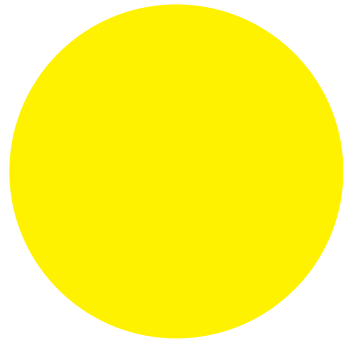


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# Iran Daily

Vol. 7591 • Saturday, June 29, 2024 • Tir 9, 1403 • Dhu al-Hijjah 22, 1445 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages



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**Iran's vote conveys political stability**



By **Abdolreza Faraji-Rad**  
Former Iranian diplomat in Europe

**OPINION EXCLUSIVE**

Yesterday, the Islamic Republic of Iran held a key presidential election following the tragic loss of president Ebrahim Raisi in an air accident in May. The smooth and peaceful execution of the polls, lauded both domestically and internationally, conveys important messages about Iran's stability.

Despite the void left in the wake of Raisi's untimely death, Iran's government remained steadfast and unwavering. Routine life persisted as political groups, including rivals of the incumbent government, navigated the transition with remarkable civility and respect. Adhering to constitutional mandates, the electoral process to determine a successor was executed swiftly and diligently within the legal framework.

Throughout the electoral campaigns, no major disruptions were reported across the country. Candidates representing diverse political factions, including a notable reformist presence, engaged in spirited yet civil rivalry. The participatory climate, coupled with stringent electoral standards, culminated in a successful and credible election for Iran.

Iran's adept handling of various crises, as exemplified by the recent presidential election, underscores the nation's political stability. Despite the tragic loss of president Raisi, Iran successfully held a high-caliber presidential election—a testament to the resilience and efficacy of its political system.

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**Iran's presidential election**

# Nation Turns Out Strong



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● IRNA



Oil prices to stay steady in H2: Poll

Oil prices will not change much in the second half of 2024 as concerns around demand from China and prospects of higher supply from key producers counter risks from geopolitical tensions, a Reuters poll indicated on Friday. A poll of 44 analysts and economists surveyed by Reuters in the last two weeks forecast the global benchmark, Brent crude, would average \$83.93 per barrel in 2024, just shy of the \$84.01 consensus in the previous month's poll. The forecast for average 2024 US crude, at \$79.72, was slightly above May's poll result of \$79.56. Brent crude futures have averaged \$83.4 thus far in 2024, after brief spikes to as high as \$92.18, driven by supply risks due to the conflict in the Middle East. "Beyond the noise, oil prices seem stuck in a sideways trend," with supply and demand providing little direction and storage levels floating well within seasonal norms, said Julius Baer analyst Norbert Rucker. However, a few analysts said prices could jump to the \$90 mark and potentially beyond, depending on a variety of factors including summer consumption, the geopolitical situation in the Middle East, and output curbs from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Analysts expect oil demand to grow by between 0.99 and 1.4 million barrels per day (mmbpd) in 2024, slightly above the 0.96 mmbpd forecast by the Paris-based International Energy Agency. On the supply side, meanwhile, most analysts noted that crude production from non-OPEC countries is rising. If OPEC+ moves ahead with gradually unwinding its current production cuts from October, the market could move into a small surplus by the end of 2025, said William Weatherburn, analyst at Capital Economics. Earlier this month, OPEC and allies, known as OPEC+, opted to slowly unwind output cuts of 2.2 million bpd over the course of a year beginning in October, while extending cuts of another 3.66 million bpd through the end of 2025.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi Cartoonist



Interim president opens over 40 projects in power, water sectors

Iran's Acting President Mohammad Mokhber inaugurated 42 projects in the fields of water and electricity in the four provinces of Ardebil, Kerman, Hormuzgan and Markazi on Thursday via videoconferencing. The total value of the opened projects stands at about \$633 million, according to a report by president.ir. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, which was attended by Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehranian, Mokhber said Iran still has problems in the water and electricity sectors but the country is no longer facing a crisis. "Today, many plans are being implemented in the field of construction and development of thermal and renewable power plants, efforts to improve the efficiency of power

plants, water supply from the sea, waste water treatment, use of deep waters and regulation of resources," he noted. Mehrabian, for his part, said at the ceremony that Iran ranks seventh in the world and third in Asia in terms of electricity generation capacity. The minister went on to say that power plants with a total capacity of 22,000 megawatt are currently being constructed across the country noting that only 8,000 MW are needed to achieve the goals of the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP) in the field of electricity production. The 7NDP was unveiled in a ceremony attended by more than 500 government officials, experts and scholars on May 20, 2023. One of the main



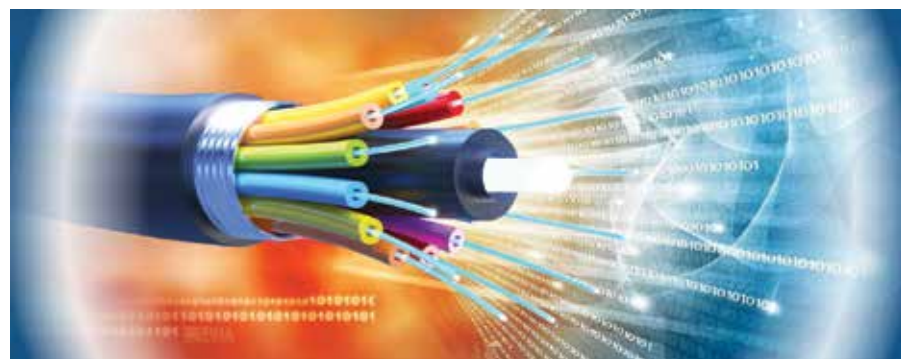
goals of the five-year plan is to attain progress accompanied by justice in Iran by achieving an average annual economic growth rate of 8% during the period the plan is executed.

Islamic Development Bank to offer €700m credit to Iran



The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) will offer Iran a credit line worth €700 million following negotiations and reimbursement of arrears of the Iranian government at the bank. Despite Iran's shareholding, the Islamic Development Bank had refrained from paying loans to Iran in recent years, as reported by Tasnim News Agency. However, the Iranian government managed to negotiate and attract the attention of the IDB's officials to pay its arrears and receive a loan worth €700 million. A senior aide to Iran's minister of economy also announced the establishment of a BRICS financial institution which is similar to the World Bank. Fazel Moridi said Iran will soon be a shareholder of the Multilateral Development Bank (MDB), an international financial institution chartered by two or more countries to encourage economic development.

