as permanent conductor and artistic director of symphony orchestras in Brussels, Prague, Zagreb, Málaga and twice in Tehran. He has more than 250 albums released on the international market, some of which include works by six Iranian composers. He has received the highest artistic honors of Belgium, the Czech Republic and Spain.



IRAN DAILY: After all these years, after conducting so many orchestras and experiencing so many performances, what is the most important thing life and music have taught you?

RAHBARI: Perhaps what I have learned is that the more you remain yourself, the better it is. From the very beginning, when I started conducting and composing at a very young age, at 21 or 22, until today, I believe that my character, which is very Iranian — truly Iranian — has never changed. Neither in my work with musicians, nor in my behavior, nor in my expectations. I think perhaps the most important thing I have learned — if I do not make a mistake in choosing the word — is that I have never regretted remaining the person I was. I have never regretted that I stayed true to myself. This is perhaps one of the most important things I have understood throughout my life.

You won international conducting competitions in France and Switzerland and attracted the attention of one of the greatest conductors of the 20th century, Herbert von Karajan. Could you tell us about that period?

The two international conducting competitions in France and Geneva took place one year apart. At that time, they generated some attention in European newspapers and media because, until then, it had never happened that someone from the East, in general, or from Iran, in particular, had participated and reached the finals of such competitions. This drew considerable attention. Afterwards, I received a letter from Mr. Karajan's office saying that he wanted to meet me. I later asked his secretary in Salz-



Alexander (Ali) Rahbari (L) is seen assisting the legendary conductor Herbert von Karajan in Salzburg, Austria, in 1980.
● WIKIMEDIA



Alexander (Ali) Rahbari (L) poses for a photo with Valery Gergiev, an internationally-respected conductor who has invited the former to work together at the Mariinsky Opera in St. Petersburg, Russia.
● slippedisc.com

burg about the reason. They told me that he was surprised that an Iranian conductor had reached the finals of two major competitions in Europe, two years in a row.

First of all, I must say that Mr. Karajan was undoubtedly one

of the greatest figures in the history of conducting in the 20th century — and he still remains one of the greatest. Even after his passing, his recordings remain among the finest. Apart from being invited several times to conduct

the Berlin Philharmonic and becoming his assistant, which was a great honor for me, I spent a great deal of time attending his rehearsals and recording sessions.

At that time, he was around the same age that I am today,

meaning that he had enormous experience, and I was able to learn many things from him. I learned from him especially how to prepare an orchestra for major operas and symphonies in a very short period of time. In fact, this is something he taught me directly: how to prepare an orchestra within a very limited time. This is something I still do today. Most of my concerts are prepared with only two rehearsals. This method comes from him. I should say that in the 20th century, the fact that Mr. Karajan knew me and trusted in my capabilities was the greatest honor of my life.

A similar incident happened in the 21st century as well. In my estimation, Valery Gergiev, by virtue of the extensiveness of his repertoire and his singular characteristics, even surpasses Karajan in certain respects. Approximately five years prior, he likewise extended to me an invitation to commence my collaboration with the Mariinsky Opera.

He later told me that he had followed my career from a distance for years, but the time had come for us to work together. This was the second greatest honor of my career: to be recognized for my capabilities by another one of the world's greatest conductors and to be invited to collaborate.

For an artist like me, who throughout all these years has worked almost without any support from his own country and who, in many periods, has faced many difficulties simply because of being Iranian, this trust has a very great value. Fortunately, there are still figures in the world who, regardless of nationality, recognize the talent and merit of artists.

You have conducted more than 130 orchestras around the world. If you were to



Alexander (Ali) Rahbari poses for a photo inside the prestigious Concert Hall of the Mariinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, Russia.
● SOCIAL MEDIA

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Afterwards, I received a letter from Mr. Karajan's office saying that he wanted to meet me. I later asked his secretary in Salzburg about the reason. They told me that he was surprised that an Iranian conductor had reached the finals of two major competitions in Europe, two years in a row. I learned directly from him how to prepare an orchestra for major operas and symphonies in a very short period of time. This is something I still do today. Most of my concerts are prepared with only two rehearsals.



