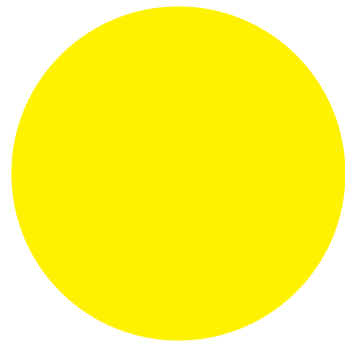


EU countries resume crude imports from Iran: *Eurostat*



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### Difficulties of forming government in France

By Abolqassem Delfi  
Former Iranian ambassador to France

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

France grapples with the aftermath of its first round of parliamentary elections, with the far right National Rally and its allies arriving in first place with 33% of the vote, the New Popular Front – a coalition aimed at defeating the far right that unites center-left coming second with almost 28% and President Emmanuel Macron's Ensemble alliance slumped to a dismal third with 20.76%. In anticipation of the second round, predictions suggest a

potential repeat of these voting patterns, placing the far right in an advantageous position. Nonetheless, it appears unlikely that any of the three coalitions will be able to secure a parliamentary majority, effectively ruling out the prospect of a single-party government. Current projections estimate that the far right could amass between 240 to 270 seats, the left could garner 180 to 200 seats, and Macron's moderate coalition may claim anywhere from 60 to 90 seats. The complexities inherent in forming a new government under these circumstances will undoubtedly pose significant challenges for France. [Page 2 >](#)



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### End of Macron's bloc

French parties rush to team up against far right

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## Iranian aviation fleet more than doubled in three years: Official



Head of the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran (CAOI) said on Monday that aviation fleet of the country more than doubled in three years.

Mohammad Mohammad-ibakhsh put the current number of Iran's active aircrafts at over 200, adding that the corresponding figure was less than 100 airplanes in August 2021 when the 13th administration took office, IRNA reported.

Over the past three years, with measures taken by the government, the average age of Iranian airlines fleets went down to 26.5 years from 28 years in August 2021, the official noted. Iran also announced on Monday that it has become self-sufficient in repairing plane engines and parts as the country faces restrictions to buy new aircraft and repair their parts due to Western sanctions.

The achievement was made by scientists and experts at MAPNA Group, a leading holding company active in various areas of business from rail transportation and power plant projects to the aviation industry.

Mehdi Akbarifard, a MAPNA expert, said that his company have managed to repair both the engines and their parts of the airplanes of the country's air fleet, especially on CFM56 engines which are installed on Airbus A320 and Boeing 737 airliners.



## EU countries resume crude imports from Iran: Eurostat

Figures by the European Union's statistics agency, Eurostat, showed that Bulgaria and Poland as two EU members have imported oil from Iran this year. Bulgaria raised its oil imports from Iran in the quarter to March by 113% compared to the same period last year to 314 metric tons

(mt). Poland's oil imports from Iran, a first reported in the past two years, was a 19 mt shipment that took place in March. Georgia, an EU candidate country, imported 544 mt of oil from Iran in the March quarter, down from 974 mt reported in the same quarter last year. Eurostat figures also

indicated that Turkey has resumed importing oil from Iran in March this year nearly four years after it cut shipments to zero to comply with US sanctions on Tehran. Eurostat data cited in a report by Iran's official IRNA news agency showed that Turkey had imported 576 mt of oil from Iran in March

and another 485 mt in April. Turkey's last oil shipment from Iran had been reported in August 2020 when the country bowed to US pressure and stopped the imports. The figures are yet another sign that more countries have stopped complying with US sanctions on

Iran and are taking delivery of oil shipments from the Islamic Republic.

Reports suggest more European countries are willing to ignore US sanctions on Iran and import oil from country now that Tehran is selling record volumes of oil to Asian markets.

Iran's oil exports reached more than 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd) in some months of this year and in 2023, up from records lows of 0.3 million bpd reported in 2019 when the US intensified its sanctions against Tehran.

Iranian Minister of Oil Javad Owji said on June 22 that the country currently exports crude oil to 15 countries.

Speaking in a joint news conference with Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi and Head of the Department of Environment Ali Salajegheh, the minister added that the gas production volume of Iran has increased by 53 million cubic meters/day in the administration of the late president Ebrahim Raisi.