Iran's Internet bandwidth doubled in three years



Iran's minister of communications and information technology (CIT) said the country's Internet bandwidth has doubled since August 2021. In a post on his X account, Issa Zarepour wrote that the country's Internet bandwidth has reached 10.7 terabytes per second, Tasnim News Agency reported. Good steps were taken during the administration

of late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi who assumed office in August 2021 to increase the Internet bandwidth in the country from 5.4 to 10.7 terabytes per second, the minister said. Zarepour also pointed to the number of G-4 and G-4.5 Internet websites which have witnessed more than 32 percent growth and added that the number of G-5 Internet websites has increased 200-fold while the penetration rate of mobile phones has risen significantly.

Iran's vote conveys ...

Had this internal stability and governance capability been absent, the nation might have succumbed to turmoil or security threats in the wake of the president's passing and during the election process. Notably, Iran's political stability

remains steadfast even in the face of ongoing pressure, obstructions, and hostilities. As a key pillar of national power, political stability distinguishes Iran within the volatile West Asian region. Bolstered by popular support and engagement, the Islamic Republic

of Iran continues to overcome numerous challenges. Consequently, the most important message conveyed by the presidential election, irrespective of the outcome, is the unwavering political stability of Iran. From an international perspective, regional and global powers including China and Russia as well as the West, are keenly

observing the election results. While Iran's overarching policies are well-established, the change in government may bring nuanced shifts in approach and tactics in various domains. As the world awaits the formation of Iran's new executive branch, it is evident that the nation holds a pivotal position in regional and global affairs.

Iran ranks 4th in attracting FDI in West Asia: Khandouzi

Iran ranks fourth in West Asia in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) after the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, according to minister of finance and economic affairs. Ehsan Khandouzi also noted that this is while none of the said countries have faced any banking problems in the field of money transfer and sanctions barriers, wrote Tasnim News Agency.

The minister pointed to Iran's export of non-oil commodities and put the value of export of non-oil goods during the administration of late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi at \$50 billion. The economy minister also highlighted the transit of goods via Iranian land and said it has risen from 11.5 million tons in 2021 to 18 million tons. Iran managed to attract more than \$11.9 billion of foreign capital within the



framework of FDI in the past three years, he stated. In the mentioned figure, the share of the oil and gas projects was \$4.8 billion

which means the oil industry accounted for 41 percent of the country's total foreign investment in the said two years.



# Moscow's historic heart from Red Square's icons to Zaryadye Park's modern marvels



● Red Square

● State Historical Museum



● Kremlin Palace



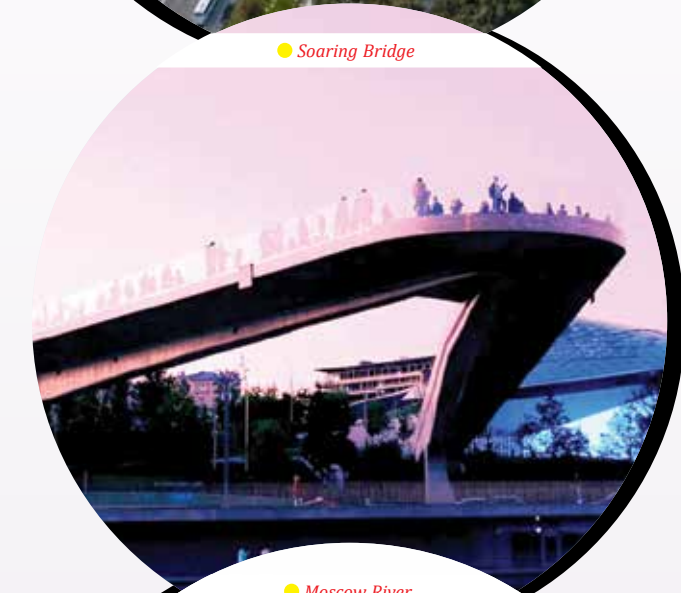
● St. Basil's Cathedral



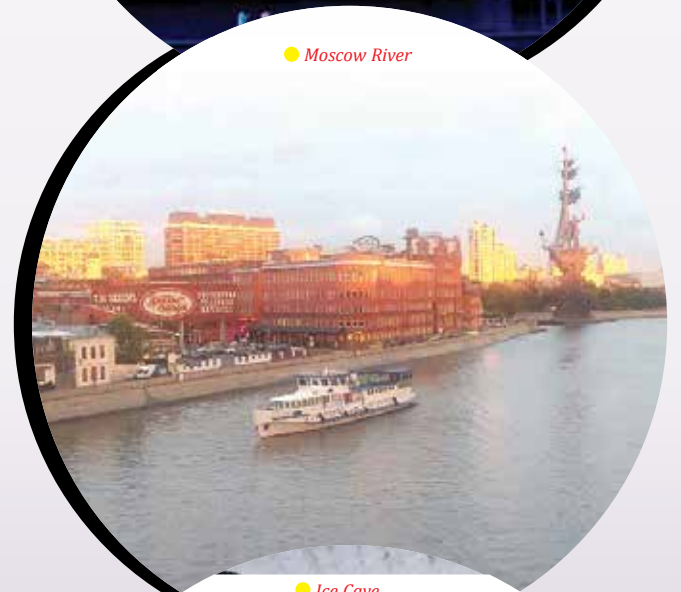
● Zaryadye Park



● Soaring Bridge



● Moscow River



● Ice Cave



By Leila Imeni  
Staff writer

Russia's membership in the BRICS—the intergovernmental organization comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the UAE—has had a significant impact on its tourism relations with other members. The collaboration within BRICS has facilitated increased tourism between Russia and these countries through various initiatives such as visa facilitation agreements, joint marketing campaigns, and cultural exchanges. This has led to a growth in the number of tourists visiting Russia from BRICS nations, as well as Russian tourists traveling to these countries. Drawn from a rich history spanning almost 900 years, Moscow, the capital of Russia, showcases

a unique cultural identity. Formerly famed for its traditional landmarks, the city has experienced a remarkable metamorphosis in recent decades. Standing in Red Square (known as Krasnaya ploshchad in Russian) of Moscow and admiring its architectural marvels, one might assume the square was named for its red brick buildings however, the origins of its name, stemming from the Russian word "krasnaya" meaning beautiful, hint at a deeper significance. Over the years, Moscow's Red Square has borne witness to pivotal moments that have left an indelible mark on Russian history. Serving as the vibrant heart of both Moscow and the nation, the iconic square showcases some of the most awe-inspiring landmarks in the city. Moscow's Red Square not only symbolizes beauty but also stands as a testament to the legacy of Russia's past.

