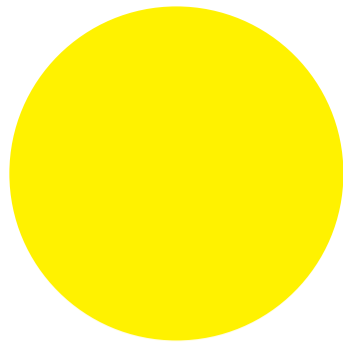




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Iran Braces for Seminal National Event

Presidential election campaigns hit high gear

PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

As the rivalry among six presidential candidates in Iran reaches its peak, the nation gears up for a life-changing election. Campaigning is set to conclude today at 8:00 AM, making way for the commencement of voting tomorrow morning. Following a heated final television debate on Tuesday evening, hopefuls went full throttle with their campaign efforts on Wednesday.

The race remains tight between three key contenders: Massoud Pezeshkian, backed by reformists and moderates, and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and Saeed Jalili, both endorsed by conservatives. Polls indicate that none of the three holds the required majority to secure a first-round victory, with the trio running neck and neck.

Unofficial sources claim attempts to persuade either Qalibaf or Jalili to drop out, consolidating the conservatives' camp to avoid fragmentation and boost the likelihood of a first-stage triumph. At the time of this piece, however, all candidates remain in the race. Of the current candidates, four – Jalili, Qalibaf, Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, and Alireza Zakani – align with the conservative camp and share close ties to the late president Ebrahim Raisi's administration. Their platforms emphasize the continuation of his policies.

On the other side of the political spectrum stands reformist candidate Pezeshkian, an outspoken critic of Iran's current policies. His platform centers on ramping up efforts to lift sanctions, bolster domestic unity, and remove restrictions on the Internet, while leveraging the expertise of specialists and elites to tackle economic challenges.

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Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf



Saeed Jalili



Massoud Pezeshkian



Alireza Zakani



Mostafa Pourmohammadi



Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi

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Iran-Russia cooperation agreement fully laid out: Envoy

Russia's Ambassador to Tehran Alexey Dedov said on Wednesday that the process of a new comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia has been completed. In an interview with ISNA, Dedov said that two agreements on establishment of the two countries' cultural centers as well as an agreement on cooperation on data security, which had been earlier approved by Iran's Parliament, were announced by Iran's acting President Mohammad Mokhbar for implementation on Sunday.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Forex reserves up by \$4b in three months: CBI



The figures of the Central Bank of Iran showed that the country's foreign exchange reserves increased by \$4 billion in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19 to May 22, 2024).

The statistics indicate that the country's foreign exchange reserves in the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year reached \$25.5 billion, showing an 18.6 percent growth compared to the same period last year, Mehr News Agency reported.

The CBI put the foreign exchange reserves of the country in the first three months of the previous Iranian calendar year (March 21 to May 22, 2023) at \$21.5 billion. In this timespan, \$14.3 billion of products were imported into the country.

The trade balance of the country reached \$11.2 billion in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year, registering a 51.3 percent hike compared to last year's corresponding period, the CBI added.

Over 550 wagons added to Iranian rail fleet



A total of 558 brand-new and overhauled wagons were added to the rail fleet of Iran.

In a ceremony attended by CEO of the Railway of the Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI) Miad Salehi, 516 brand-new freight wagons, 12 brand-new locomotives, 5 overhauled locomotives, 8 brand-new passenger wagons, and 17 freight wagons joined the railway fleet, reported ISNA.

He went on to say that these wagons and locomotives have been fully manufactured by domestic engineers.

According to another RAI official, 93 locomotives in the production and renovation fields have entered the nationwide rail network since August 2021 when the administration of the late president Ebrahim Raisi assumed office.



NIGC signs memo with Gazprom on Russian gas supplies

Russian energy giant Gazprom signed a memorandum with the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) to supply Russian pipeline gas to Iran.

The MoU was signed on Wednesday during a visit by Gazprom's head Alexei Miller to Iran at a ceremony attended by Iran's Interim President Mohammad Mokhber, Reuters reported.

"A strategic memorandum has been signed with the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) on working out the organization of pipeline supplies of Russian natural gas to Iran," said a statement by Gazprom.

"The parties proceed from developing long-term mutually beneficial cooperation going forward," the company said.

Referring to the MoU, Oil Minister Javad Owji noted that Iran and Russia have together more than 60% of the world's gas reserves. "The signing of the memorandum will yield favorable changes in the energy balance in the region, while Iran will be fully ready to receive gas from Russia with its infrastructure and gas transmission lines," added the minister.

The gas agreement between Iran and Russia will act as a revolution in the energy and industrial field of the region, Owji said. Iran sits on the world's second-largest gas reserves after Russia, and Moscow has long sought to make inroads into its natural gas business. In July 2022 Gazprom signed an MoU on energy cooperation with

the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) worth around \$40 billion.

Under its terms Gazprom was supposed to help NIOC develop the Kish and North Pars gas fields and six oil fields, and to become involved in the completion of liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects and the construction of gas export pipelines.

Non-oil exports rise 40% in three years to March: IRICA



Iran's exports of non-oil commodities have increased by 40% during three years to March 2024, according to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

According to the report, Iran's non-oil trade surged from \$74 billion in 2020 to \$116 billion in 2023, marking a 57% increase, IRNA reported.

IRICA's report shows that the weight of non-oil trade reached 167 million metric tons (mts) in 2023, up from 147 million mts in 2020, representing a 20% increase. Additionally, the value of non-oil exports in the mentioned time shows substantial growth, reaching \$49 billion in

2023, a 40% increase compared to the \$35 billion recorded in 2020.

In terms of imports, Iran's total imports amounted to \$66 billion in the previous year. Notably, \$2 billion was allocated to the import of gold bars, and \$2.6 billion was spent on trucks and truck units, as reported.

Furthermore, Iran's foreign trade with neighboring countries increased by 10% in 2023, surpassing \$61 billion. The transit of goods through Iran saw a significant increase, with 17.8 million mts transited in 2023, representing a 54% surge compared to the previous year.

Russia sends coal to India via Iran by train for first time

Russia has for the first time sent two trains laden with coal to India via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which connects Russia to India via Iran, according to a statement by Russia's national railway company.

According to RT, a multimodal route that includes a railway, roadway network and seaports, the INSTC spans 7,200km (4,500 miles) from St. Petersburg to the port of Mumbai in India, IRNA reported.

The corridor is part of Russia's push to find new transport routes in light of Western sanctions, which have forced it to shift trade flows from Europe to Asia and the Middle East.