The capacity of storing gas has increased by one billion cubic meters and \$23 billion worth of capital was invested for the development of the joint oil fields, Owji stated.

He also said 153 projects in the up-and-downstream sectors, valued at \$34 billion, were launched during Raisi's administration.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Owji pointed to Iran's extraction of gas from the South Pars Gas Field shared with the neighboring Qatar and added that Iran's gas extraction from the joint field is 100 million cubic meters more than Qatar's.

## Difficulties of forming ...

The nation has a history of fostering cooperation between disparate parties in government, evidenced by the tenure of socialist President François Mitterrand, who, upon losing his parliamentary majority, was obliged to accept the formation of a Gaullist government helmed by Jacques Chirac as prime minister. This period of coexistence persisted for two years, demonstrating the nation's capacity for

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adaptation amidst political upheaval. However, if the far right proves successful in forming a government, France may find itself embroiled in contentious policy clashes and ideological fissures between the government and the president. With the second round of elections on the horizon, conjecture regarding the potential composition of a coalition government continues to mount. A partnership between the left

and Macron's moderates represents one plausible scenario, though the ideological divides separating certain left-wing parties, such as the Communists and Socialists, may complicate any attempts at collaboration. Another potential scenario could be a far right alliance comprised of smaller right-wing factions whose ideologies surpass the radical leanings of Marine Le Pen's National Rally. The Republicans, having garnered near-

ly 10% of the vote, could potentially secure 20 to 30 seats in the legislative body. They have already joined forces with the National Rally in certain regions. However, the diverse composition of votes has effectively muddied the waters, obfuscating the process of government formation and coalition prognostication. Macron's decision to dissolve parliament remains a subject of great intrigue, underscoring the considerable risk he undertook in the wake of the far right's triumph in the European Parliament elections. It

appears Macron had two strategic objectives in mind when opting for parliamentary dissolution and early elections. On one hand, he may have wagered that French citizens, caught off-guard by the right's ascendancy, would rally behind moderates in the parliamentary elections, thereby countering their European Parliament defeat. Unfortunately for Macron, this gamble did not yield the desired outcome, as the right's European Parliament victory was echoed in the domestic parliamentary elections.

The second possibility is that Macron sought to shine a spotlight on the risks and challenges posed by the far right's growing influence. Given the nation's firsthand experience with the consequences of extremist policies, Macron may have aimed to provide the French with a cautionary glimpse into the perils of a far right government before the presidential election. By doing so, he could potentially sway public opinion, leading voters to withdraw their support for the National Rally Party in the presidential race.

## Iran ELECOMP 2024 'warmly' received by experts

By Sadeq Dehqan & Reza Abesh Ahmadlou  
Staff writers

The 27th Iran International Electronic, Computer & E-Commerce Exhibition entitled "Iran ELECOMP 2024" which was launched on Saturday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds will wrap up today.



Iran ELECOMP 2024, with the slogan of "All Together for Digital Economy", paves the ground for showcasing the potential of new technology-based firms (NTBFs), startups, economic enterprises and companies active in the related field to introduce their latest achievements and products to help promote the country's digital economy. Taking advantage of the high capability and potential of the private sector more than before has been the focus of the 27th edition of the ELECOMP.

In addition, the exhibition hosts representatives of foreign countries including Russia, South Korea, Germany, Taiwan, Syria, China, Pakistan and Turkey. More than 500 startups and nine science and technology parks are taking part in this edition of the exhibition. ELECOMP is regarded as the most significant commercial event in Iran's electronics and computer products and services market. China is one of the countries that has a prominent presence

in this year's ELECOMP with many Chinese firms partaking in the exhibition. Cao Chao, the sales director of a Chinese company who also heads the delegation from China, said 60 representatives of Chinese firms which are active in the fields of electronics and computers, mobile and digital have participated in the 27th edition of the expo to introduce their technology and products. As many Chinese companies in the field of electronics and computers are not yet familiar with the Iranian market, so the Chinese companies present at ELECOMP 2024 have showcased their standard and well-known products and technologies so that they can develop their presence in the Iranian market, he noted. Chao went on to say that the technologies in the exhibition were better than what he expected, the expo was well received by visitors and experts in the fields of electronics and computers, mobile and digital. He predicted a bright future for