## St. Basil's Cathedral

Located at the heart of Moscow's Red Square, St. Basil's Cathedral stands as an iconic symbol of Russia. This vibrant and magnificent cathedral, adorned with its distinctive domes, represents a masterpiece of Russian architecture. Dating back to the 16th century, St. Basil's Cathedral is renowned for its unique design, rich history, attracting visitors from across the globe.

## State Historical Museum

Another prominent landmark on Red Square is the State Historical Museum, a revered institution that showcases Russia's cultural heritage and history. Housing a remarkable collection of artifacts, documents, and exhibitions spanning ancient eras to modern times, the museum offers a comprehensive insight into the country's past. Throughout its existence, the State Historical Museum has been a venue for a myriad of significant events, including lectures, exhibitions, and cultural programs that honor Russia's history and traditions. Serving as a center for scholarly research, educational endeavors, and public engagement, the museum plays a vital role in preserving and promoting Russia's historical legacy.

## Kremlin Palace

The Kremlin Palace, a historic fortified complex near Red Square overlooking the Moscow River, serves as the official residence of the Russian president. Featuring a collection of palaces, cathedrals, and administrative buildings from various periods in Russian history, the Kremlin has been a witness to significant historical events and remains a pivotal center of political and cultural im-

portance in Russia. Within its walls lie priceless treasures, museums, and art collections.

## Kazan Cathedral

The Kazan Cathedral of Moscow, also known as "the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan", is a prominent Russian Orthodox church located on Red Square in the heart of Moscow. This architectural masterpiece serves as a significant religious and cultural landmark in the city, drawing both worshippers and visitors alike with its awe-inspiring beauty and historical significance.

## Other attractions

Lenin's Mausoleum, a granite structure, houses the embalmed body of Vladimir Lenin, the founder of Soviet Russia. GUM Department Store, a historic shopping mall boasting a striking glass roof in another attraction near Red Square, offers a blend of luxury and high-end brands.

## Stage for celebrations and festivals

Red Square of Moscow has been the stage for numerous celebrations and festivals throughout Russia's history, drawing active participation from diverse crowds. Today, these vibrant events continue to attract a multitude of tourists from around the globe who flock to Moscow to witness them firsthand. The grand New Year celebrations in Russia are renowned for their spectacle, with the annual event at Red Square being particularly impressive. On the night of December 31st, Red Square transforms into a magical winter wonderland and a Christmas market resembling a festive village. As night falls, the square fills with thousands of people, while popular Russian mu-

sicians and singers grace the grand stages of Red Square, adding to the enchanting atmosphere.

## Zaryadye Park

Zaryadye, meaning 'beyond the [trading] rows,' is a remarkable park situated just adjacent to the Kremlin and Red Square, featuring some of Moscow's most striking modern architecture. The park was officially opened in 2017, offering visitors a captivating blend of nature and innovative design. The total area of Zaryadye Park is approximately 130,000 square meters.

## Botanical splendor

Zaryadye Park in Moscow boasts a diverse array of plants and greenery, creating a lush and vibrant oasis in the heart of the city. The park features a variety of trees, shrubs, and flowers, including both native Russian species and exotic plants from around the world. Visitors can explore different botanical zones within the park, such as the mixed forest, steppe, tundra, and meadowland sections, each showcasing unique flora adapted to various climatic conditions. This rich botanical diversity adds to the park's beauty and provides a peaceful and rejuvenating environment for visitors to enjoy nature in the heart of Moscow.

## Soaring Bridge

The Soaring Bridge in Zaryadye Park is a stunning architectural feature that spans the park's landscape with a striking, curved design. This modern bridge, built over Moscow River, offers visitors a unique vantage point to enjoy panoramic views of the park and the surrounding landmarks, including the iconic Kremlin and Red Square. With its contem-

porary aesthetics and impressive height, the Soaring Bridge serves as both a functional pathway and a captivating architectural attraction in one of Moscow's most renowned public spaces.

You can take panoramic pictures from the soaring Bridge which is a slender V-shaped structure, spanning 70 meters without visible supports. A popular observation point, it offers breathtaking views of Moscow's city skyline, the Moscow River, iconic landmarks, and modern architectural marvels including the glass skyscrapers. Stalin's Seven Sisters are seven skyscrapers built in Moscow from 1947 to 1953. You can't imagine Moscow without these skyscrapers. They were built in monumental Stalinist Empire style and inspired by skyscrapers of the USA. Today, two of Stalin's Seven Sisters are luxury hotels, one is the main building of Moscow State University, one is home to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the others are residential, commercial and administrative properties.

## Ice Cave

The ice cave in Zaryadye Park is a unique attraction that offers visitors a captivating experience of exploring a frozen wonderland within the heart of Moscow. This artificial cave is designed to simulate the icy environment of a real glacier, complete with shimmering ice formations, icy stalactites, and a chilly atmosphere that transports visitors to a frosty world. The cave provides a refreshing escape from the bustling city, allowing guests to immerse themselves in a magical winter setting, regardless of the season outside.