Alexander (Ali) Rahbari (L) conducts in the Tehran Symphony Orchestra at a rehearsal session at Vahdat Hall, Tehran, Iran, in 2015.
● ALI TAJIK/musicboard.ir

describe the characteristic of a great and professional orchestra in one sentence, what would that characteristic be?

The characteristic of a good orchestra is very simple. It has one essential feature that, unfortunately, has not yet happened in Iran. That is, the musicians must unanimously want to have a conductor at a very high level and must want to constantly maintain and improve their own artistic level. An orchestra is teamwork. Exactly like a football team in which all members work together for victory. I have worked with great orchestras in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Toronto, Tokyo, London, and many other important music centers around the world, but in all of them I have encountered one common characteristic: you are facing a team; a team that wants to be the best.

This has not yet happened in Iran. In Iran, decisions regarding orchestra musicians are usually influenced by institutions such as the House of Music, the Music Office, or the Rudaki Foundation. Of course, I believe none of these organizations are necessarily to blame because their main expertise is not managing a professional orchestra at a global level.

We have very good musicians in Iran. There are many valu-

able talents, but one day, these very musicians must want to build a great orchestra themselves. If you study the history of the world's great orchestras, you will see that in many cases, it was the musicians themselves who caused an orchestra to rise to a higher level.

The conductor is important, but it is not only the conductor who builds an orchestra. The conductor is actually the artistic director, but the musicians must want that team to succeed. Just as in football, if the players of a team do not want to win, no coach can make that team a champion; the same is true in an orchestra. The musicians must want to raise their own level.

You have had experience collaborating with and knowing some of the greatest conductors in the world. Tell us about Valery Gergiev's view of you and the position of your collaboration with the Mariinsky Opera.

About 12 years ago, in Vienna and in the presence of several major Austrian artistic figures, Valery Gergiev said that: "I have known this conductor for about 40 years; since the time when I myself was the director of the Rotterdam Orchestra and he was the director of the Brussels Orchestra." He said

that during those years, he had watched my performances through Belgian television, which could also be watched in the Netherlands, and that he knew who I was and what activities I had carried out. For me, this was truly a great honor because as a professional conductor, I know the level at which Gergiev stands and the great position he holds in the world of classical music. My honor is that about 40 years after Karajan, a figure like Gergiev invited me to work at the Mariinsky, a place which I believe is one of the most important music centers in the world.

Gergiev gave me the opportunity to conduct between 7 and 12 concerts a year at the Mariinsky, an orchestra that has more than 400 official musicians and is considered one of the largest and most prestigious musical institutions in the world. A few weeks from now, my sixth artistic season of collaboration with the Mariinsky in St. Petersburg will begin.

I have a very good relationship with Gergiev. I love him very much, and during these years, our relationship has become very close and sincere. As an Iranian, as a conductor, and as a composer, I cannot imagine a higher position

than this.

The Mariinsky is the very place where many of the great Russian composers have presented their works, and being present in such an institution is a great honor for me. One of the important features of this collaboration is that at the Mariinsky, I have a great deal of artistic freedom; I choose the programs myself, I choose the soloists myself, and I even make decisions about the timing of performances. After many years in which I have served seven times as an artistic director in different parts of the world, I think this is the highest position a conductor can achieve. Here, everything is provided for a professional conductor: a great artistic director who is not involved in non-artistic issues, jealousy, or unhealthy relationships; wonderful audiences; halls that are always full; and one of the best musical environments in the world. I truly do not know what could be better than this for a conductor.

Considering the events of recent years and the sanctions imposed on some artists and musicians, what is your view

on cultural sanctions?

I am fundamentally opposed to sanctions, especially sports and cultural sanctions. In my opinion, sanctions have never been the right solution. Sanctions, in many cases, are not very different from directly harming people.

In the experience of sanctions against countries such as Iraq or Iran and some other countries, it has repeatedly been seen that the ordinary people, especially children, have not been able to receive their medicines and essential needs on time, and many have suffered because of these conditions.