cooperation between Iran and his country in the digital and computer fields, noting that China enjoys very amazing and smart technologies, and on the other hand, Iran is considered a very appropriate market for these technologies which welcomes modern technologies. Talking to Iran Daily, Morteza Morsali, the head of the Iran National Innovation Fund, said that the INIF aims to commercialize innovations and inventions, make research achievements and technologies applicable, and complete the chain of ideas by providing support to NTBFs which include financial and credit services and facilities. "Currently, there are more than 9,000 NTBFs active across the country, of which more than 2,000 ones operate in the field of electronics, computers, and digital technology," he noted. Another service of the fund to NTBFs is paving the ground for their presence in exhibitions, so that they can introduce their capabilities and products, and

provide them with further marketing opportunities. Elaborating on his company, Hamed Jahanshahi, the CEO of Pouyan Sanat Company, said, "Our company produces control and monitoring systems for centers such as server rooms, telecommunication halls, as well as reservoirs and cold storage facilities for food products." Jahanshahi explained that the system developed by his company controls and monitors environmental conditions, including temperature and humidity, electricity and voltage, as well as water leakage, floods, gas leaks and fires which can be controlled remotely. Sarira Abolsedq, public relations specialist at Shatel Mobile Company, talked to Iran Daily about the smart technologies offered by her company, saying that as the only technology-based mobile phone operator in the country, Shatel Mobile provides automatic registration of SIM card to the network of all three radio network operators of Iran.

"By continuously analyzing the available networks in each area, it provides its SIM card users with selecting the highest quality radio network in a completely intelligent manner," she said, adding that the technology also allows users to manually make a shift in the network any time by dialing a special code. Talking to Iran Daily, Amin Abdol-Alizadeh, the executive manager of Bloom Group said his company operates in the field of producing mobile phones, smart bicycles and smart watches. "We have recently started producing smart mobile sets which will hit the market in upcoming three months," he noted. Some other Iranian companies were present in the country's market in the field of smart-phone production, but they failed to continue, he said, adding that we are making our efforts to produce high-quality phones at much lower price than foreign ones in order to keep our presence in the market.

# 16,000 handicraft artists active in Zanzan Province

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## Iranica Desk

About 16,000 craftspeople are active in Zanzan Province, 5,000 of whom are involved in the copper industry, said the head of Zanzan's Union of Copper-smiths.

Mosen Salimi noted that more than 1,250 coppersmithing workshops are operating across the province in the fields of *qalam-zani* (engraving), *firouzeh-kubi* (turquoise-inlaying), stone-carving, silver-inlaying and *mi-*

*na-kari* (enameling).

"According to historical findings the history of copper industry dates back to 9500 BCE and the cold-hammering method was used until 5000 BCE," he said.

Referring to financial and insurance problems as well as high taxation faced by those engaged in the copper industry.

Meanwhile, Head of Zanzan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Saeed Safavi said

that during the short term of its operation the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts carried out very fruitful measures to support those active in the sector.

He went on to say that 520,000 people are involved in activities related to the handicraft sector, of whom 16,000 are active in 500 branches of handicrafts in Zanzan Province.

"A law has been ratified for supporting handicraft trainers and artists and efforts are underway to enforce it as soon

as possible", he said.

Safavi mentioned that a significant amount of financial support has been provided to handicraft artists operating within household units in recent years. He highlighted that visiting handicraft workshops is a sub-category of tourism, and a related pilot plan has been initiated in the province in this regard.

Moreover, the official emphasized that brand-building and effective packaging can contribute to the growth of the

handicraft sector. He noted that several workshops have been established in the province to support these efforts.

Handmade knives, a local type of women's shoe named *charoq*, light cotton summer shoes, felt, tapestry work, carpet, kilim, *jajim* (loosely woven woolen carpet), *monabat-kari* (wood-engraving), and embroideries are among the traditional handicrafts found in Zanzan.

The city of Zanzan has been officially recognized as the National City Filigree Art, which has a history dating back several thousand years. Filigree is known for its intricate metalwork, ranging from delicate jewelry pieces to cast iron railings and balustrades. It involves creating finely shaped works using silver threads or ribbons to craft *eslimi* patterns and other geometric designs. These intricate works are used to adorn luxury items such as cups, containers, candlesticks, painting or photography frames, and jewelry, showcasing the artistry and craftsmanship of the region.