Host to Iranian architectural style

# Khiva in Khorezm, tourism capital of Islamic world in 2024



By Reza  
Abesh Ahmadlou  
Staff writer

*Museum city of Khiva, in Uzbekistan's Khorezm region, exudes a remarkable resemblance to Iranian culture, art, and civilization.*

*At the 11th session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Baku of Azerbaijan in June 2022, Khiva was declared tourism capital of the Islamic world in 2024.*

*Regarded as a cultural gem in Transoxiana, Khiva boasts a wealth of historic structures adorned with*

*distinct Iranian architectural elements. Its mosques and buildings feature intricately designed curved and flat roofs within mud and brick walls, showcasing meticulous Iranian-style craftsmanship evident in their decorative motifs, geometric patterns, and inscriptions.*

Islamic-Iranian architecture has included all aesthetic architectural elements with spirituality. However, the art shows different indicators according to developments in each period and region, which distinguishes it from other eras and demonstrates the culture of that specific region. By studying the buildings in Central Asia, it can be inferred that traditional and modern methods have been applied in mosques, schools, and other buildings. The legendary Khiva was the last capital of the great civilization of ancient Khorezm. The city has a very solid age, and its fate is inseparably linked with the emergence, formation and decline of the powerful state of Khorezmshahs.

Khiva is located west of Khorezm region, in the heart of the Kara-Kum desert, on the left bank of the Amu Darya. Ichan-Kala complex – the historical inner city of Khiva – surrounded by great walls, has become the first World Heritage site in Central Asia. The fortifications and palaces, mosques and madrasahs, mausoleums and minarets erected over the centuries (the most ancient

monuments of architecture belong to the 14th century), caravanserais and baths have turned Ichan-Kala into a unique city-monument. In ancient times, Khiva, like other eastern cities, was divided into three parts: The fortress – Kunya-Ark, the suburb – Dishan-Kala, and the city – Ichan-Kala. Today, Ichan-Kala is an open-air museum – the old part of the city, enclosed by a fortress wall and turned into a state historical and archaeological museum reserve. Ichan-Kala urban structure is comparable with Bam Castle in Kerman Province of Iran.

It is here that on the vast territory of 26 hectares the exotic image of the eastern city is preserved. But what is most striking is that Ichan-Kala is not just a frozen museum city, but a living inhabited part of the city. Up to 300 families live there, who are mostly engaged in handicrafts.

The clay wall surrounding the city, with more than two kilometers in length, up to 10 meters in height, and 5-6 meters thick, has four gates on each side. The western gate is Ata Darvaza. The Bagcha gate leads to Urgench, the former capital of Khorezm; the

Palvan gate opens the road to the Amu Daryo and farther east; and the Tash gate leads south.

It is pointless to describe Khiva with words; you must look at it! Admire the soaring minarets, wander through the crooked alleys paved with chipped stone, admire the carved wooden columns of amazing madrassas, praise the lace-like mosaic of majestic mausoleums, and just touch the rough surface of ancient clay adobe walls – an oriental fairy tale.

In Ichan-Kala, there are about 60 historical structures. Here you can see such unique historical monuments as the Kunya-Ark Citadel Complex, the Tash-Khauli Palace Complex, the Kalta Minor minaret, completely covered with glazed tiles, the famous Juma Mosque, with its 213 carved columns, the symbol of Khiva, the Islam Khoja minaret and much more.

Unfortunately, Dishan-Kala has survived much less than Ichan-Kala. Only the gates Kosh-Darvoza, Gandimyan-Darvoza and Khazarasp-Darvaza are left of what once was a massive fortification wall.

Dishan-Kala fortification wall was built at the instigation of Al-lakuli-Khan in the mid-19th century so as to protect the city from attacks.

The khan issued a decree requiring that each of his subjects work at the construction site of the wall for 12 days a year – for free, of course. Since the khan had over 200,000 men, the wall was built in three years' time.

Its length was 6,000 meters; it was eight meters tall and six meters thick. They built it of adobe bricks. The wall had turrets standing at regular intervals along its length. The upper part of the wall was crenellated; it had narrow arrow slits to enable effective defense. Along the perimeter of the wall there was a moat as another defense, and they locked all the gates at nighttime. The gates were also part of the fortification. Each of them had a turret on both sides, and a lookout gallery over it.

Dishan-Kala had 10 gates:

1. Khazarasp in the northeast, opening to the roads to Khazarasp
2. Pishkanyk in the east, named

after the nearby village, or Kumyaska, named after the mahalla residential community

3. Angaryk in the west, named after the nearby village, opening to the road to Allakuli-Khan's summer residence Bogishamol

4. Shikhlar in the south, named after the nearby mahalla residential community, with all the earnings from it going to Pahlavon Mahmud Mausoleum

5. Tozabog in the southwest, opening to the road to Muhammad Rakhim-Khan's summer residence

6. Shakhimardan in the west, named after the cemetery near it

7. Dashyak in the northwest, named after the nearby village

8. Kosh-Darvoza in the north, named so owing to its double-gate design, and also named Urgench

9. Gadaylar in the north as well, named after the nearby mahalla residential community

10. Gandimyan in the north, named after the nearby vil-

lage.

In early June 2024, the 12th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (12th ICTM) on "Sustainable development of the tourism industry" convened in Khiva.

The conference was attended by the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary General of the Economic Cooperation Organization Khusrav Noziri, Director General of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Salim AlMalik as well as the ministers and high-ranking officials of tourism of 57 member countries, and representatives of several international organizations.





## Uzbekistan welcomes more Iranian tourists: *Minister*

Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Aziz Abdukhakimov has said Iranian are always welcome to his country adding that increasing the number of flights between two countries and eliminating the visa requirements are very important in witnessing a rise in the number of visitors from Iran.

Abdukhakimov, who is also the minister of tourism and cultural heritage of the country thanked the Iranian government on removing visa requirements for Uzbek nationals to visit Iran noting that "Now, Uzbek citizens can very easily visit Iran to enjoy the Iranian cultural heritage and Iranian resorts.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) in Khiva in Khorazm Region on June 2, he said that Iranian government put a lot of efforts to develop a touristic sector.

"We have already discussed the issue to eliminate the visa requirements for Iranian citizens and the discussions are still underway. Of course, it takes time before we should solve some technical issues. For us, Iranian tourists, are very important," the Uzbek minister stated.

In the conference in Khiva, we



discussed many issues related to digitalization of tourism, preserving cultural heritage, green tourism, ecological tourism, sustainable and resilient tourism as well as the future of tourism, he noted.

"In general, I can say this event was very successful. We had

a very fruitful and productive discussion with my colleagues from different countries, bilateral and the multilateral. But as you know, it's just our initial steps."