Cultural sanctions are also wrong to the same extent. In today's world, there is an obvious double standard; some countries and artists are easily sanctioned, while such decisions are not made against others.

In my opinion, sanctioning Russian musicians was a very big mistake. Especially when at the same time, we see that such restrictions are not imposed on artists from some other countries, this raises serious questions.

Art and music must go beyond political issues. Music belongs to human beings, and artists should not be punished because of their nationality or the political circumstances of their country.

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The works I have written for My Mother Persia, around 12 or 13 pieces, are very Iranian. The reason is that I learned traditional Iranian music from childhood, and this music became deeply rooted within me. Although my main success has been in Western music and conducting, the reality is that a very large part of my childhood was spent with traditional Iranian music. Therefore, these Iranian elements naturally appear in my works. If I were to mention only one or two works among my compositions, perhaps the piece Persian Blood, which I wrote at the age of 19, is one of the most important ones. Another work is Nohe-Khan.



Alexander (Ali) Rahbari, globally-renowned Iranian composer and conductor, leads the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra with passionate intensity during a 2019 performance.
● filharmonia.sk

Maestro Alexander (Ali) Rahbari (c) lifts his hands before the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra in 2019 to the roaring audience, sharing a wide, joyful smile as the concert hall erupts in appreciation.

● filharmonia.sk

Why have Iranian symphonic works, despite having talented composers, still not achieved their deserved position in the world?

This issue has two main reasons. The first reason is that we have very powerful composers in classical music, but many of them, because they have not learned Iranian music deeply and properly, try to give their works a national identity only by adding some apparently Iranian elements. However, the result is not always successful because sometimes this effort causes their music to resemble an incomplete interpretation of Armenian, Turkish, or other regional musical cultures rather than a true Iranian musical language.

The second reason, which in my opinion is more important, is the lack of serious support for introducing these works at the international level. This support does not necessarily have to come only from the government; even the music community and musicians themselves should make more efforts to introduce valuable Iranian works. More than 40 years ago, around 50 years ago, I recorded six works by Iranian composers in the city of Nuremberg, Germany, and introduced them to the international market. These works were welcomed and are still present in the global market. But unfortunately, no serious support was provided by Iranian cultural institutions in this field. We have very good composers who can truly be introduced at a global level, but they lack support. Countries such as South Korea, China, and Russia support their composers and conductors. They try to introduce their best artists to the world, but regarding Iranian artists, such organized support does not exist.

Among your own compositions, which works do you consider closer to your Iranian identity, and which ones do you think are your most important pieces?

The works I have written for My Mother Persia, around 12 or 13 pieces, are very Iranian. The reason is that I learned traditional Iranian music from childhood, and this music became deeply rooted within me. Although my main success has been in Western music and conducting, the reality is that a very large part of my

childhood was spent with traditional Iranian music. Therefore, these Iranian elements naturally appear in my works. If I were to mention only one or two works among my compositions, perhaps the piece Persian Blood, which I wrote at the age of 19, is one of the most important ones. This piece is about 10 minutes long, and its first performance took place in Vienna.

Another work is Nohe-Khan (The Lament Singer) for violin and orchestra, which I wrote at the age of 20. A few years ago, I worked on it again, and it has now been released internationally and has received positive reactions. These two pieces are especially important to me. Of course, I have also written several operas that have not yet been performed, as well as other works that have not had the opportunity for public performance. Many people ask me why I have not conducted my own works. My answer is that throughout all the years when I was responsible for an orchestra, I never wanted to use my position to perform my own personal works. When you are the director of an orchestra, there are many composers waiting for their works to be performed, and I did not want to take that opportunity away from others. However, now that I work mostly as a guest conductor, I allow myself to conduct some of my own works as well. In recent years, several of these works have been performed, the most important of which was the performance of Nohe-Khan at the Mariinsky. I have also conducted the work Also Sprach Zarathustra (German for: Thus Spoke Zarathustra).

You have collaborated with many of the greatest opera singers and classical music artists in the world and have recorded more than 40 operas. Do you still have a particular dream in the field of music?