Construction of the INSTC started in the early 2000s, but developing it further has taken on a new impetus in light of the restrictions facing Moscow. New Delhi has also touted the



route as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

"For the first time, two trains with Kuzbass coal headed to India along the International North-South Transport Corridor. The trains set off from the Kemerovo region. They followed along the eastern branch of the INSTC through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas," Russian Railways said on Monday in its

Telegram channel.

The coal will be shipped by sea along the final part of the route from Iran's port of Bandar Abbas to the Indian port of Mumbai, according to the statement. Abbreviated as Kuzbass, the Kuznetsk Basin is one of the largest coal mining areas in the whole world. It is located in Southwestern Siberia, geographically in the Kemerovo Region.

NIDC to allocate \$800m for purchasing drilling rigs

Mohsen Khojastehmehr, the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), said a license has been issued which allows the National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) to spend \$800 million in purchasing drilling rigs as well as drilling related equipment and services.

According to a decision made by the cabinet, NIDC has been excluded from the list of ces-

sion to the private sector which consequently has provided the opportunity for governmental investment in the company activities as the first chain of operations in the upstream sector, Iranian Oil Ministry's official Shana news agency reported. He went on to say that with regard to its experience, expertise, assets and fleet the company enjoys, NIDC is one of the most important operational compa-

nies not only in the region but in the world and that is why it is required to be supported.

According to NIOC director up to now, the NIDC has drilled more than 5,000 oil and gas wells in onshore and offshore sectors of the country along with extracting more than 70 billion barrels of crude oil and gas condensate as well as 5 trillion cubic meters of natural gas from oil and gas fields.

Margoon Waterfall holds immense ecological and cultural significance

Nestled amidst the picturesque landscapes of Iran, Margoon Waterfall stands as a breathtaking natural wonder that enchants visitors with its majestic beauty and tranquil surroundings. Situated in the Fars Province, this waterfall not only delights the eyes but also holds immense ecological and cultural significance. This article invites you on an in-depth exploration of the charm of Margoon Waterfall, delving into its historical background, geographical importance, diverse flora and fauna, tourism allure, and more.



A glimpse of natural grandeur

Margoon Waterfall, often hailed as one of Iran's most exquisite waterfalls, tumbles down from a height of around 70 meters (230 feet). The moniker Margoon itself, meaning "snake-like," mirrors the sinuous and winding course of the waterfall as it descends. Sourced by multiple springs atop the cliff, the waterfall forms a wide, fan-shaped cascade that captivates all those who behold its splendor.

Seasonal delights

Margoon Waterfall displays varying charms through the seasons, each presenting a distinct and mesmerizing spectacle. In spring and summer, the waterfall reaches its peak, surrounded by blooming flora that paints a vibrant and verdant panorama. Come autumn, the landscape transforms into a canvas of warm hues, while winter unveils a tranquil and serene beauty, sometimes with the waterfall partially frozen, imparting an ethereal allure to its magnificence.

Location and access

Located in the western region of Fars Province, near the border of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, Margoon Waterfall sits approximately 130 kilometers (81 miles) from Shiraz, the provincial capital of Fars. The journey to Margoon treats visitors to picturesque mountain roads and charming villages, setting the stage for the main attraction.

Geological origins

Margoon Waterfall owes its formation to the geological makeup of the region. Predominantly consisting of limestone and other sedimentary rocks, the area has been sculpted over ages by the erosive power of water. Emerging

from these porous rocks, the many springs that feed the waterfall contribute to the creation of the expansive cascade that defines Margoon.

Diverse ecosystem

The vicinity around Margoon Waterfall boasts a rich variety of plant and animal life, establishing it as an ecological gem. The verdant flora includes a mix of trees such as oak, walnut, and wild pistachio, accompanied by a profusion of wildflowers and shrubs that enhance the natural allure of the area.

Habitat for wildlife

Furthermore, this region serves as a haven for wildlife. Visitors may catch sight of various bird species like eagles, hawks, and songbirds, along with mammals such as foxes, wild boars, and occasionally even bears. The presence of these creatures underscores the ecological significance of the area and underscores the imperative of its conservation.

Local folklore and legends

Margoon Waterfall holds not only natural beauty but also a wealth of local folklore and legends. According to tales passed down through generations, the waterfall is said to be inhabited by benevolent spirits who safeguard the area and its visitors. These stories bestow a mystical aura upon a visit to Margoon, adding depth to the cultural significance of the site.

Historical significance

The region encompassing Margoon Waterfall has been home to human habitation for centuries, evident from ancient settlements and historical artifacts found in the vicinity. Throughout history, the waterfall has likely served as a vital water source and a



communal gathering place for local populations. Its enduring presence has transformed it into a symbol of natural continuity and resilience.

Tourist hotspot

Margoon Waterfall draws a plethora of local and international tourists seeking its allure. Its natural splendor, combined with the serene ambiance of the surrounding landscape, makes it a perfect haven for nature enthusiasts, photographers, and thrill-seekers. The waterfall sees heightened visitation during the spring and summer seasons, when the weather is inviting and the flora is at its peak bloom.

Hiking and exploration

An activity that draws numerous visitors to Margoon Waterfall is hiking. With a variety of trails leading to and from the waterfall, there are options available for hikers of different skill levels. These trails wind

through forests, meadows, and alongside rivers, offering ample opportunities to soak in the natural splendor of the region.

Picnicking and relaxation

For those seeking a relaxing experience amidst nature's beauty, the surroundings of the waterfall provide ideal picnic spots. The soothing sound of flowing water, coupled with the lush greenery, creates a tranquil setting perfect for unwinding and reconnecting with the environment.

Nature conservation

Given the ecological significance of Margoon Waterfall and its environs, active conservation measures are imperative. Local authorities and environmental organizations are dedicated to safeguarding the area from pollution, deforestation, and other detrimental factors. These initiatives are crucial in preserving Margoon Waterfall as a pristine natural gem for future generations.

Sustainable tourism

Emphasizing sustainable tourism practices is essential for the long-term preservation of Margoon Waterfall. This involves promoting eco-friendly behaviors among visitors, such as reducing waste, showing respect for wildlife, and sticking to designated trails. By cultivating a culture of environmental stewardship, the beauty and ecological balance of the area can be upheld.

Margoon Waterfall is a stunning showcase of Iran's awe-inspiring natural beauty and diverse ecosystem. With its grand cascade, colorful flora, abundant wildlife, and cultural importance, it beckons nature lovers and explorers seeking an unforgettable journey. Whether you crave adventure, serenity, or a profound communion with nature, a visit to Margoon Waterfall promises a remarkable experience, highlighting the marvels of the natural world.