There is a huge potential to develop tourism among Muslim countries, the minister said

adding that as a chair country, we propose to establish a financial fund, which will help us to finance big projects aim to develop big touristic projects.

He went on to explain that the project contains constructing touristic complexes, which will include not only hotels or

restaurants, but also some cultural heritage and the cultural institutions like museums and galleries.

We are committed to collaborate and cooperate with all Muslim countries to develop so-called Ziarat tourism (visiting religious sites) which allow us to visit the travelers and the pilgrims from all Muslim countries in different countries, including Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan hosted seven million tourists in 2023 as the country expects 10 million tourists for the current year; he said elsewhere in his remarks putting Uzbekistan's target for 2030 to attract at least 15 million visitors.

At the 12th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) in Khiva, it was announced that Dakar (the capital of Senegal) will become a tourist city of the Islamic world in 2025, Cairo, the capital of Egypt in 2026, and Lahore of Pakistan in 2027. Tabriz, in northwestern Iranian province of East Azarbaijan was named as the capital of Islamic tourism 2018 by the ICTM.

The 13th session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers of Tourism will be held in Qatar in 2026.

We are committed to collaborate and cooperate with all Muslim countries to develop so-called Ziarat tourism (visiting religious sites) which allow us to visit the travelers and the pilgrims from all Muslim countries to visit the holy places in different countries.

## Iranian athlete makes hat-trick in Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games

Iran's strongest man Reza Gheytsi has registered a hat-trick after winning the championship of Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games hosted by Khiva, Uzbekistan.

The tournament, which took place on June 1-2, featured a diverse range of participant athletes from 17 countries, including Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

The event was organized in cooperation with the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the World Strongmen Federation (WSF), and the administration of the Khorezm region.

The tournament's program included various weightlifting competitions as well as challenging sections such as "Aqtash Kharsangi", "Obkach", "Towing the Amudarya boat", "Fireball throwing", "Towing the Moynoq anchor", and "Jalaliddin Manguberdi and Amir Temur sword fights".

The event also showcased Uzbekistan's tourism potential and opportunities on a global scale, highlighting the growing popularity of niche sports tourism.

Activities like Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games OIC Open, not only showcase the strength and skills of athletes but also promote regional and international cooperation in the development of sports tourism.

Gheytsi, who participated in the competition in recent two years, succeeded to defend his

title, making a hat-trick.

The Iranian athlete received his gold medallion and cup from Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan Abdukhakimov Aziz in closing ceremony on June 2.

Pahlavon Mahmud, known in Iran as Pourya-ye Vali, was a pahlavani wrestling champion, Sufi teacher and poet from the 14th century, famous for his exceptional strength. He became the patron saint of the city of Khiva.

He lived during the years of Mongol rule. He achieved great fame at the time both as a professional wrestler and as a poet-philosopher.

A special feature of Pahlavon Mahmud's school was the education of the students' minds through the martial art of wrestling, a discipline with which he made a name for himself as far away as Central Asia, Iran and India. In Persian as well as in Old Uzbek and Hindi, the word Pahlavon became a synonym for a wrestler, hero, or champion.

After his death he was venerated as a hero in Persia and Central Asia. In Iran, the nickname Pourya-ye Vali has been attributed to Pahlavon Mahmud.

One legend says that the location of his tomb is in Khoys of Iran, but another legends says that Pahlavon Mahmoud was buried in his own workshop in Khiva, Uzbekistan, which was transformed into the Pahlavon Mahmud Mausoleum.



Activities like Pahlavon Mahmud Strongmen Games OIC Open, not only showcase the strength and skills of athletes but also promote regional and international cooperation in the development of sports tourism.



# World Cup 2026 Asian qualifiers: Iran fancies easy progress after favorable draw



● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

## Sports Desk

Iran will begin its quest for a seventh World Cup participation – fourth in succession – with a home game against Kyrgyzstan on September 5. Eighteen teams were divided into three groups in the third-round draw of the Asian qualifiers in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, where Iran was placed in Group A – also featuring Qatar, Uzbekistan, the United Arab Emirates, and DPR Korea. Seeded in Pot 1 of the draw alongside Japan and South Korea, Iran was lucky to avoid the continent's fellow-old guard members Saudi Arabia and Australia as well as Jordan, Iraq, and Bahrain, which were all impressive in January's AFC Asian Cup. With the top two in each group progressing to the finals in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, Iran

head coach Amir Qalenoeei hopes his side will have secured qualification when the final round of the group fixtures takes place on June 10 next year.

However, the qualifiers could still pose some tricky tests for Qalenoeei's men, who shared the spoils with Uzbekistan in a double header in the previous round, either side of a last-four defeat against eventual champion Qatar in the Asian Cup.

Iran has also face two other group opponents over the past 12 months, thrashing Kyrgyzstan 5-1 in the inaugural CAFA Nations Cup last year before beating the UAE 2-1 in the Asian Cup group phase.

The game against the North Korea, meanwhile, will be a first encounter with the East Asian team for Iran in 13 years.

The second and third matchdays will

see Iran visit the UAE and Uzbekistan respectively, followed by home fixtures against Qatar and North Korea. "Qatar won the Asian Cup in the past two editions and has a top-notch league. Uzbekistan has also invested massively on the youth levels and the recent results show the country is a rising power in the Asian football," said Qalenoeei, who remained "confident" Iran will qualify as a top-two side in the group.

Meanwhile, Andranik Teymourian, a member of Qalenoeei's coaching staff who played for the country in the 2006 and 2014 World Cups, said: "The level of the Asian teams is so close and there are no easy games in the continent, though I still believe we were handed a favorable draw, given the formation of other groups." Elsewhere in the draw, South Korea was pitted against Iraq, Jordan,

Oman, Palestine, and Kuwait in Group B and will have to make long trips to the Middle East for the away games.

"We are aware of each team's abilities and every game will be tough but we will try our best to achieve our target," said Lee Lim-saeng, the technical director of the Korea Football Association.

"I won't say we are completely happy with the draw because we have a lot of tough games. We respect the qualities of all the teams in our group but we have to be confident that we can make it," added the South Korea.

Asian heavyweights Japan, Australia, and Saudi Arabia will be the favorites for a top-two finish in Group C – also including Bahrain, China, and Indonesia.