Yes, I have worked with the best tenors and the greatest singers in the world. I have experienced very good days and have made many valuable recordings. I think I have recorded more than 40 operas. But if I want to talk about my dream today, I must say that at the moment I am very satisfied with the programs I have. The concerts I conduct at the Mariinsky and the collaborations I have with five orchestras in China are very valuable to me. These orchestras are at a very high level, and I am very happy

about these collaborations. Under the current circumstances, I feel that what I am doing is enough for me.

Thomas Bernhard, the great Austrian writer, has a sentence that essentially claims that whatever you are at the age of 18, a few years or a few decades later, you will only become several times that same person; therefore, it is important who you are at the age of 18. If I want to answer this question from this perspective, I must say that if I were 20 years old again today, I hope I could do the same things that I did at that age: write pieces such as Persian Blood and Nohe-Khan, and at the age of 20-something become the head of two music conservatories and the director of two orchestras. I do not think I could follow such a path again today. Therefore, I believe that my 20s were such a powerful period that even today, it is difficult for me to imagine returning to that time. The experience I have gained during the past 50 years does not necessarily mean that if I were young again, I could write better or perform better. I strongly believe that the period between 18 and 25 years of age is a very important and decisive period for many people, especially those who have had greater talent, interest, and opportunities from childhood.

Despite your extensive international achievements, you believe that you have not been recognized in Iran as much as you should have been. How do you think history will judge your position?

I think that if one day, history of music looks back at the past, it will say that a great deal of neglect was directed toward me and that my activities were not given the attention they deserved. Of course, my work has received a great deal of attention in the world, but I feel that in my own country, they have not yet fully understood what I have done and what path I have followed. The day when my works are examined, my recordings are listened to, and my activities are studied in books and educational centers, they will see what has happened.

Countries such as China, South Korea, and Turkey have always tried to find their best artists and see how they can use their abilities to introduce their culture and enhance their country's reputation. But in Iran, unfortunately, in some cases, efforts have been made to pre-

vent successful artists abroad from having the opportunity to return and work inside the country. The result has been that the people of Iran have not been able to benefit from the abilities of their own artists. We have first-class composers, we have conductors, we have highly talented musicians, but a large part of the Iranian society cannot benefit from their abilities. The reason for this issue is the existence of several small and weak institutions that believe the presence of these individuals is not in their interest. But this neglect will one day attract a great deal of attention, and history will judge it.

How do you evaluate the situation of the Iranian Symphony Orchestra? Why, despite its long history, has this orchestra still not reached a global position?

Unfortunately, as I have always said, the Iranian Symphony Orchestra has faced a fundamental problem throughout the past 100 years. This orchestra has a history older than many orchestras in Asian countries such as South Korea and China, and it is even older than many orchestras in other countries, but it has never been treated as a professional and national institution.

The main problem has been that the Symphony Orchestra has not been treated like football. In Iran, people know football and can recognize its good and bad aspects. Even ministers and senior officials have knowledge about football, but regarding the Symphony Orchestra, which in many countries of the world has a position equal to football, such an understanding has not existed. In major countries such as France and Austria, a symphony orchestra has the same importance as an important football team. But in Iran, the selection of the conductor, artistic director, and manager of this institution has never been approached professionally. From the past until today, sometimes someone has been chosen to conduct simply because he was available, had time, or the conditions allowed his presence.

I have always emphasized that a good conductor is never unemployed because a professional conductor is always working somewhere. This mistake, with different levels of intensity, existed both before and after the Islamic Revolution, and the result has been that the Iranian Symphony Or-

chestra, despite having many talents, has remained stagnant for years. And stagnation ultimately leads to falling behind. If today we compare the Iranian Orchestra with the orchestras of China, South Korea, or Turkey, unfortunately there is a very large gap. Perhaps we are 50 or 60 years behind because that professional transformation that should have happened has not taken place in Iran.

However, I believe that the main problem is not the musicians themselves; rather, the musicians must want this situation to change. I know many very good Iranian musicians. When I came to Iran 22 years ago and then again 12 years ago, on both occasions, I observed that these same musicians were able, within one week to 10 days, to show themselves at an international level. This means that the talent exists.

