



Saeed Jalili



Masoud Pezeshkian

Campaigning kicks off for Friday's runoff

National Desk

Iran's presidential candidates began their campaigning on Sunday for the Friday run-off elections after the Guardian Council confirmed the results of the June 28 election.

The Guardian Council's spokesman Hadi Tahan Nazif said the validity of the first round of the election has been approved by the council, adding that no complaints were submitted to the council by any of the candidates.

Masoud Pezeshkian, the Reformist contender, and Conservative Saeed Jalili will face off in the July 5 runoff election after final results showed that Pezeshkian secured a narrow lead over Jalili. Winner of the competition

will replace the late president Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash last month. Pezeshkian received 10,415,991 votes while Jalili gained 9,473,298. Conservative parliamentary speaker Mohammad

Baqer Qalibaf and former interior minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi, the two other candidates, garnered 3,383,340 and 206,397 votes respectively.

According to the Interior Ministry, out of 61 million eligible voters, more than 24 million cast their ballots, resulting in a 40% turnout. This means that the turnout rate has been lower than the previous presidential election, which saw nearly 49%.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said the vote went smoothly. "The presidential election was conducted in complete security, in all fairness, with very serious competition and with the valuable presence of people at the ballot boxes," he said. Iran's presidential race began with six candidates but Alireza Zakani, the current mayor of Tehran, and Amir Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi withdrew from the race on the eve of the election day.

After the official announcement of the final results, Pezeshkian issued a statement, calling for high turnout in the runoff election.

"We must stand up once again and make a new plan," he said. Pezeshkian said that Iranians from all ethnicities should join hands and

save the country from "poverty, lies, discrimination and injustice."

"I hope your presence will be the basis of a new voice for change in attitude, behavior, conversation and in the distribution and allocation of resources," he added in a video published on the website of the Reformist newspaper Etemad.

In a message posted on his X account on Sunday, Pezeshkian assured his supporters that his government will stand against "forced" morality police and filtering of Internet content and social media platforms.

"Those who are part of the problem cannot save us. The future is in your hands," he said in another message.

Jalili visited Tehran's Grand Bazaar on the same day to talk with people. He underlined that improving the country's economic situation is among his most important plans.

He said that the economic status of the public will improve by his economic programs.

The two candidates are also scheduled to take part in televised debates on Monday and Tuesday. Campaigning will continue until 24 hours before the polls open for casting ballots.

Israel launches assaults on Rafah, Shujaiya



Heavy fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters continued in northern and southern Gaza with at least six civilians, including children, killed in a strike on a home in Rafah.

Israeli forces advanced further on Sunday into the Shujaiya neighborhood of northern Gaza and also pushed deeper into western and central Rafah in the south, residents said.

Israeli tanks, which moved back into Shujaiya four days ago, fired shells towards several houses, leaving families trapped inside and unable to leave, the residents said.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians have fled the devastated neighborhood. Speaking at the start of the weekly cabinet meeting on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeated his position that there was no substitute for achieving victory in the war against Hamas.

"We are committed to fighting until we achieve all of our objectives: Eliminating Hamas, returning all of our hostages, ensuring that Gaza never again constitutes a threat to Israel and returning our residents securely to their homes in the south and the north," he added.

Months of on-and-off talks towards a Gaza truce and captive release deal have meanwhile made little progress, with Hamas saying Saturday there was "nothing new" in a revised plan presented by US mediators.

The Israeli military reported clashes in central Gaza and the southern Rafah area, a week after Netanyahu declared that the "intense phase" of the war raging since October 7 was nearing an end.

The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA estimated that "60,000 to 80,000 people were displaced" from Shujaiya since new fighting broke out there on Thursday and the army issued evacuation orders.

For those who remain, "our lives have become hell," said 50-year-old Shujaiya resident Siham al-Shawa.

She told AFP people were trapped as strikes could happen "anywhere" and "it is difficult to get out of the neighborhood under fire."

"We do not know where to go to protect ourselves."

France votes in election that could usher in far right

Voters across mainland France cast ballots Sunday in the first round of early parliamentary elections that could put the government in the hands of nationalist, far-right parties for the first time since the Nazi era. The two-round elections that wrap up July 7 could impact European financial markets, Western support for Ukraine and the management of France's nuclear arsenal and global military force, AP reported.

Many French voters are frustrated about inflation and other economic concerns, as well as President Emmanuel Macron's leadership, seen as arrogant and out-of-touch with their lives. Marine Le Pen's anti-immigration National Rally party has tapped that discontent, notably via online platforms like TikTok, and

led in preelection opinion polls. A new coalition on the left, the New Popular Front, also poses a challenge to the pro-business Macron and his centrist alliance Together for the Republic. It includes the French Socialists and Communists, the greens and the hard-left France Unbowed party and vows to reverse an unpopular pension reform law that raised the retirement age to 64, among other economic reforms.

There are 49.5 million registered voters who will choose the 577 members of the National Assembly, France's influential lower house of parliament. Turnout at midday Sunday stood at 25.9% according to interior ministry figures, higher than the 18.43% at midday during 2022 legislative elections. The vote

was taking place during the traditional first week of summer vacation in France, and absentee ballot requests were at least five times higher than in 2022. Macron voted in Le Touquet, a seaside resort in northern France. Le Pen also voted in the north, her party's stronghold, but in the working-class town of Hennin-Beaumont.

Voters in Paris had issues from immigration to the rising cost of living on their minds as the country has grown more divided between the far right and far left blocs, with a deeply unpopular and weakened president in the political center. The campaign was marred by rising hate speech.

"People don't like what has been happening," said Cynthia Justine, 44. "People feel they've lost a lot in recent



years. People are angry. I am angry." She added that with "the rising hate speech," it was necessary to express frustrations with those holding and seeking power. She said it was important as a woman to vote since women haven't always had that right. And "because I am a Black woman, it's even more important. A lot is at

stake on this day." Macron called the early elections after his party was trounced in the European Parliament election earlier in June by the National Rally, which has historical ties to racism and antisemitism and is hostile toward France's Muslim community. It also has historical ties to Russia.



French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron stand in the voting booth before voting in Touquet-Paris-Plage, northern France, on June 30, 2024. **YARA NARDI/AP**

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Afghanistan situation requires comprehensive talks: Iran

Iran's special envoy to Afghanistan emphasized the need for comprehensive consultations with all parties to address the "complex and serious" situation in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi made the remarks in a post on X on Sunday, hours before a delegation from Iran left for Qatar to attend the third Doha summit on Afghanistan.

Expressing hope that the upcoming round of the United Nations-hosted meeting on Afghanistan

will bring about security, stability and welfare for the Afghan people, the envoy underscored the importance of collective efforts to resolve the ongoing challenges, Press TV reported.

He added that the Iranian delegation would convey Tehran's concerns about Afghanistan and explain the humanitarian policies of Iran regarding foreign nationals in the country to the officials of the United Nations and the countries participating in the meeting.

The Iranian diplomat further noted he hopes that the upcoming negotiations will lead to the reduction of the suffering of the people of Afghanistan and bring about peace, stability, security, sustainable development, and a government based on people's will and without foreign interference and domination.

The third round of the UN-convened meeting of Special Envoys on Afghanistan is scheduled to be held on Sunday and Monday.