Australia head coach Graham Arnold was unfazed by the daunting

challenge awaiting the Soccerroos, saying: "I believe we can finish in the top two. You've got to have that belief and that energy to bring the focus to getting the job done."

"I do believe we've gotten stronger as a team, I think in the last campaign we didn't probably have the depth that we've got today.

"Individually some players have got promoted in the English Premier League and in the German Bundesliga 1, so as a young team – and we still are a young team – we're getting better and better."

The teams finishing third and fourth in each group will have a second chance to head to the World Cup as they will be drawn into two groups of three, with the group winners going through and the runners-up going head-to-head for a place in the inter-continental playoff.



## Familiarity but no fear for Switzerland against Italy



**REUTERS** – Familiar opponents Italy and Switzerland meet in the Euro 2024 last 16 in Berlin today, and while familiarity hasn't bred contempt, there is also no fear from the Swiss in facing a country many of their players call home.

Italians and Swiss have long had close ties, sharing a border and Italian is one of the official languages of Switzerland, but that will all be forgotten in Berlin.

Italy and Switzerland have met 61 times, the most common opponent for each country and while the Swiss have beaten the Italians only eight times, most recently in 1993, they have impressed more in Germany.

Switzerland came close to topping Group A before conceding an added-time equaliser in the final game against hosts Germany, and it was a performance which showed they have no fear of anyone at this tournament.

Italy needed a late goal to snatch a 1-1 draw with Croatia to progress, and the defending champions have failed to impress, unlike Euro 2020 when they eased through the group stage and beat the Swiss comfortably.

After seeing off Turkey 3-0 in their opening game three years ago, Italy beat Switzerland by the same score.

Bologna were a team who took Serie A by storm last season, finishing fifth in the standings to secure Champions League football and there could be as many as three Bologna players on the pitch in Berlin, all on the Swiss side.

Unfortunately for Italy, Luciano Spalletti will not have Riccardo Calafiori available, with the Bologna defender suspended. Calafiori made the opposite move to many Swiss players when joining Basel before returning to Italy.

Midfielder Michel Aebischer scored in Switzerland's 3-1 opening win over Hungary, forward Dan Ndoye put them in front against Germany Remo Freuler completes the Swiss Bologna trio.

"I'm sorry for Riccardo, really. I would have liked to have faced him at the Olympiastadion," Freuler said.

"On Saturday, however, the challenge will be Switzerland against Italy. Not Bologna against

Italy." Freuler was on loan at Bologna from Nottingham Forest last season, but before that he spent six years at Atalanta, and this will be no ordinary game for the 32-year-old.

"Of course, it's not a match like any other for me. In Italy I built my career, also finding an ideal country to spend my life with my family," he said.

"On Saturday, however, there won't be all this love. It's a round of 16 and there will be no room for feelings."

Freuler knows the next part of the tournament is where the Swiss will really be judged.

"Doing well in the first part of the tournament is important. The matches that make the difference, those capable of changing the dimension of a national team, however, are others," Freuler said. "But I'm not afraid. And Switzerland are not afraid of Italy."

Switzerland players applaud their fans after the match against Germany in Euro 2024 in Frankfurt, Germany, on June 23, 2024.

● PIROSCHKA VAN DE WOUW/  
REUTERS

## LeBron James' son Bronny drafted by dad's Lakers

**BBC** – Bronny James was picked in the second round of the NBA draft by the Los Angeles Lakers where he could play alongside his legendary father LeBron. The 19-year-old was the 55th choice of the draft in New York on Thursday after weeks of speculation about which team he would end up on.

Four-time NBA champion LeBron, 39, is probably entering the final year of his career and could become a free agent this summer by declining his \$51.4m (£40.6m) player option when the window opens at the end of June. However, that prospect seems remote given the four-time NBA champion said after the All-Star

game in 2022 that his "last year will be played with my son". No father-son pairing has ever played together in the NBA before.

On Instagram, Bronny wrote "Beyond Blessed", while his father posted a series of pictures of the pair and the caption "Legacy". Bronny has completed his first

year of college basketball with the University of Southern California Trojans, where he averaged 4.8 points and 2.1 assists per game.

Unlike his father, who stands at 6ft 9in and is the NBA's leading all-time scorer, teenager Bronny is 6ft 1in and is more of a defensive player.



● USA TODAY SPORTS



# Iran's presidential election Nation turns out strong

## National Desk

Iranians voted Friday in the country's 14th presidential election to pick a successor for the late president Ebrahim Raisi who lost his life in a helicopter crash on May 19. The contenders approved by the Guardian Council include Conservative parliamentary speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili. Also running are the sole Reformist, Masoud Pezeshkian, and a fourth candidate, former interior minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi.

Two other Conservatives – Tehran mayor Alireza Zakani and Raisi's former vice president Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi – dropped out on the eve of the election.

Voting was held nationwide at more than 58,640 polling stations, mostly in schools and mosques.

According to the election headquarters, more than 61 million Iranians over the age of 18 were eligible to vote, with about 18 million of them between 18 to 30.

Early projections of the results are expected by Saturday morning and official results by Sunday.

If no candidate wins 50 percent of the vote, a second round will be held on July 5, for only the second time in Iranian electoral history after the 2005 vote went to a runoff.

## 'Day of joy, happiness'

Calling it "a day of joy and happiness," Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei voted shortly after the polls opened.

Ayatollah Khamenei called on Iranian voters to turn out at polling stations to determine the country's future and make the "best and most useful choice."

"Election day is a day of joy and happiness for us Iranians, especially when the election is for selecting the president as the future of the country will be determined by this choice of the people."

"However, I think there is one important issue besides this, and that is the enthusiastic turnout of the people and the increase in the number of voters. This is a definite need for the Islamic Republic," he told reporters after voting.

## Focus on economy

All four candidates have

vowed to revive the economy, beset by sanctions re-imposed since 2018, after the United States ditched Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact with six world powers.

The candidacy of Pezeshkian, until recently a relative unknown, has revived cautious hopes for Iran's reformist wing after years of dominance by the conservative camp.

Pezeshkian, who has aligned himself with figures such as former president Hassan Rouhani under whose administration Tehran struck the landmark 2015 nuclear deal, responded to a journalist's question about how Iran would interact with the West if he was president.