Persian treasures in Czech museums

With the exception of the National Gallery in Prague, the most important Czech museums that contain objects of Persian origin were established in the 19th century, concurrently with the foundation of several large museums in Europe. Although most of the Persian material in Czech museums represent typical examples of ceramics, metalwork, textiles, etc., several items merit special mention either on account of their artist-ry or acquisition history.

The most comprehensive material is preserved in the National Museum and the National Gallery, both in Prague. A section of Persian art belonging to the Oriental collections of the National Museum which are stored in the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, is the most representative

one among Czech collections. Apart from objects originating from what is now the modern state of Iran, there are examples from the Caucasus and Central Asia as well, although most objects coming from these areas have been collectively described as Persian in the inventories.

The Oriental collections of the Náprstek Museum are based on donations of Czech travelers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, such as Josef Wünsch (1842-1907) and Josef Kočenský (1847-1938), as well as the famous Czech painter Antonín Chittusi (1847-1891) and the poet and writer Julius Zeyer (1841-1901). Additional objects were purchased later in the 20th century from several Prague antique dealers. Characteristic examples of late 18th and 19th century Persian art include

an impressive set of scissors, lanterns and incense burners.

Earlier metalwork is represented by magic bowls from the 16th and 18th centuries, while from Central Asia Bukharan and Samarqand metal vessels as well as Turkmen jewelry stand out. Mention should also be made of 14th-century Kashan lustre tiles, blue-and-white stoneware from the 17th-18th centuries and fine Qajar lacquer works, such as pen cases, book covers and three oil paintings. It is also necessary to mention that there is a large and important numismatic collection in the museum as well: this collection consists of both ancient Near Eastern and Islamic coins, including examples from modern-day Iran.

Another important collection in Prague can be found in the National

Gallery. In contrast with the National Museum, the collections of the gallery were not systematically formed. Instead of acquisitions from collectors or travellers, the collection of Islamic art grew as a result of the centralising policies of the 1950s and 60s when objects were transferred from various Czech museums and castles. Nevertheless, its sub-collection of Persian art is rich and representative enough. The largest part originates from the Museum of Decorative Arts (MDA) in Prague, the original collections of which had developed during the second half of the 19th century, in parallel with the Moravian Gallery in Brno. A fine example of the transferred objects from the MDA is a manuscript of the Holy Qur'an, dated 866 (1462) and copied in Tabriz under the Qara Qoyunlus.



▲ A 14th-century Kashan lustre tile

Trump's trial shows legal system works, but his rhetoric left scars



By Monica Potts
Reporter

PERSPECTIVE

Three weeks ago, former US president Donald Trump became the first and only ex-president to be convicted of a felony. And while the presumptive Republican nominee has returned to the campaign trail, his ongoing outbursts disparaging the courts are a reminder that this is anything other than a normal election. As he awaits sentencing on the 34 charges he was convicted of in the New York hush-money case, Trump has continued to suggest that the charges against him were politically motivated and that he would try to use the legal system to go after his own political enemies if he wins this fall.

Trump's legal issues have continued to split the country. About half of all voters approve of his conviction in the New York hush-money trial, according to polling conducted since the verdict, and they're also evenly split on whether the trial was fair, according to a YouGov/The Economist poll from June 2-4. Perhaps unsurprisingly in our highly polarized times, Republicans were much more likely than Democrats to think the charges Trump faced were politically motivated in an AP-NORC poll from earlier this month. Though there's some evidence the conviction may have hurt him with independents and shifted his overall chances slightly downward, the state of the presidential race overall seems to remain unchanged at a tie.



Trump has a long history of attacking judicial institutions and officials that's only continued in his recent legal cases, which he has consistently painted as a partisan "witch hunt" against him. Trump's claims of an unfair trial reverberate through the Republican Party and the right-wing media environment, the experts said, reflecting and amplifying the persistence and effectiveness of his narrative.

So, while Trump's conviction hasn't seemingly had any drastic impacts on his (re)electoral prospects yet, it's still unclear how this and the other unprecedented legal challenges he's embroiled in — and his rhetoric surrounding them — will impact either the election or the criminal justice system more broadly. The question isn't going anywhere as Trump still faces criminal charges in three other cases, and a decision in his case arguing that he has immunity for any of his actions while in office is expected to come down from the Supreme Court next week. With that in mind, 538 turned to legal and political experts to assess where we are in the aftermath of the historic conviction and what challenges lie ahead.

Experts: Legal system working

When Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office first announced the charges against Trump in the hush-money case a little over a year ago, even some progressive observers were dubious about both the case's legal merits and its political implications, with some arguing that its details were "underwhelming" in the face of Trump's other alleged crimes. In fact, reporting has shown that Bragg himself sometimes played a reluctant part in the case given its weighty political implications.

However, experts pointed out that bringing the case was actually a sign that the rule of law was working. "If you are going to say that, well, you can't prosecute Donald Trump because he is a popular political figure with a big platform ... then you are actually conceding ... that the fundamental democratic principle that no one is above the law actually isn't true and can't be enacted," said Kristy Parker, special counsel at Protect Democracy, a non-partisan anti-authoritarian group.

Rachel Barkow, a professor at the NYU School of Law, also emphasized the aspects of normalcy

in the unusual situation, noting that the charges brought against Trump were relatively common, as is the general practice of elevating misdemeanors to felonies. "The supporters of Trump find it to be a witch hunt against him or particularly political when in fact ... prosecutors do stuff like that all the time," Barkow said. While the bar for bringing charges against a former president should be high, she said, Trump shouldn't have impunity. "At a certain point, the rule of law does depend on bringing charges." And once the decision to bring charges was made, the trial was "textbook," said Deborah Pearlstein, director of the program in law and public policy at Princeton University. "The judge handled the trial incredibly well, the evidence was thoroughly and well-presented, the defendant was extremely well-represented, due process was complied with, the jury was able to give the evidence full and

fair deliberation," she said. "This looked like just the way you would want the criminal justice system to operate in an ideal circumstance." The other legal experts I spoke with agreed and pointed to the norms and procedures followed by the prosecution and the judge to ensure that the defendant, former president or not, had a fair trial. "Human beings run the justice system, and it is possible that they can do things for improper reasons," said Parker. "But the system itself is designed to root that out and correct for it." She pointed to guidelines her organization has published, which include ensuring an open trial observed by the public and the press, the defendant's opportunity to present a defense, and for the case to be decided by a jury of the defendant's peers — all of which happened in the New York trial. "We prosecuted a former president of the United States and the legal system didn't collapse,"

Pearlstein said. "On the contrary, it behaved incredibly well. We are able, just like every other Western democracy that's faced this issue, to handle prosecuting political leaders. If we weren't able to do that, I would worry profoundly about the fate of the rule of law in this country. So, in that sense, it's a wonderful success, a case study, a proof of concept. It's a good thing."