## Nahar Khoran Forest Park, a sanctuary of natural wonders



Nahar Khoran is a vast forest park located ten kilometers within the Ziarat village of Gorgan, Golestan Province. This national forest, part of the ancient Caspian Hyrcanian mixed forests dating back to the Jurassic period is a popular tourist destination in northern Iran. It was historically a resting place for pilgrims who would enjoy their lunch (Nahar in Persian) on the mountain's slopes to the south of Gorgan as they passed through the area, inspiring the

name Nahar Khoran.

Located along the shores of the Caspian Sea from the Republic of Azerbaijan to Gorgan, the Nahar Khoran Forest Park is a lush expanse dominated by broad-leaved trees, part of the expansive Hyrcanian forests spanning two million hectares. With a diverse geological composition featuring multiple layers, the forest's elevation ranges from 400 meters to 900 meters above sea level, transitioning from sloping terrain to flat plains. Encompassing a total area of three hundred hectares, the forest garden includes

a central district covering one hundred and sixty-eight hectares.

Every corner of the Nahar Khoran Forest Park boasts a variety of terrains, including highlands, valleys, drainage basins, ridges, and springs. Among the notable natural features is the charming Sefid Cheshmeh spring, bubbling in the forest's highlands. Additionally, Nahar Khoran is home to the Ziarat River, a forty-kilometer waterway fed by the Qarah Su drainage basin, providing essential irrigation for the region. Within Nahar Khoran, a scenic jungle road leads to the expan-

sive Baba Taher viewpoint, offering panoramic vistas of the surrounding mountains and lush forest. Complementing Baba Taher, Nahar Khoran features various amenities and attractions, including restaurants, hostels, amusement parks, small markets, hotels, and villas clustered around Nahar Khoran square, Jangal-e Dast Kasht (Hand-planted forest), and paradise. Forest huts are also scattered throughout the area, providing cozy retreats amidst nature.

The diverse wildlife of Nahar Khoran includes inhabitants such as boars, jackals, bats, mice, weasels, squirrels, eagles, falcons, laughing doves, woodpeckers, wagtails, accentors, green forest lizards, starlings, crows, tits, and finches.

The vegetation in Nahar Khoran comprises a rich tapestry of plant species, including oaks, velvet maples, parrotias, European hornbeams, lindens,

sweet cherries, date-plums, raspberry bushes, ruscus, common medlars, pines, common hawthorns, cypresses, magnolias, boxwoods, privets, weeping willows, common ivies, and leucanthemums.

Nahar Khoran is also known for its tranquil hiking trails that wind through the forest, offering visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the surroundings. The forest is home to a wide variety of bird species, including nightingales, hoopoes, and owls, adding to the rich ecosystem of the area.

Visitors to Nahar Khoran can enjoy picnicking by the riverside, where the peaceful sounds of flowing water and bird songs

create a serene atmosphere. The forest is also a popular spot for camping, allowing nature enthusiasts to spend the night under the starlit sky and experience the true essence of the wilderness. Moreover, Nahar Khoran is known for its vibrant seasonal colors, with the cherry blossoms in spring and the golden hues of autumn leaves adding to the picturesque landscape. The changing flora throughout the year provides a delightful visual feast for those exploring the forest garden. Overall, Nahar Khoran is not just a forest park but a sanctuary of natural wonders waiting to be discovered and appreciated by all who venture into its verdant embrace.

# Biden, Trump debate who's more supportive of Israeli war crimes



By Alex N. Press  
Journalist

## PERSPECTIVE

This week, the *Washington Post* reported that the United States has sent \$6.5 billion in military aid to Israel since October, a mind-boggling amount of help for a cabinet that is committing a genocidal assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza. The previously undisclosed sum includes \$3 billion alone in May of this year, the same month that Israel began attacking Rafah, an area densely packed with civilians who had been told it was safe.

Despite the majority of Americans disapproving of Israel's extermination campaign, the US government remains firmly on the side of the Israeli state, willing to shred the long-standing pretense of a rules-based international order and even allow Israel to expand the war into Lebanon for the sake of maintaining its strong ties with its key ally in the Middle East.

It's a demoralizing reality and one that was boldly on display in this week's presidential debate. The proof of this elite consensus on Israel came before either Donald Trump or Joe Biden uttered a word, evidenced in the choice of moderators: CNN's Jake Tapper and Dana Bash.