"God willing, we will try to have friendly relations with all countries except Israel," the 69-year-old candidate said after casting his vote in a polling station in Tehran. Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon, has urged efforts to salvage the nuclear agreement and lift crippling sanctions.

"Are we supposed to be eternally hostile to America, or do we aspire to resolve our problems with this country?" he asked.

The Leader recently criticized the politicians who believe in reliance on world



powers, saying they "think all the ways of progress pass through the US; No, it is not like that."

"The one who thinks that it is not possible to take steps without favors of the US, he will not manage [the country] well," he emphasized. Ayatollah Khamenei said that the most qualified candidate is the person who is

capable of tapping into domestic opportunities and capacities, among them the country's young, educated generation.

During campaign debates, Jalili criticized the moderates for having signed the 2015 accord.

Jalili said the deal "did not benefit Iran at all." He led Iran's nuclear program ne-

gotiations between 2007 and 2013.

"I think Jalili is the only candidate who raised the issue of justice, fighting corruption and giving value to the poor ... Most importantly he does not link Iran's foreign policy to the nuclear deal," said Farzan Sadjadi, a 45-year-old artist in the city of Karaj.



Iranians cast their votes at a polling station in Tehran during the presidential election on June 28, 2024.

● REZA MOATTARIAN/  
IRAN DAILY

## Iranians remember late president, FM

Nasrallah hails Iran's stability after Raisi's loss



● TASNIM

Iran held a ceremony to commemorate the 40th day of the passing away of the late president Ebrahim Raisi and his entourage, including former foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who lost their lives in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran on May 19.

Iranian officials along side a number of foreign officials attended the ceremony held in the capital Tehran on Thursday. Addressing the ceremony via video link from Beirut, Hezbollah's Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah described Iran as the "strong fortress of resistance" against oppressors, saying the Islamic establishment serves as a role model.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran emerged proudly and admirably from this tragic incident and presented an advanced and lofty model that is strong in facing all challenges," he said.

Nasrallah said the incident was "very painful and historic" which left Iran faced with

threats.

"However, the rule is that we must turn threats into opportunities, as always emphasized by Eminent Leader of the Revolution" Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, he said. "We have faced similar big and dangerous incidents in recent years. As an example, we can point to the assassination of two dear commanders, Hajj Qassem Soleimani and Hajj Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, that was a huge damage and at the same time a threat," he added.

Lieutenant General Soleimani, head of Iran's Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi, an Iraqi commander of the Popular Mobilization Forces, were assassinated in a US airstrike ordered by then-president Donald Trump at Baghdad airport in January 2020.

"But this threat turned into an opportunity. These bloodsheds marked the breakout of the uprising and a new life for the resistance and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all the

resistance movements in the region," Nasrallah said.

"Enemies who were lying in wait and talking about riots happening here and there saw with their own eyes that despite all the difficult conditions it faced due to this incident, Iran was calm, stable, unified and united," he added. The commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) also praised the distinguished characteristics of Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian in defense of resistance and the fight against US hegemony.

Describing the late Iranian foreign minister as "indefatigable and plucky," Qa'ani said Amir-Abdollahian opened a new era in defense of resistance and was the "sonorous voice" of the resistance front. The chief of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement Ziad al-Nakhaleh, who also attended the ceremony in Tehran, said Raisi and Amir-Abdollahian played a major role in victories scored by the resistance factions.

## Biden excoriates Trump's 'morals of an alley cat'



● AFP

As the clock chimed 21:00 EDT (01:00 GMT) on Thursday, US Democratic President Joe Biden and his presumed Republican rival, Donald Trump, traded a slew of slights and diatribes in their first televised debate on CNN ahead of the November election, which reportedly drew more than 70 million viewers.

Biden appeared as a mumbling debater that failed to land well-crafted lines while Trump, as a prolific purveyor of falsehoods, repeatedly sold lies and half-truths to potential voters by dodging tough questions. With a muffled voice at one point, the octogenarian Democrat, in one gaffe, attacked Trump on his tax cuts and the national debt, confusingly ending his remarks with, "We finally beat Medicare."

The businessman-turned-politician pounced on the blunder and said, "He did beat Medicare. He beat it to death, and he's destroying Medicare." Trump also kept prattling on how the US had failed, how Biden was rated as worst head

of state in the country's history and how the US was dismally viewed on the world stage.

"Joe, our country is being destroyed. As you and I sit up here and waste a lot of time on this debate. This shouldn't be a debate. He is the worst president, he just said about me because I said it. But look, he's the worst president in the history of our country. He's destroyed our country," the 78-year-old said. Biden disagreed and offered a sanguine view of the US on the international arena, claiming that, "We're the most admired country in the world... No one thinks we're weak. No one wants to screw around with us, nobody."

Halfway through the 90-minute slugfest, Biden touched on Trump's convictions and varied court cases but in a laconic fashion, spawning a missed opportunity for Biden to hammer on one of his rival's key liabilities.

Biden hit at Trump for having an affair with an adult film actress while his wife was pregnant, referring to Stormy Dan-