But Trump's rhetoric had repercussions

That said, the execution of the trial itself isn't the only point of concern when it comes to Trump's relationship with the justice system. Legal experts are worried how Trump's statements about the case, and his broader willingness to attack or undermine the legitimacy of the judicial system, bode ill for future cases and may have

already eroded public faith in the courts. Indeed, Trump has a long history of attacking judicial institutions and officials that's only continued in his recent legal cases, which he has consistently painted as a partisan "witch hunt" against him.

Trump's claims of an unfair trial reverberate through the Republican Party and the right-wing media environment, the experts said, reflecting and amplifying the persistence and effectiveness of his narrative. "Almost the entire Republican Party has gotten in line. ... They say things like, 'Oh, this is how he speaks, it's not what he means,' even though there's evidence to suggest that this is exactly what he means," said Jennifer Lawless, a political scientist at the University of Virginia. "I think they give permission to voters to say, 'All right, well, it's not going to be as dangerous as I might expect.'"

"Donald Trump, from the minute he was indicted on the first counts, made it clear that his perspective was that there was a two-tiered system of justice, that the jury would not treat him fairly, that the judge was out for him, and that the entire criminal justice system is rigged against him," Lawless went on to say. "And so, at least for his base and for a lot of Republican voters, the expectation was that it didn't matter whether he was convicted or not, he was not treated fairly."

So, it wasn't too surprising when, after the verdict came down on May 30, many Republican leaders continued to decry the process as a partisan weaponization of the justice system. "Democrats cheered as they convicted the leader of the opposing party on ridiculous charges, predicated on the testimony of a disbarred, convicted felon," said House Speaker Mike Johnson on the social platform X. Trump's disparagement of the justice system as a political tool



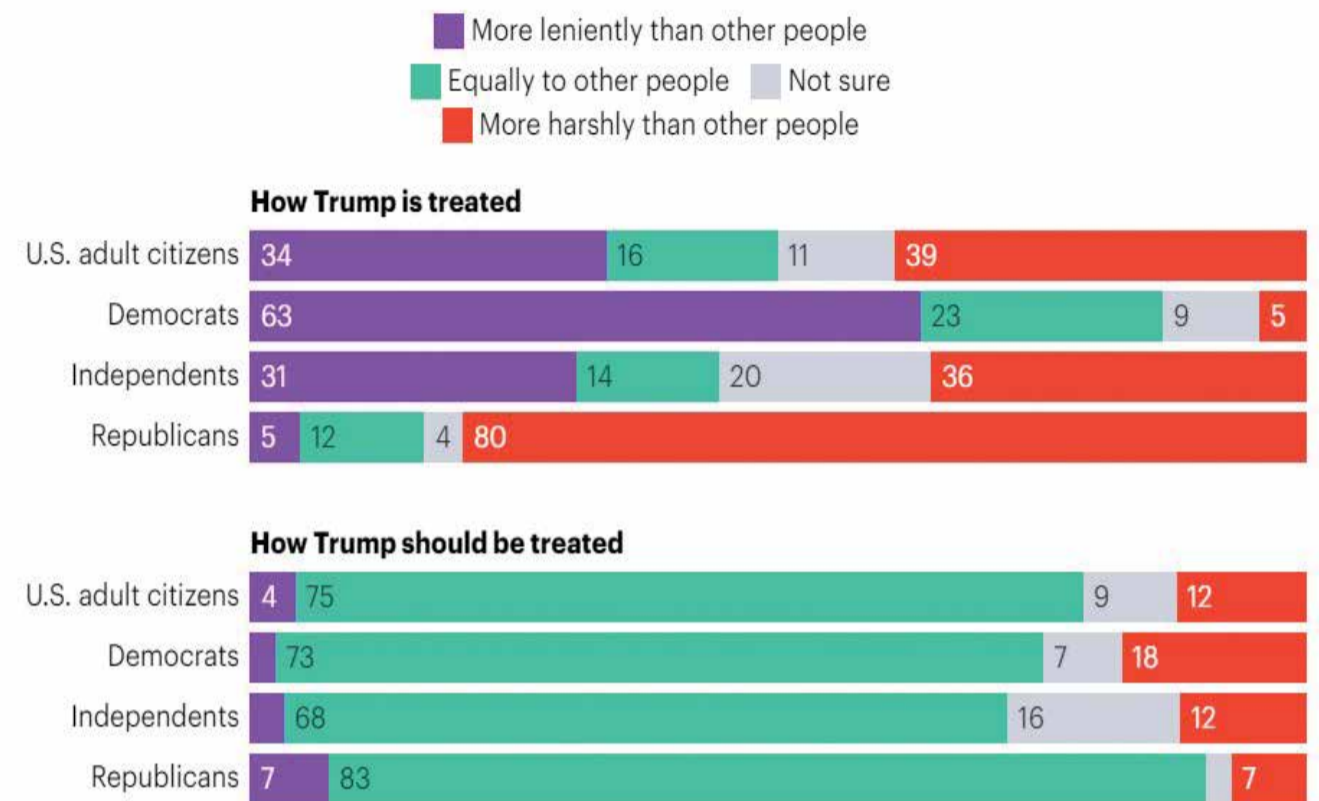
Trump supporters hold signs saying "WITCH HUNT," in reference to legal allegations against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, at his first campaign rally where he announced his candidacy in the 2024 election in Waco, Texas, on March 25, 2023. LEAH MILLIS/REUTERS

The illustration shows former US president Donald Trump, who was recently convicted of a felony, peering through a pair of handcuffs. **PAUL SPENLA/THE ATLANTIC**



Most Americans say Trump should be treated like any other defendant. Few think he is

Which comes closest to your view of how Donald Trump [is / should be] treated by the criminal justice system? (%)



YouGov

Chart: David H. Montgomery • The Economist / YouGov | June 2 - 4, 2024 • Get the data

and his threats to weaponize it himself have long gone hand in hand. “Trump ran, extraordinarily, in 2016 on a campaign of ‘lock her up,’” Pearlstein pointed out, referring to Trump and his supporters suggesting that his 2016 opponent Hillary Clinton should be imprisoned. “That was stunning at the time, it was what made so many of us worry about not just this particular candidate, but democracy more broadly, beginning then.”

That’s one reason why legal experts were concerned that the most recent prosecution of Trump would not only open the door for more of his attacks on the legal system but would further embolden Trump and other Republicans to call for retaliatory charges against Democrats — which could potentially be a step toward the slippery slope to authoritarianism. Indeed, enacting “retribution” on his opponents is something Trump has repeatedly suggested he might do if re-elected, and what some Republicans are calling for now.