US President Joe Biden (R) and Republican presidential candidate former US president Donald Trump participate in the CNN Presidential Debate at the CNN Studios in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 27, 2024. The image of Palestinians walking through a destroyed street in Gaza that is displayed above the candidates, was photo-edited post-debate.

● CNN

### Shameless propaganda

The two television anchors have distinguished themselves as some of the mainstream media's most rabid supporters of Israel, which means clearing a very high bar. In May, as a pro-Israel mob violently attacked pro-Palestine UCLA students and the New York Police Department flooded the campus of Columbia University to quash pro-Palestinian student protests, Bash produced a disgraceful piece of propaganda. In the CNN segment, she muddled the waters on who, exactly, was responsible for the violence on campuses; then she delivered a remarkable monologue in which she compared the violence at UCLA to "the 1930s in Europe". Bash didn't mean, of course, that the pro-Israel attackers were fascist brownshirts — she was saying that the people they attacked were.

Tapper reported a segment in October concerning allegations that Hamas systematically engaged in sexual violence on October 7. Much of that reporting relied on sources whose reliability has since been called into question, and several of the experts quoted had significant ties to the Israeli state, relevant histories that Tapper failed to disclose. One of the highest-profile media figures in the country, Tapper has since been quick to amplify allegations of widespread antisemitism among protestors critical of Israel's wanton violence, which has now killed more than 37,000 Palestinians (surely a dramatic undercount as Israel has so weakened Gaza's civilian infrastructure that it can no longer process the death toll).

And those are just the moderators. As for the two men vying to control the vast US military apparatus that is propping up the Israeli cabinet, ensuring it can keep killing people en masse, the subject only came up briefly. The overwhelming majority of post-debate coverage has rightly

been about how the event revealed Joe Biden's unfitness to serve another four years in office — a fact that Democratic Party insiders have been whispering about for a while. But given that the United States is currently party to one of the most horrific acts of violence in human history, it's worth asking what Biden and Donald Trump had to say about it.

### Who's more enthusiastic about genocide?

Bash introduced the topic, correctly stating that after Hamas's attack on October 7, Israel's response has not only killed thousands of Palestinians but created a humanitarian crisis (two million Palestinians are now facing famine). Noting that Biden's approach has neither resulted in the release of the remaining captives nor reined in Israel's violence, Bash asked the president, "What additional leverage will you use to get

Hamas and Israel to end the war?" It's a good question. The United States has immense power over Israel should it choose to exercise it; if you don't believe me, take it from Ronald Reagan. But the Biden administration refuses to cut off weapons transfers and military assistance to Israel, even though this would immediately affect its war effort. Too bad we didn't get a real answer. Instead, Biden claimed that the Israeli cabinet, Benjamin Netanyahu included, has endorsed his cease-fire proposal. In reality, the Israeli prime minister's support for the plan has proven fickle, to say the least. Biden then asserted that "the only one who wants the war to continue is Hamas," even though Hamas had agreed to a version of Biden's cease-fire proposal in May. Then the president was off to what he clearly believes is the only relevant issue in the campaign: proving his pro-Isra-

el bona fides. "The only thing I've denied Israel is two-thousand-pound bombs because they don't work very well in a crowded area; they kill a lot of innocent people," the president stated, referring to the temporary hold the administration has put on those bombs as it conducts a review. "We're providing Israel with all the weapons they need and when they need them." "We are the biggest producer of support for Israel of anyone in the world," Biden said (and people say this country doesn't make stuff anymore!). The president did not mention the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza or use the word "Palestinian". "He said that the only one who wants [the war] to keep going is Hamas. Actually, Israel is the one, and you should let them go, and let them finish the job," Trump responded. Coming amid a flood of outrageous

lies, it was one of the most honest statements the former president made all night. Israeli elected officials have long made it clear that they are waging a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Gaza Strip, with the aim of forced relocation for the millions of Palestinians inside the enclave. Again, it is Hamas who has been more willing to accept cease-fire proposals, not Israel. Trump's support for those aims is no secret. The Israeli right is full of Trump supporters who understand that the former president would be even less critical of their genocidal campaign than the Biden administration. As many have argued, Netanyahu is a Trump guy, seeing him as more hands-off and belligerently racist than Biden, and that preference seems to be shared by Israelis in general. When Trump says he believes you should let Israel keep waging war, he means it. "He's become like a Palestinian," Trump continued, referring to Biden, using the nationality of a people facing genocide as a slur. "But they don't like him because he's a very bad Palestinian. He's a weak one." Biden rolled his eyes at Trump's statement, and the candidates moved on. Bash did try to bring the discussion back to the topic, asking Trump if he'd support the establishment of a Palestinian state, but all she got was a noncommittal "I'll have to see."