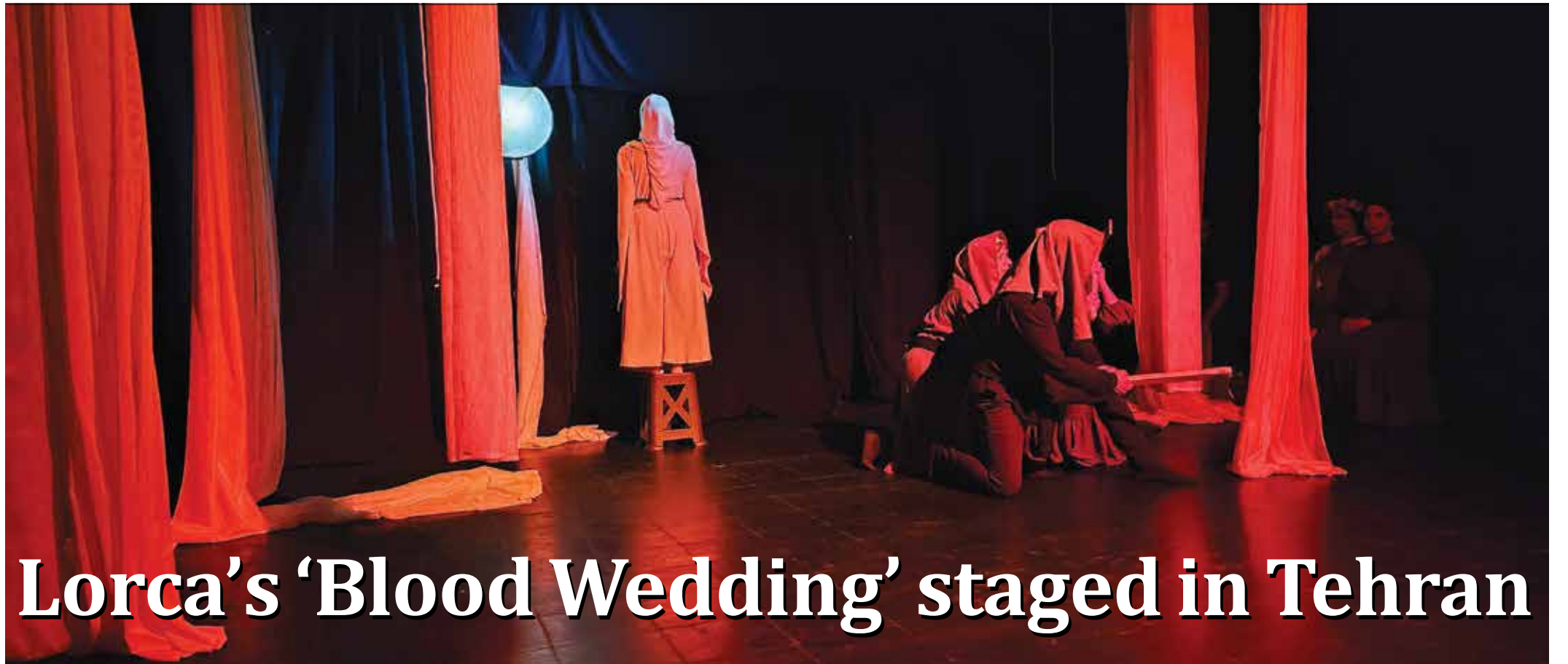
iels and the hush-money trial that concluded in 34 felonies for the former president.

"You have the morals of an alley cat," Biden quipped at Trump, who categorically denied the extramarital relationship.

Trump boasted about ending the war between Russia and Ukraine before he even took office. He claimed that a universal 10 percent tariff on imports would not raise prices for American consumers, an assertion economic experts overwhelmingly disagree with. By and large, registered voters who watched CNN's presidential debate largely think Trump outperformed Biden, with most saying they have no real confidence in Biden's ability to lead the country.

Biden's garbled performance has sparked fears among his own party, as his voice was raspy and he found himself at a loss for words, with Democratic operatives and pundits indicating that discussions were underway about "Biden bowing out before the election" following Thursday's debate.





## Lorca's 'Blood Wedding' staged in Tehran

● ALI GOUDARZI

By Zohreh Qanadi  
 Staff writer

"In a village in Spain, a young man and woman are on the brink of marriage. However, on their wedding night, the bride unexpectedly flees with her ex-fiancé Leonardo, who is connected to a family that had previously killed the groom's father and brother." This was a summary of a tragedy by Spanish dramatist Federi-

co García Lorca (1898-1936) being performed in Spanish by Iranian students at Tehran's Shahrzad Theater Complex from June 23 to July 9. The Persian translations of the dialogues, however, are provided via surtitles. On Thursday night, 'Blood Wedding', directed by Hossein Zainali, welcomed special guests from embassies in Tehran, including Spain, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina. Sponsored and organized by the Spanish Embassy, the play

was attended by the country's ambassador and consul, Antonio Sánchez-Benedito Gaspar and Jaime Gonzalez Castaño, respectively, along with the Mexican ambassador, as well as the Chilean and Argentine chargé d'affaires. Theater enthusiasts can now enjoy 'Blood Wedding,' the masterpiece by Lorca, at Shahrzad Theatre in Tehran. The play, lasting for 55 minutes, enraptures viewers with its complex depiction of relationships and emotions on stage, exploring themes such

as the cycle of life, the passage of time, choice, deception, fate and nature. Drawing from surrealism and Spanish folk culture, 'Blood Wedding' portrays a love triangle involving a young woman and two men competing for her affection. The plot centers on a bride about to enter into an arranged marriage who becomes caught up in a romance with her former lover. Their relationship sparks a family conflict that ultimately leads to a tragic outcome. The play delves into the bride's

struggle with societal and familial expectations, highlighting the clash between personal desires and traditional norms. It is celebrated for its rich and lyrical language, as well as its examination of profound themes that remain relevant to contemporary audiences. The professional, beautiful, and creative scenes, competitive performances, excellent acting, and mastery of the Spanish language played a significant role in the drama and expression of the Spanish language.

The presentation of the play in its original language not only highlights the impressive imagination and adaptability of Iranian students, who exhibit a boundless appreciation for and engagement with diverse cultures, but also highlights the artistic and cultural expertise of the Iranian people. This authenticity in language choice serves as a means to effectively engage with and influence interactions with other societies, offering a valuable asset for Iranian society.



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## A nation's decision



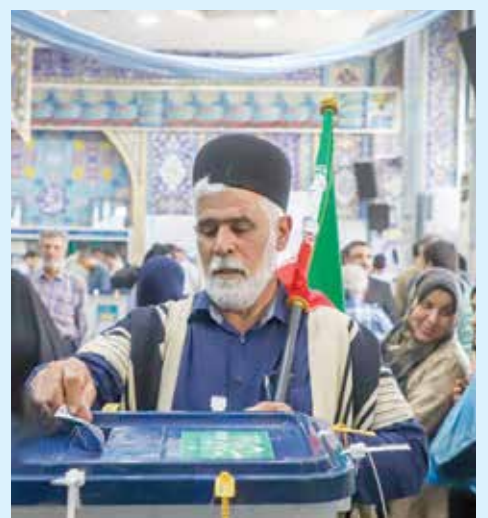
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