“Prosecutorial discretion in the wrong hands is a truly dangerous thing,” Barkow said, arguing that the country is already “over-criminalized” such that almost anyone could be attacked for some kind of crime. “And now, you’re talking about the politicization of prosecution — that takes place in other countries that ... don’t have strong democratic norms. And that’s when we end up on that sliding scale to autocracy.”

Some of the other legal experts we spoke to were more confident about the checkpoints in place to prevent that. To charge someone with a crime, prosecutors have to convince juries and judges and meet the burden of proof in their cases. And, as a counterpoint to Trump’s claims of partisan bias from the courts, Lawless said the fact that President Joe Biden’s son, Hunter, has been convicted in his own trial might help bol-

ster faith in the justice system. Despite public approval of the Supreme Court being down, voters still have a lot of faith in the judicial system overall, she said. “People still generally believe in the way that the criminal justice system works, certainly for a billionaire white man,” she said. But one thing all of the experts noted is that Trump hasn’t hidden his ambitions to overhaul existing democratic systems and norms. Pearlstein pointed to reporting around conservatives’ “Project 2025” presidential transition blueprint, which includes plans to install political loyalists in key government positions — a move experts say would erode some of the guardrails that protect democracy. “If you start mucking with the systems that check the role of employees of the federal government who should be, in effect, impartial ... then you disable one of those checks that do

make the weaponization of the Department of Justice more likely,” Pearlstein said.

Still more Trump trials to come

No matter how well experts think the hush-money trial went, it is only one of several Trump-related challenges the system faces. Polling shows that most Americans view the charges in the three other pending criminal cases against Trump — the Florida case related to mishandling of classified documents, the Georgia election interference case, and the federal election interference case related to January 6 — as more serious than the New York case, but it seems unlikely there will be any resolution on those cases before the election. The fact that voters are waiting for those cases to unfold is a problem in and of itself, the experts said.

“In a functioning democracy, [if]

a person ... in a very public way, worked with numerous other people to stop the certification of a free and fair election, there would have been some sort of accountability mechanism that would have been allowed to play out fully,” Parker said. She felt it was “problematic” that voters likely won’t get a chance to see the evidence presented at trial and a verdict in many of these cases before they’re asked to make a choice in November.

The country’s deep political polarization is one of the main reasons for this delay, these experts said — an observation that underscores how legal challenges to the former president have become intrinsically tied to politics. As was evident in the discourse around Trump’s first trial, some liberals may be hesitant to target Trump in ways that rally his base to his defense, while some conservatives may be biased toward

Trump’s innocence. That hints at some of the problems that have already cropped up in future cases, like the classified documents case in Florida overseen by Judge Aileen Cannon. Cannon is a Trump-appointed judge who legal experts say, unlike Judge Juan Merchan in New York, has deviated from the norm in her handling of Trump’s case. Even before the trial began, Cannon appointed a special arbitrator to review the classified documents taken from Mar-a-Lago, a move that slowed the federal criminal investigation into those documents and was quickly overturned and criticized by an appeals court. And Cannon’s actions and decision-making as the case unfolds have continued to draw criticism from legal observers.

While some have noted Cannon’s relative inexperience as one reason for her unexpected decisions, most experts say she’s ex-

hibited a clear favoritism toward Trump. Pearlstein says Cannon’s actions thus far have seemed calculated and intentional. “If I were her and I were trying to make this take as long as possible ... and if I were trying to leave open channels for inappropriate outcomes, this is how I’d be behaving,” Pearlstein warned. “She’s not behaving normally for a criminal judge. And that’s what worries me about this case.”

Some have expressed concern that the Supreme Court’s long deliberations over Trump’s executive immunity case are a similar stalling tactic, and that likely outcomes for a ruling from the court’s conservative majority will effectively shield him from further criminal prosecution before the election, even if they don’t grant him complete immunity. Beyond that, if Trump wins in November, he’s reportedly working to try to shield himself from current and any further prosecution, a change that could fundamentally alter the rule of law.

This has been part of how Trump has operated from the beginning of his candidacy, from “lock her up” to trying to overturn the results of the 2020 election, Pearlstein said. And the fact that conservatives have largely reacted with indifference or renewed support in the face of Trump’s conviction shows just how far he’s come in reshaping democratic norms.

“Up to now, people who have sought to lead the executive branch of our federal government ... have bought into the idea that our constitutional system of government was a good one,” Parker said. “When you have an extremely powerful person and an extremely powerful set of actors acting in unison to tear down the legitimacy of a process ... that is going to have an effect.”



Republican presidential candidate, former US president Donald Trump (C), awaits the start of proceedings in his criminal trial at the New York State Supreme Court in New York, the United States, on May 2, 2024. **DOUG MILLS/POOL**

The article first appeared on ABC News.

Wrestling U17 Asian Championships:

Iranian young guns crowned freestyle champion



Iranian wrestlers and coaching staff celebrate with the freestyle team trophy at the U17 Asian Championships in Amman, Jordan, on June 25, 2024. UWW

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestlers claimed the freestyle title at the U17 Asian Championships in Amman, Jordan. The Iranian 10-man squad collected five gold medals and double bronzes to stand atop the team table with 183 points, followed by Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which tallied 156 and 151 respectively. Sam Arshad, Aryan Mehr-Alizadeh, and Amir-Reza Alipour brought the curtain down on a glorious campaign for the country on Tuesday, walking away with the ultimate prize of their respective weight classes. Representing Iran in the 51kg event, Arshad overcame opponents from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan before defeating Nur-tilek Zamirbekov of Kyrgyzstan 4-1 in the final showpiece. A second final featuring Iranian and Kyrgyz wrestlers saw Mehr-Alizadeh beat Kursantbek Isakov 3-1 for the 55kg gold, while Alipour rounded off a dominant 92kg run with a technical-superiority victory (10-0) over Zhenyu Yang of China for the gold.