There you have it. Unresponsive to public opinion and impervious to criticism, unaffected by the laundry list of humanitarian agencies that have called Israel's actions "genocide," the US war machine rolls on. Rather than serving as the oft-mentioned adult in the room, the United States is aiding and abetting genocide and will keep doing so — and the liberal president who is doing it now feels no need to offer justifications. These are the two candidates: a racist maniac and a guy who should be retired and in slippers. Whether it's Trump or Biden in the White House — and it's certainly looking like it'll be Trump — the United States will be there to lend a helping hand (and many, many weapons) to Israel. That is not news, but that doesn't make it any less tragic for the world.

The full article first appeared on Jacobin.



The illustration shows the last four presidents of the United States against a backdrop of military drones flying, with their respective signatures and the word "approved" written above them. From left to right: George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump.

● ELISE SWAIN/THE INTERCEPT

Despite the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza, the topic of Israel's genocide came up only briefly in Thursday's presidential debate. But Trump and Biden said enough to make it clear that they're competing over who's more pro-Israel.

# How will Trump and Biden differ on top foreign policy issues?

By Atlantic Council experts

## OPINION

There's been a lot of talk about the style. But what about the substance? During Thursday night's debate between US President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump, the two men drew sharp contrasts on their approaches to wars in the Middle East and Ukraine and climate and energy policies. Atlantic Council asked its experts to assess the most significant exchanges, what they revealed about the policy differences (or lack thereof) between the candidates, and the potential consequences for the United States' partners.

### Three conclusions about Mideast to draw

First, the debate proved that it's time once again to start taking Trump seriously, if not literally, as the odds may have just increased that he will return to office. Trump has a clear message: Hamas and Iran would not have attacked Israel if he had been president, and if he is re-elected, he will not put any constraints on Israel's efforts to "finish the job" in Gaza. Biden, Trump argues, is caught in half-measures that don't satisfy either side, which is what he meant by calling Biden a "bad Palestinian". Taking Trump seriously requires the Democratic political and foreign policy communities — including those who have protested against the Biden administration's approach to the war — to recognize that this message will likely resonate with more Americans than they would prefer. Second, the debate likely strengthened Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hand in his efforts to remain in office. Over the decades, Netanyahu repeatedly has proved his deftness in managing both party and coalition politics. Following the largest security failure in Israeli history on October 7, Netanyahu's strategy to avoid his cabinet's collapse has been to urge those in his coalition to give him through the end of the Knesset session (July 28) and then to hold on until the outcome of the US election, since a potential Trump victory would reduce Washington's pressure on Netanyahu and thus the strains on the coalition. That argument is now clearly more persuasive. Moreover, Netanyahu will feel emboldened in his strategy of publicly arguing with Biden, which resonates with the far right of his coalition, and is now much more likely to reinforce much of Trump's underlying message when he speaks in front of Congress on July 24 — all of which will be received warmly by Republicans. Trump hasn't forgotten his own frustrations with Netanyahu, but that will be rationalized as a problem for future Bibi, not present Bibi.

Third, the debate may have increased the likelihood of Israel launching a war against Hezbollah. For many in Israel, including a not-insubstantial proportion of the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF's) leadership, the core lesson of October 7 is that they can no longer permit the existence of any well-armed adversary on Israel's borders. Some advocated internally for Israel to strike Hezbollah on October 11 and continue to do so today. Meanwhile, one of the most powerful political challenges for Netanyahu is how to manage the demands of the tens of thousands of Israelis who have had to flee their homes in the north under daily attack from Hezbollah. Israel has raised the volume



