



Iranian director Dariush Mehrjui

Iran Government Faces Suspicion In Murder Of Film Director And Wife

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Politics Iran

The murder of a renowned film director and his wife in Iran has raised suspicions of parallels with the serial murders of intellectuals by intelligence agents in the late 1990s.

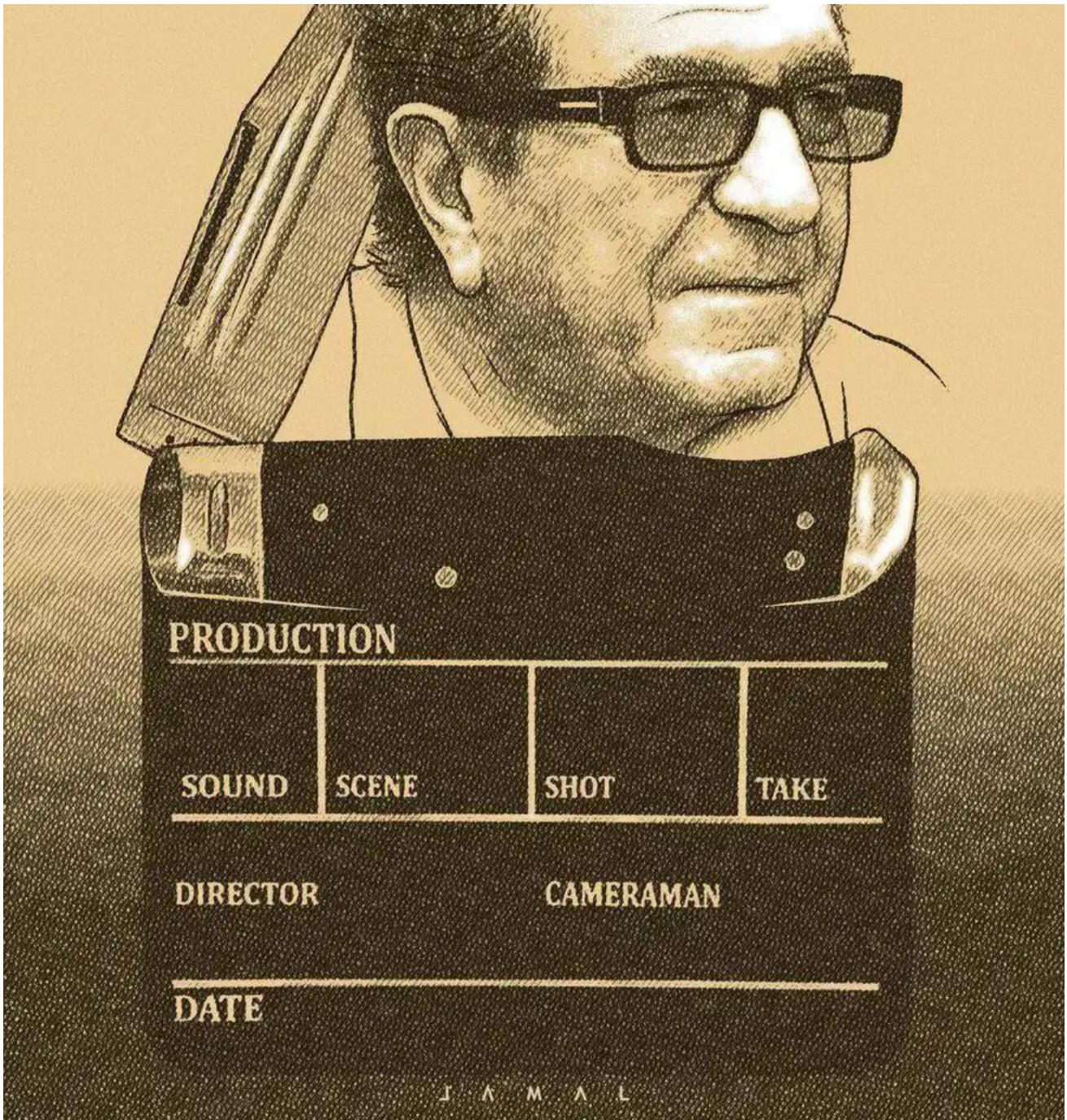
Dariush Mehrjui and Vahideh Mohammadifar **were stabbed to death** at their villa near Tehran Saturday. Bodies were discovered by their daughter, Mona Mehrjui, the same evening.