Elsewhere, Amirabbas Ramezani and Amirabbas Alizadeh managed to leave the Jordanian capital with a couple of consolation bronzes. Beaten by Uzbekistan's Jurabek Rakhmonov in a 45kg quarter-final, Ramezani outmuscled Japanese Kenta Sakakihara 10-0 in the repechage battled and then defeated the host's Omar Ishaq Musleh with the same scoreline to share the third podium with Bekzat Amangeldy of Kazakhstan. Alizadeh, meanwhile, bounced back from a semifinal 8-6 setback against Indian Vishal Shilimkar to hammer Mongolian Budsai Khan Yandag 10-0 in the third-place bout of the 48kg contests. The final-day results came after Abolfazl Shamsipour and Reza Afshar had bagged a couple of golds for the Iranian squad on the preceding night. Shamsipour beat Indian Nishant Ruhil 4-1 for the 71kg gold, with Afshar defeating Uzbek Bunyod Rufatov 4-0 for the 80kg gold. Yasin Khosro Tayyebi (60kg), Amir-Ali Valipour (65kg), and Abolfazl Mohammadnejad (110kg) were the other mem-

bers of the team, who were unlucky to finish their campaigns empty-handed, though they still contributed to the team title with a combined 28 points. Earlier in the under-17 championships, the Iranian Greco-Roman squad had made a clean sweep of 10 medals but settled for a runner-up finish behind Uzbekistan in the team table. Abolfazl Karami (51kg), Emadreza Mohsennejad (80kg), and Danial Izadi (92kg) grabbed three gold medals, with Ahmad Badraddini (45kg), Alireza Amiri (48kg), Amir-Mahdi Saeidi Nava (67kg), and Mohammad Kazemi (71kg) adding four silvers to Iran's medal haul. Amir-Ali Heidari (55kg), Abolfazl Shiri (60kg), and Ayoub Hosseinvand (110kg) left the Jordanian capital with three consolation bronzes as Iran tallied 200 points. Uzbekistan notched up 215 points, thanks to a remarkable five golds, as well as three silvers and double bronzes, while third-place Kazakhstan finished on 148 points with a single gold, two silvers, and three bronze medals.

England fans creating 'unusual environment', Southgate claims



BBC - Some England fans' reactions to the team's performances at Euro 2024 are "creating an unusual environment" which is "causing an issue for the group" says manager Gareth Southgate. His side finished top of Group C on Tuesday after a goalless draw against Slovenia followed a 1-1 stalemate with Denmark in their previous group-stage game. Southgate's side were booed off, and some empty cups were thrown at the Three Lions boss following another below-par display against a team ranked 57th in the world, 52 places lower than England. "I'm not going to back away from it," he said. "The most important thing is the supporters stay with the team." Southgate said he "understands" why fans have expressed their displeasure at disappointing performances and results, which included a 1-0 success over 32nd-ranked Serbia in their opening match of the tournament. Fans jeered England at half-time in Cologne and Southgate was met by another negative

response as he went to applaud supporters at full-time, with a handful of plastic pint cups thrown in his direction. "I understand the narrative towards me and that's better for the team than it being towards them," he added. "But it is creating an unusual environment to operate in. I've not seen any other team qualify and receive similar. I understand it, I'm not going to back away from it, but I'm very proud of the players for how they're operating within it." England's performance against Denmark in their second group game was widely criticised by pundits, with captain Harry Kane calling for more positivity from the media in the build-up to Slovenia, and saying ex-players should remember how "tough" tournament football is. Social media video from inside Cologne Stadium appeared to show some England fans swearing towards Southgate, then arguing with other supporters who felt they should be getting behind the team and the manager. Southgate gave several post-

match interviews to individual broadcasters before holding a news conference. He told beIN Sports that "the reaction to everything" was creating "an incredible environment" and the "players are feeling that". "I've lived in this environment for 20 years as a player and coach. We've got to keep ourselves on track and make sure the dressing room is tight." In his news conference later, Southgate added: "We have made England over the last three or four years fun again. I think it has been enjoyable for the players and we have got to be very, very careful that it stays that way." Southgate also revealed the responses from some supporters are "causing an issue for the group" and urged them to back the players. He told BBC Radio 5 Live: "I was not going to back away from going over to thank people for coming and giving the support that they did, but I know that this is causing an issue for the group. "I can deal with that but I need them to support the players."



WOLFGANG RATTAY/REUTERS

Asian Fencing Championships:

Iran settles for saber team silver

Sports Desk

Iran grabbed the men's team saber medal at the Asian Fencing Championships in Kuwait. The Iranian trio of Mohammad Rahbari, Farzad Baher, and Ali Pakdaman defeated India and Kazakhstan for a place in Tuesday's final showdown but fell to a 45-26 loss to fencing powerhouse South Korea. Rahbari got Iran off to a winning start, beating Park Sangwon 5-4 in the first of the nine clashes in the final. However, Oh Sanguk and Gu Bongil - members of the gold-winning team in the Tokyo Olympics - came out on top against Baher (6-3) and Pakdaman (5-4) respectively and the South Korean side



FIE

never looked back, claiming five more wins - with Rahbari and Gu sharing the spoils - for a second men's saber gold in Kuwait - following Oh's individual triumph. Iranian Rahbari, meanwhile,

took his personal haul at this year's competitions to two medals, having won the individual joint bronze - alongside the host's Yousef Alshamlan - after a 15-5 setback against Oh in the semifinals.

World Para Powerlifting World Cup:

Aminzadeh wins double golds as Iran bags six medals

Sports Desk

Ahmad Aminzadeh rounded off a decent campaign for Iran at the World Para Powerlifting World Cup with double super-heavyweight golds in Tbilisi, Georgia. A gold medalist in last year's Asian Para Games, the Iranian registered a best lift of 250kg for the ultimate prize in the men's +107kg event, while an overall tally of 741kg handed him the total gold of the weight class. Ali-Akbar Gharibshahi had collected double golds for Iran in the 107kg contest, while Paralympic silver medalist Amir Ja'fari claimed the total gold in the men's 65kg class. Mohsen Bakhtiar, meanwhile,



paralympic.ir

took the 59kg bronze. More than 320 athletes from 71 countries took part at the competition in the Georgian

capital, which also served as the final round of qualifiers for the Paris Paralympics later in the summer.

Iran-Russia cooperation agreement fully laid out: *Envoy*



Russia's Ambassador to Tehran Alexey Dedov
● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

International Desk
Russia's Ambassador to Tehran Alexey Dedov said on Wednesday that the process of a new comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia has been completed.

In an interview with ISNA, Dedov said that two agreements on the establishment of the two countries' cultural centers as well as an agreement on cooperation on data security, which had been earlier approved by Iran's Parliament, were announced by Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhbar for implementation on Sunday.

"So, we can say that the process of the comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia has been completed," he said.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also said on Wednesday that Moscow was working on what she called a big treaty with Iran. Her comment appeared to be a reference to the comprehensive bilateral cooperation agreement that is being negotiated between Tehran and Moscow.

Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko also said on Tuesday that Moscow expects to sign a new agreement on comprehensive cooperation with Iran "in the very near future." "We expect that this agreement will be signed in the very near future, since work on the text is already close to completion. All the necessary wording has been found." On June 11, Russia underlined that Tehran and Moscow are continuing work on the comprehensive cooperation agreement after Russian media reported suspension of the joint deal.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that work on a comprehensive agreement between Russia and Iran continues but the schedule may somewhat change due to the snap presidential election in Iran. Russia and Iran signed a 20-year strategic agreement in 2001 that was automatically extended in 2020 for five years, according to Russia's TASS state news agency reports. Both sides also agreed in 2020 to work on a new pact that would replace the old document. The 2001 pact called, among others, for cooperation in security, energy projects, including the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the construction of nuclear power plants, industry and technology, according to its text published on the Kremlin's website.

US troops exit necessary for Syria's stability: *Iran*

Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Amir Saeid Iravani said the full and unconditional exit of US troops from Syria is necessary for the Arab country's stability, arguing that the forces continue to support terrorist groups instead of fighting terrorism. "Full, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal of US forces from Syria is essential for the peace and stability of Syria," Iravani said at a UN Security Council meeting on "The situation in the Middle East: (Syria)" in New York on Tuesday, Press TV reported. "Instead of combatting terrorism, they continue supporting UN-designated terrorist groups such as Al-Nusra Front (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) as well as looting the oil and wealth of the Syrian people," he added. Iravani noted that Syrians continue to suffer from humanitarian crises, aggression, foreign occupation, and terrorism. "Through unlawful occupation, inhumane sanctions, politicizing the return of refugees and IDPs, and preventing international support for Syria's reconstruction, certain Western countries are responsible for the prolongation of the conflict as they attempt to impose their own will on the Syrian people," the senior Iranian diplomat stated. "Such attempts are unlawful and immoral and serve only to prolong the crisis and worsen the suffering endured by the Syrian people," he added. He went on to urge the international community not to leave the Syrian people alone in their struggle against terrorism, foreign occupation, and the economic terrorism caused by unlawful sanctions. The US military has for long stationed its forces and equipment in north-eastern Syria, with the Pentagon claiming that the deployment is aimed at preventing the oilfields in the area from falling into the hands of Daesh terrorists.

Canada, Saudi Arabia bar presidential vote on own soil

Over 500 journalists will cover Iran's election

National Desk
Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said on Wednesday that Canada and Saudi Arabia have not permitted Iran to set up absentee voter sites for its June 28 presidential election. Vahidi told reporters on Wednesday that a large number of Iranian pilgrims are now in Saudi Arabia but the Arab country has not accepted Iran's request to hold election in the country. According to Iran's Election Headquarters, about 47,000 Iranians have traveled to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrimage.

The United States, which like Canada has no diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic, has permitted Iran to set up 30 absentee voter sites on its soil. The Iranian interior minister added that Iranians living abroad will be able to cast their votes in 344 polling stations set up in other countries. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani also said that the ministry would use all its capacities to hold the 14th presidential election abroad. He said that all Iranian embassies and consulates abroad are in full preparation for holding elections.



Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi talks with reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting in Tehran on June 26, 2024.
● ASGHAR KHAMSEH/IRNA

Masoud Pezeshkian, Saeed Jalili, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi and Alireza Zakani are the six candidates who are running for the presidency to replace the late president Ebrahim Raisi who died in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on May 19.

Head of Foreign Media at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance Alireza Shiravi has said that over 500 journalists from 150 foreign media outlets based in 31 countries will cover Iran's 14th presidential election on Friday.

Erdogan accuses West of backing Israeli 'plans to spread war'

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday accused Western powers of backing what he said were Israeli plans to attack Lebanon and "spread war" throughout the region. "Israel is now setting its sights on Lebanon and we see that Western powers behind the scenes are patting Israel on the back and even supporting them," he told lawmakers from his ruling AKP party, according to AFP. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to spread the war to the region will lead to a great disaster," he said. "It is ... pathetic that states that talk about freedom, human rights and justice are captives of a mentally-ill person like Netanyahu." His remarks came as concern soared over escalating threats and ongoing cross-border exchanges of fire between Israeli forces and Lebanon's Hezbollah, fueling fears it could descend into fully-fledged war.

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Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran braces for ...

Mostafa Pourmohammadi, the sole clergyman running for president, has raised unique challenges during televised debates. Despite his conservative inclinations, his stances and platform lean more toward reformists, sparking contention with his conservative counterparts. As the election unfolds, Iran's familiar political divide between reformists and conservatives has taken center stage. Key points of contention include the lifting of sanctions, addressing economic woes, and addressing demands about social net-

works, internet freedom, and civil liberties. Voter turnout has been a concern in recent Iranian elections. Both the parliamentary elections in March and the previous presidential election saw turnout rates fall short of 50%. In both instances, conservatives emerged victorious amidst low turnout. With the election nearing its conclusion, Pezeshkian and his key supporters, including former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani, former foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and ex-communications minister Mohammad Javad Azari

Jahromi, have zeroed in on rallying undecided voters and persuading those who do not intend to show up to cast their ballots. On the final day of electioneering, the leading candidates—Pezeshkian, Jalili, and Qalibaf—embarked on a whirlwind tour of various cities, drawing enthusiastic crowds at their respective campaign rallies. Despite the unexpected circumstances following the death of president Raisi in an air accident last month, the electoral process has maintained a respectable standard, fostering increased public engagement. All legally recognized politi-

cal factions have fielded their candidates, contributing to the competitive environment. The unpredictability of the results, even in the final hours before the election, underscores the significance of this national event. As the country stands on the cusp of change, Iranians will determine whether to maintain the status quo with minor adjustments or chart a new course for the executive branch over the next four years. Should no candidate secure over 50% of the votes, a runoff will take place a week later, featuring the two top contenders, as stipulated by law.

Nazanin Karimi to join two Iranian artists for Italy's AmiCorti festival jury

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian actress Nazanin Karimi is set to join two other Iranian artists to evaluate the films at the sixth edition of Italy's AmiCorti International Film Festival. Renowned Iranian actress-cum-director Fatemeh Motamed-Arya will preside over the jury, which also includes Iranian actor Hossein Soleimani, Mehr News Agency reported. This year's festival continues to feature a strong presence of Iranian artists, following last year's appointments of Milad Mansouri and Deniz Motevasseli as official members. Another notable Iranian figure at the festival is singer Fariman Jabbarzadeh. Known for his recent collaboration with Italian singer Al Bano, Jabbarzadeh will serve on the jury for the music video category. Under the leadership of Italian producer and artistic director, Rossi, the AmiCorti festival takes place annually from June 25 to 30 in Italy. The festival features competitions in the four categories of short films, feature films, international short films, and music videos. Awards will be presented on June 29 during the festival's closing ceremony, with winners being acclaimed in the presence of film crews and the jury.