Pro-Palestinian supporters protest, demanding a radical change in the US establishment and a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, on June 27, 2024, in Atlanta, Georgia, where the presidential debate took place. **OCTAVIO JONES/GETTY IMAGES**

on its threats in recent weeks, both publicly and behind closed doors, which in part is intended to incentivize Hezbollah to agree to the deal being negotiated by the Biden administration to halt the violence along the border and de-link Israel's conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. Netanyahu is temperamentally risk-averse, so launching a war against Hezbollah while fighting continues in Gaza and tensions are rising in the West Bank would normally be considered uncharacteristic for him. But many in Israel will interpret Trump's unconditioned support for Israel "finishing the job" against Hamas as also a green light to do the same against Hezbollah. Moreover, I worry that the conventional wisdom in Israel risks overestimating the probability of the rosier war scenarios and underestimating the risk of a wider, more devastating war that would threaten Israeli population centers. Notwithstanding the potential for unintentional escalation of the kind that triggered the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006, I still think it more likely that a wider war won't break out before the US election — a scenario that the Biden administration is actively working to avoid. But Netanyahu is well aware that Israel previously launched Operation Cast Lead during the "lame duck" period at the end of the George W. Bush administration. Given the message Trump delivered during the debate, one wonders if Netanyahu might begin weighing the potential advantages of

launching a new war against Hezbollah if Trump is elected but before he takes office.

—William F. Wechsler is the senior director of Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council. His most recent US government position was deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations and combating terrorism.

### View from Jerusalem

Many people set their alarm clocks for an early wake-up call on Friday morning in Israel, where major networks broadcast the US presidential debate live. Interest in the spectacle among Israelis was palpable — and understandable. Washington's influence is deeply embedded within the core of almost every hot-button issue currently on Israel's agenda: the protracted Israeli military campaign in Gaza, the negotiations to free captives from Hamas captivity, the attempt to resolve tensions with Hezbollah over the Israel-Lebanon border, the drive to thwart Iran's alleged ambitions to acquire a nuclear-weapons capability, and the effort to formalize ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The Biden administration continues to play a pivotal role on all of these fields and others. Against that backdrop, the prospect of a lame-duck presidency in the United States — an increasingly likely possibility, amid mounting calls within the Democratic Party for Biden to with-

draw his candidacy — injects another dose of dangerous instability into the already hobbled decision-making process of Netanyahu's cabinet. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the remaining months until January 20, 2025, when the next US president will be inaugurated, will feature a critical US-Israel relationship in which the leaders of both countries are mired in profound crisis, consumed with electoral politics and nursing mutual grievances. Cooperation between their nations will suffer as a result of this toxic dynamic.

Biden and Netanyahu, both weakened, increasingly will be tempted to try to gain leverage in their discussions by appealing to each other's domestic audience. For Netanyahu, who considers himself a master of US politics, July 24 — the date on which he is scheduled to address a joint session of Congress — will provide an instructive bellwether of his intentions. His previous appearance in that venue, in 2015, antagonized Barack Obama's White House and intensified perceptions of Israel as a partisan cause. A repeat of that performance could restore Netanyahu to Trump's good graces but would undoubtedly worsen his predicament with the incumbent US president. With the coming US election still up for grabs, and since power may yet again shift between Democrats and Republicans, it would be wise for the Israeli prime minister to tailor his words so that majorities of both US political parties can con-

tinue to advocate for a close relationship with Israel.

—Shalom Lipner is a nonresident senior fellow at the Scowcroft Middle East Security Initiative of the Atlantic Council's Middle East Programs. He previously served seven consecutive Israeli premiers over a quarter-century at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem.

### An anticlimactic climate discussion

During Thursday's debate, the candidates zeroed in on kitchen table issues, such as the cost of living, unemployment, and immigration, along with international priorities in Ukraine and the Middle East. But the largely unmentioned implications of the changing climate and energy insecurity have an outsized impact on all of these issues — and they demand policy leadership from the United States.

Record heat and droughts drive migration and geopolitical tensions; extreme weather events, exacerbated by climate change, cause higher energy costs and destroy housing and critical infrastructure; and high temperatures pose a number of health risks. Moreover, US energy policy plays a major role in helping Europe stand up to supply blackmail from Russia and the United States address its overreliance on Chinese supply chains.

When asked how the candidates plan to address the climate crisis, Biden only briefly mentioned his biggest achievement in this area, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act: "I've passed the most extensive... climate change legislation in history," he said.