Twelve years ago, when the Iranian Orchestra was invited to China, the reason for this invitation was that in a short period of time, we showed one of the great music managers in China that these musicians had the ability to perform at an international level. They were not only invited to China, but the possibility of their presence in Europe and Austria could also have been created. But unfortunately, because of wrong decisions and unprofessional management, individuals were sent to China by some institutions who did not have sufficient experience and knowledge. Even the Chinese wrote to me with disappointment and said that such an approach was not appropriate, and after that, no further invitation was made. With this method, it is impossible to build a world-class orchestra. I hope that one day a minister, a cultural official, or a professional music group will decide to create an orchestra at a global level. This can even be achieved in a short period of time. Perhaps within one month, the foundations of a powerful orchestra could be created. At that point, it can be shown that Iran's cultural identity is no less significant than football. Football may lose one day and win another day, but a symphony orchestra is the cultural heritage of a nation. Finally, I would like to say this as well: of course, it is not related to the subject and main focus of our conversation, but it remained in my heart and I had to say it: "I am happy that Iran has stood against the criminal United States and Israel."

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Kiani faces grueling path to second Olympic medal

Iranica Desk

Iranian taekwondo star Nahid Kiani has embarked on what she describes as an extremely demanding journey toward a second Olympic medal, with the road to Los Angeles 2028 potentially requiring her to compete in as many as 20 major tournaments over the next year. The 28-year-old has not been short of history-making success throughout her career. She became the first Iranian woman to claim a World Championships gold in 2023, but the pinnacle of her achievements came at the Paris Olympics a year later. Kiani, who suffered a first-round exit against her compatriot and IOC team member Kimia Alizadeh at Tokyo 2020, avenged the setback in the French capital and went all the way to the final, before securing a maiden women's Olympic silver medal for the country. Now with her sights set on yet another milestone success in Los Angeles, she has already begun her qualification campaign for the next Games. Knocked out in the last 16 at the 2025 World Championships, Kiani bounced back in style at the start of the ongoing international season by capturing gold at the Asian Championships in May, followed by a silver medal at the Korea Open, officially entering the qualification race for Los Angeles.



● WORLD TAEKWONDO

Under the qualification system set by World Taekwondo, athletes seeking an Olympic berth through the world rankings must accumulate ranking points over a period of roughly 18 months by competing in international and ranking events. For Kiani, that means an exceptionally congested schedule, with little room for rest between some of the sport's biggest competitions. "I had a good test in South Korea," Kiani told Varzesh3 during Iran's joint training camp with the Turkish national team. "The Korea Open was a very high-level competition. It is the oldest taekwondo tournament in the world and one of the most high-profile events in the

sport, and it offered 20 Olympic ranking points. I faced two or three of my main rivals for the Asian Games there, so it was a very good test for me. "I was satisfied with my performance because, given that I was only relatively prepared, I managed to get a good result. I hope this silver medal and the points I earned will be a good step toward qualifying for the Olympics." The Korea Open, however, was only the beginning of an exhausting stretch. After the training camp in Türkiye, Kiani is due to travel to Lahore for the President's Cup, which carries 30 Olympic ranking points. She will then head directly to Taiyuan,

China, for the Women's Open Championships, where another 40 points will be available. That competition will bring together many of the world's leading athletes and, according to Kiani, could prove even tougher than a world championship because of its open format, which allows major taekwondo nations such as South Korea, China and Russia to enter as many athletes as they wish. The Iranian will then travel to South Korea for a Grand Prix event before returning home for only two weeks. She will subsequently head to the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan, followed shortly afterward by another Grand Prix in Italy.