Iranian filmmaker Mehrdad Ghaffarzadeh said the joint film by Iran and Japan, 'On the Zero Line,' is currently being screened in Japanese cinemas. Produced in 2018-19, and directed by Ghaffarzadeh and Yoshimasa Jimbo, the film, "along with other works by the Japanese director, is now on display in Japanese cinemas," Ghaffarzadeh said. A poet who lost his words and a woman who miscarried her baby meet on the equator, and two emotions start to mingle at the point of latitude 0°, as stated in the storyline. "This film is somewhat different as we sought to explore new experiences in the field of cinema. This film was made in Dadaism style," Ghaffarzadeh told Mehr news agency. Members of the Dada cultural and artistic movement began to experiment with film as a means

'On the Zero Line' hits Japanese cinemas



Arts & Culture Desk

to disseminate their stylistic partialities and cultural values through a new medium free of cultural respectability and aesthetic pretension, according to experts. Founded in Zurich, Switzerland, by Tristan Tzara in 1916, this avant-garde movement would soon spread to France, Germany, the United States, and elsewhere. Much like the surrealists who would follow, the Dadaists sought to liberate their audience from the cultural allegiances, prejudices, and norms of thinking that, in their view, had been largely responsible for the catastrophes of World War I. "In Dadaism, chance is one of the main elements in creating a work. For example, in literature, you randomly choose a few words and place them together. In the production of such a work, the random result can either be remarkable and a masterpiece, or conversely, meaningless,"

Ghaffarzadeh said. "In this regard, the film 'On the Zero Line' was made with this approach, with two directors from two different parts of the world, Iran and Japan, moving alongside their respective story characters, one male and one female, without knowing each other's story, meeting in the equator line of Kenya (Africa) and creating a common ending. We, as two directors, essentially became aware of the common story on the equator line and wrote our joint conclusion there," he added. The Iranian director said that in Kenya, a man and a woman intersect on the equator line. Their meeting gives rise to a new world, resulting in love. He also addressed the challenges of collaborating on film productions with other nations, identifying constraints. Ghaffarzadeh cautioned that joint projects could potentially constrain narratives and artistic choices. Despite these hurdles, he highlighted the potential for success with proper planning and execution. Regarding the screening of 'On the Zero Line,' he outlined plans to coordinate its screening through the "Art and Experience" group in Iran. The director also is making a love story titled 'Sing Me a Love Song,' which will be a co-production between Iran and Turkey, Turkish newspaper Hürriyet announced last week.

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films, and music videos. Awards will be presented on June 29 during the festival's closing ceremony, with winners being acclaimed in the presence of film crews and the jury.

Over 120 cases of dengue fever diagnosed in Iran

Social Desk

The Communicable Diseases Surveillance System in Iran reported that more than 120 cases of dengue fever have been confirmed in the country. Shahnam Arshi, an Iranian Health Ministry official, said that within the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 20, 2024), over 120 individuals tested positive for the disease, with a majority of them having traveled to the United Arab Emirates, Tasnim reported. Arshi said that the general condition of most patients is stable. Iranian Health Minister Bahram Eynollahi announced on Monday that three people have so far died of dengue fever in the country. Eynollahi said a total of 90 people have been stung by Aedes mosquito in Iran. The mosquito is the only cause of dengue fever. Officials warn that Fars, Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Bushehr, Sistan and Baluchistan in southern Iran, and Mazandaran, Gilan, and Golestan provinces in the country's north are high-risk areas in terms of Dengue. The disease is more common in tropical and subtropical climates.



Qatar cannot defy US pressure; Hamas office moving to Iraq



PERSPECTIVE

Qatar wants to avoid the policy of pressuring Hamas into accepting a ceasefire agreement as per American conditions. The US has asked Qatar to gradually withdraw the facilities provided to Hamas's political office in Doha as a strategy to pressure the Palestinian resistance movement into accepting the US-proposed ceasefire agreement. Consequently, Hamas leadership has initiated the plan to move its political office from Qatar to Iraq. The Iraqi government, perceiving the pressure from US and Qatari officials on Hamas to accept the ceasefire, approved the move last month. Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh revealed during negotiations with representatives from the Iraqi and Iranian governments that Hamas would not accept the US-proposed ceasefire terms, and Qatar would not be able to withstand American pressure, necessitating the partial closure of its political office in Doha. This could limit Hamas's political activities and media access. A senior Iraqi MP and a political figure with close ties to the resistance group confirmed the decision to move Hamas's political office to Baghdad. Last month, Ismail Haniyeh and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani had a significant meeting, resulting in the decision to move the Hamas's political office to Baghdad. The senior Iraqi MP stated that Kurdish and secular Sunni parties are concerned that the decision by the Baghdad government will increase tensions with the US. However, despite the lack of consensus, the government's decision to host Hamas will not be reversed. Hamas has yet to set a date for the move and the functioning of the office but expects the process to be completed soon. He added that Hamas sent a delegation led by senior official Mohammed Al Hafy to Baghdad this month to manage office affairs,

and the media office in Baghdad will become operational in the coming weeks. The Iraqi government has refrained from commenting on the situation, stating that the Iraqi government and people stand with Hamas and the oppressed Palestinians. It is noteworthy that negotiations for a Gaza ceasefire mediated by the US, Egypt, and Qatar are at a standstill. Senior US officials have blamed Hamas for the impasse. President Joe Biden's proposed conditions for ending the war seem to benefit Israel, resulting in the deaths of over 37,500 Palestinians, including many women and children, since October last year. After Hamas effectively rejected Biden's ceasefire terms earlier this month, there has been no significant contact between mediators, Hamas, and Israel. Hamas has made it clear that it will not accept any ceasefire agreement without including the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and fundamental ceasefire terms. Israel aims to end Hamas's governance in Gaza and hand control to compliant elements, similar to the Palestinian Authority, to suppress resistance against Israel. Hamas has controlled Gaza since 2007, and its political leaders have resided in Qatar since 2012. Previously, Hamas expressed a desire to move its headquarters to Turkey, but diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel, and the presence of Israeli agents in Turkey, inclined Hamas towards choosing Baghdad. Doha, home to the largest US military base in the Middle East and a close ally of Washington, has long supported Hamas's governance in Gaza financially, while Qatar also maintains warm relations with Iran, Hamas's major supporter. Moving Hamas's political office to Iraq will reduce American pressure on the Gaza-based resistance movement, while providing the US with an opportunity to persuade Israel of a permanent ceasefire and withdrawal of occupation forces, which is challenging but not impossible.