The revered eighty-three-year-old director refrained from engaging in politics for many years. However, over the past year, he subtly expressed support for the ongoing Woman, Life, Freedom anti-regime movement. This support is speculated to be a possible reason for him being targeted by the state, according to some allegations.

Mehrjoui had also consoled dissident **soccer legends Ali Daei** and **Ali Karimi**, and Elnaz Rekabi, **a climber who was one the first to ditch her hijab** in an international competition, in a handwritten letter he published on Instagram at the height of the protests last year for "the catastrophic massacre of innocent teenagers and youth".

BBC's Persian channel on Sunday also aired excerpts of an unfinished documentary about Mehrjui's life by Hassan Solhjoui, a filmmaker and a senior producer of BBC World Service, in which he was expressing his opposition to compulsory hijab by removing his wife's headscarf. In another scene, he said he was tired of "four decades of deceit", referring to the 44 years of Islamic rule in Iran.





An artpiece published by Iranian daily Ham-Mihan to commemorate the death of Dariush Mehrjui

Iranian media, politicians and activists have extensively pointed out the similarity between the double murders and the killings of tens of dissident politicians, writers, activists, and even academics over a period of at least two years that came to be known as “chain murders” in the late 90s.

“The news of Dariush Mehrjui and his wife’s murders was an immediate reminder of the serial murders in the 1990s, particularly the murders of Dariush Forouhar and his wife [Parvaneh Eskandari], which bore dire consequences [for the country],” Jomhourī Eslami wrote Monday in an editorial entitled “Take The Karaj Murder Seriously”.

Forouhar, who was the leader of the pan-Iranist Nation Party of Iran, and his wife Parvaneh met a brutal end when they were repeatedly stabbed at their Tehran home in November 1998. These heinous killings triggered widespread national outrage and were promptly linked to dozens of other unsolved murders of intellectuals by both the public and the reformist media.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his supporters blamed “foreign enemies” including Israel for the murders of Forouhar and his wife but public demand for answers eventually led to the reformist government of President Mohammad Khatami to take action to find the culprits.

At Khatami’s insistence, a three-member investigative team was formed, and it ultimately confirmed suspicions that the intelligence ministry was directly involved in the killings.





The country house where Iranian director Dariush Mehrjui and his wife were murdered

The ministry issued an unprecedented statement on January 4, 1999, which blamed "rogue" agents for four of the killings while calling the murders "despicable and abhorrent" and the minister, Ghorban-Ali Dorri-Najafabadi, favored by Khamenei who had still not consolidated his power as Supreme Leader, was replaced with the relatively moderate Ali Younesi.

The chain murders and the scope of the conspiracy are still shrouded in mystery. Intelligence agents arrested for the killing were tried behind closed doors by a military court and Saeed Emami, a deputy minister who allegedly masterminded the murders was said to have committed



The Jomhouri Eslami newspaper, which serves as a mouthpiece for moderate traditionalist clerics and holds the distinction of being the Islamic Republic's oldest newspaper, called upon the authorities not to prematurely conclude their investigations, even if they discover that theft played a role in the incident.

"One should not ignore the possibility that theft could have been used as a cover for the real goal and a group planned and carried out the theft through several intermediaries as a cover up," the newspaper warned.

Officials including President Ebrahim Raisi and Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei have ordered the case to be promptly investigated and a police spokesman has said that so far seven have been arrested on suspicion of involvement in the double murders.

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