"I have two or three very busy months ahead of me," Kiani said. "I hope I can get the results I want in these competitions and create a good gap between myself and my rivals." Among all those events, Kiani regards the Asian Games as particularly important. "The Asian Games are very important to the Iranian people, and I will give everything I have at these Games because they matter to the public and receive a lot of attention. Our main goal is to make people happy, and what better opportunity is there than winning medals for them?" For Kiani, however, the ultimate prize remains another

Olympic medal. "If I want to qualify through the rankings as I did for the previous Olympics, the path will definitely be difficult," she said. "I will have to compete in around 20 tough tournaments over a little more than a year. There are less than two years until the Olympics, and I will do everything I can to first qualify and then win an Olympic medal for the second time. "I have the highest Olympic medal among Iranian women athletes, and I hope this success continues not only for me but for all Iranian women athletes," she said. "Believe me, whenever I see my fellow female athletes succeed, I enjoy it. I hope that at the Los

Angeles Games, Iranian women athletes can become Olympic champions for the first time." Kiani also expressed gratitude to her family, friends and the Iranian Taekwondo Federation for supporting her through a demanding career. "This level of being away from home may be difficult for family, friends and those close to me, but I thank them for understanding me," she said. "The federation has done everything it could, and this camp in Türkiye is a very good development because Türkiye are the world champions. "I hope this process continues and that one day the Iranian women's taekwondo team can become world champions."

Iranian teams to compete at FIBA 3x3 Youth Nations League



● FIBA

Iranica Desk

Iranian men's and women's teams will get their campaigns underway at the Asia Central/East division of the FIBA 3x3 Youth Nations League in Cangzhou, China, on Monday. The Iranian women's team, comprising Farnaz Khodamoradi, Mahla Abedi, Shamim Nouri, Mahsa Karani and Zahra Moqaddasi, will open its Pool A campaign against the host country before taking on Kazakhstan later in the one-day Stop 1 of the competition, which also features Japan, Mongolia and South Korea in Pool B. In the men's competition, mean-

while, Iran will square off against top-seeded Mongolia in Pool A, followed by an encounter with Kazakhstan later at Cangzhou Sports Stadium. Mohammad-Mahdi Rahimi, Seyyed Mohammad Ghaffari, Mohammad-Basir Mo'meni, Sarem Jafari and Argen Minasians are the members of the Iranian men's team, for whom the tournament will serve as part of their preparations for September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games. China, Japan and South Korea complete the field in the men's Pool B. The pool winners will go head-to-head in the men's and women's finals.

Iran handball set for uphill battle at Asian Games without overseas players

Iranica Desk

Iran's men's handball team faces a daunting task at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games after being drawn in a challenging group and likely having to travel to Japan without any of its European-based players. With Croatian Nenad Kljaić set to make his debut as Iran coach, his team has been placed in Group B alongside Bahrain, South Korea, Kuwait and Kazakhstan – a cast described by national team player Yasin Kabirianjou as the "group of death." The group features at least three of Asia's established handball powers. Bahrain won the Asian Championship title in January, while

Kuwait finished third in the continental competition. South Korea, meanwhile, have traditionally been one of Asia's strongest sides and will also use the Asian Games as part of their preparations for the World Championship. "Kazakhstan were not in the previous edition, so we do not have much knowledge about this team," Kabirianjou told IRNA. "I doubt they are a strong team, but Kuwait, South Korea and Bahrain will certainly come with powerful teams again." The Iranian said the tournament would be particularly demanding because of changes to the competition format. "The previ-

ous Asian Games had four groups, but now there are only two," he said. "The format, the number of teams and the groupings have all changed, so qualifying from the group will be very difficult this time." At the Hangzhou Asian Games, Iran were placed in a more favorable preliminary group and advanced to the next round after beating New Zealand and drawing with Saudi Arabia. The task in Nagoya is expected to be significantly tougher, particularly with Iran potentially missing several key players who are based in European leagues. Iran Handball Federation president Alireza Pakdel has confirmed that nego-

tiations to bring the overseas-based players to the Asian Games have effectively reached a dead end because the continental event clashes with European club competitions. Players including Pouya Norouzinejad, Mehran Rahnama and Seyyed Alireza Mousavi, who play in European leagues, are therefore unlikely to join the national team in Japan. Their absence could force Kljaić to rely on a younger squad, representing a significant change from the team that competed in previous major tournaments and potentially reducing Iran's chances of challenging for a medal. Despite the difficult cir-

cumstances, Kabirianjou believes Iran can draw encouragement from its previous encounters with some of the group opponents. "South Korea have been one of Iran's rivals for many years, and we have a history of beating them," he said. Iran will also have to contend with the physical and tactical demands of a compressed international schedule after recent concerns over its ability to maintain performance levels late in matches. Kabirianjou acknowledged that the team's tendency to concede ground during the final 10 minutes of games has been extensively analyzed, with different ex-



● IRIHF

planations offered for the problem. "Experts have analyzed those final 10 minutes extensively," he said. "Some said it was a physical problem, and the federation brought in a good fitness coach. Others said it was

a problem with the head coach, and a good coach was added." Iran's most successful run at the Asian Games came in Guangzhou 2010, where the country settled for silver following a defeat by South Korea in the final.



Iranian society needs ‘peace journalism’ more than ever: *Senior media expert*

Media should avoid stoking social polarization, confrontation

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

As Iran remains in a state of war and continues to grapple with the consequences of conflict and its psychological and social impact, the role of the media and journalists has become more important than ever. In such circumstances, social media has emerged as one of the main arenas in which public opinion is shaped. Alongside the rapid flow of information and news, however, these platforms have also become channels for emotional, inflammatory and provocative narratives and commentary that, rather than helping foster dialogue, resolve disputes and promote national unity and cohesion, can fuel violence, confrontation and divisions among different sections of society. Against this backdrop, some individuals and groups have used extreme views on social media to set different parts of society against one another, turning any form of dialogue, negotiation or agreement into an opportunity for confrontation and polarization. Such a trend can further undermine social cohesion and the psychological well-being of society. The situation once again highlights the professional responsibility of the media and journalists. How can the media remain faithful to the truth and the public's right to know while avoiding the escalation of divisions? How can it create room for rational dialogue, constructive criticism and greater social cohesion

rather than reproducing violence and polarization?

To mark Iran's National Reporter's Day, observed on August 8, Iran Daily spoke with Mohammad Mehdi Forghani, a prominent communications scholar, PhD in communications and faculty member of the Department of Communications at Allameh Tabataba'i University. The interview examines the responsibilities of the media in wartime, the need to preserve social calm and cohesion, the challenge of polarization, and the role of "peace journalism" in helping society move beyond an atmosphere of tension and confrontation.



Mohammad Mehdi Forghani

IRAN DAILY: In wartime, a journalist's role goes beyond simply reporting the news. How can journalists report the realities of war while also helping to preserve social calm and cohesion?

FORGHANI: Journalists have a clearly defined set of professional duties and responsibilities, alongside certain considerations laid down in codes of professional ethics. In most countries around the world, such ethical codes have been formally established, and journalists work within them. In our country, such a professional code of ethics has not yet been formally and widely established, but journalists are implicitly and naturally aware of these responsibilities.

In my view, journalists should be able to strike a balance between two imperatives. One is the need to seek out and publish

news, ideas and opinions. But a journalist's job is not simply to report the news. With the expansion of social media, a significant part of the flow of information now takes place there, and in many cases professional journalists have lost the initiative. The role of journalism, therefore, needs to be understood as something broader than simply delivering news. Journalists have a responsibility to gather and publish news, ideas and opinions and to create space for genuine intellectuals and new thinkers — people with expertise and informed views who can help make society's environment more transparent, contribute to resolving problems and help find solutions. Alongside this responsibility, there is another imperative: taking into account national security, preserving social calm and reducing the psychological burden on people's lives — a burden that becomes heavier and more intense in wartime. Journalists should be able to strike a balance between these two duties and responsibilities.

This, of course, does not mean censorship or self-censorship. News, information and even opinions can be presented in ways that both help resolve problems and give people the information they need. If people's need for news is not met, they will naturally turn to other channels and sources of information, and news authority will shift from inside the country to outside it. People therefore need to feel that the media, journalists and reporters are honest, transparent and trustworthy in dealing with them.

At the same time, officials should understand the difficulties and constraints



A crowd of reporters encircle an official not seen in the photo after a cabinet meeting in Tehran, Iran on October 7, 8685.

● IRNA

journalists face, cooperate with them and provide them with the information they need. If, in the interests of the public or national security, a particular issue needs to be reported on or published temporarily, or with certain considerations, officials should explain this to journalists and convince them that the decision has been made in the interests of national security.

Of course, national security can be understood and interpreted differently by different individuals and factions. One person may regard war as a way of advancing national interests and security, while another may see negotiations in the same light. What matters, therefore, is to advance rational and reasoned debate rather than emotional arguments, and not to give prominence to extremist groups or those who serve the interests of war.

Today, we need a form of "peace journalism" — journalism that examines the roots and sources of disagreement and conflict and goes beyond simply reporting events to investigate the conditions that pave the way for war, both in public opinion and among political elites, and work to eliminate them.

So, alongside the two considerations I mentioned, advancing peace is also an important responsibility of journalists, because nothing serves the national interest more than peace.

One of the issues we are facing is the activity of extremist groups on so-



cial media, aimed at undermining the Iranian government, creating polarization and driving a wedge among people, and even opposing developments that could lead to peace. How can the media and journalists stand up to this trend?

In my view, journalists should first bring such figures and behavior under public scrutiny and criticism, creating conditions in which extremists and warmongers who seek to advance their aims through lies and the promotion of violence are exposed to public opinion.

The open promotion of violence and the creation of divisions run counter to the national interest. If individuals use such methods to advance factional interests, journalists should expose and bring to light their hidden motives — but they should do so with documentation, evidence and proof.

It is very important for journalists to work on a documented basis, so that they themselves are not later condemned for publishing unsubstantiated material. Instead, those

who have engaged in such behavior should be placed before the public for judgement and held accountable. On the other hand, particularly in wartime, someone who fuels division and polarization, targets national cohesion, or attacks the country's authorities cannot be said to be acting in the national interest. If such actions are carried out knowingly and deliberately, they should be dealt with as per the law, because such behavior can target peace, security, national interests and the psychological well-being and security of society.

How can the media present different, and even opposing, narratives alongside one another without contributing to further polarization and social confrontation?

We should first accept that no opinion is absolute and that no single viewpoint can encompass the whole of reality. One of the media's main responsibilities, therefore, is to create the conditions for different ideas and opinions to be debated and different viewpoints to be put forward.

But this exchange should take place via rational dialogue. It is through such dialogue that reality can emerge more clearly and national interests and considerations can be better understood.

At the same time, extremist, radical and biased groups should be pushed to the margins, rather than being allowed to intensify chaos in society through violence and polarization. The media should create the conditions for a rational and reasoned exchange of views and ideas and, in other words, keep the space for public criticism open.

All of us, both citizens and officials, should have the tolerance and willingness to accept criticism of our views and ideas, rather than attacking the person who holds a particular view instead of addressing the view itself. Ultimately, the media should create an environment in which differences of opinion become dialogue rather than confrontation. A society that allows for rational dialogue is less likely to fall victim to polarization, violence and social division.

Iranian short wins best animation award at US festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short animation the Rusty Fish, written and directed by Milad Fathiani, has won the Best Animation award at the 17th IndieFEST Film Awards in the United States, receiving the festival's gold trophy and certificate, Mehr News Agency reported on Saturday. The Rusty Fish tells the story of a hunter who recklessly harms nature and other creatures, but ultimately finds that even the small-

est part of nature can strike back at him.

The Iranian animation has already received two awards. It was selected by the jury at the Passo San Marco Film Festival in Italy and also won an award at the Asian Independent Film Festival in India.

IndieFEST Film Awards, which has been running for 17 years and is recognized by IMDb, judges independent films in various categories including animation, documentaries, and short

and feature films, with a focus on independent cinema from around the world.

It has hosted both Oscar winners and emerging filmmakers as part of its focus on independent cinema.

Festivals recognized by IMDb can carry significant weight in filmmakers' professional profiles, applications to other festivals and contacts with distributors and producers, particularly for independent animation, whose commercial path differs from that of feature films.