Trump posted a screenshot of his climate and energy talking points ahead of the debate, but he did not voice most of them on the stage. The former president did mention wanting "immaculate clean water" and "absolutely clean air" and how much the Paris climate accord costs the United States, while pointing to insufficient action on climate from China and Russia. He defended his decision to leave the accord during his first term, but stopped short during the debate of committing to leave it again. Staying in the climate accord gives the United States the most leverage in putting more pressure on other polluters and ensuring fair burden-sharing in reducing carbon emissions.

Given that the candidates avoided disclosing their climate and energy strategies on Thursday night, the moderators of the next debate should push for direct answers that give voters a clearer view of what Biden 2.0 climate ambition would entail and how Trump's all-of-the-above energy and deregulation approach can align with emissions reductions. While climate change may fade into the background as the animating issue for many US voters, its implications for every aspect of society remain salient. Although they approach these issues from very different angles, both candidates have an opportunity to make significant progress on reducing pollution and accelerating decarbonization, and the voters deserve to know what their strategies to do so will be.

—Olga Khakova is the deputy director for European energy security at the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center.

The full article first appeared on [The Atlantic Council](#).



Deb Moore of Saco, Maine, reacts to a comment by Republican presidential candidate former president Donald Trump during the presidential debate with President Joe Biden, during a watch party in South Portland, Maine, on June 27, 2024. **ROBERT F. BUKATY/AP**

# Akbari urges Iranian volleyball to imitate Japanese pattern

## Sports Desk

Payman Akbari, the interim head coach of the Iranian volleyball national team, says the country needs to take inspiration from fellow-Asian heavyweight Japan to restore the good old days.

Akbari replaced Mauricio Motta Paes midway through the Volleyball Nations League in June after the Brazilian's reign was cut short by the Iranian federation after only seven games in charge. Akbari's appointment did little to change the fortunes for Iran, which hit new low in the annual event, finishing second from bottom in the 16-team table of the preliminary round despite a couple of victories over USA and the Netherlands.

The result also meant the end of Iran's last-ditch quest for a place in the upcoming Paris Olympics through the FIVB Men's Ranking. "Paes had little knowledge of the players at his disposal as he started his work with the team relatively late, not to mention he barely communicated with his Iranian staff during the matches, though I believe he is not the only one responsible for Iran's failure," Akbari said in an interview with the official website of the Iranian Volleyball Federation. "A team needs proper management and planning, as well as a fine group of players and coaching staff, to get results and I think the Iranian team had major problems regarding those factors," added Akbari.

"The Iranian federation showed a lot of courage to sack Paes in the middle of the tournament

and when I took over, I tried to restore the winning mentality within the squad. We put in decent performances against USA and the Netherlands in the final week despite playing three tough matches in the space of 60 hours. The players were really worn out against France."

The former national team player insists that the Iranian volleyball needs "a different approach and attitude" for the future.

"We have to change the structure of the Iranian volleyball as we can't afford to pin all our hopes on a single coach to come to our rescue," Akbari said.

"We need a different approach and attitude to succeed. We should adopt a right backup plan for the team. The Iranian teams have excelled in the youth-level competitions in recent years but struggled when it came to seniors' event. Take Italy, for instance. They only used their full-strength squad for the first two weeks to seal the Olympic berth and VNL Finals spot and then named a young set of players for the rest of the way," said the Iranian.

"We sent the same squad to four tournaments – the Nations League, the Asian Championships, the Asian Games, and the Olympic qualifiers – in the space of several months last year, which eventually led to players exhaustion and failure in qualifying for the Paris Games."

A Japanese pattern is what Akbari sees as the right prescription for the Iranian volleyball. Having already punched the Paris ticket, Japan went all the



● FIVB

way to the VNL Finals – defeating Iran in the process, in what was a fourth successive straight-set win against the Asian foe over the past two years – before falling to a 3-1 loss to reigning Olympic champion France in Sunday's final showpiece. The result in Lodz was yet another episode in Japan's rise to

a global powerhouse of the sport in recent years under French coach Philippe Blain, who has masterminded the introduction of a fine generation of Japanese players – headlined by the formidable trio of Yuji Nishida, Yuki Ishikawa, and Ran Takahashi. "The Japanese know to invest for the future. They hired Blain as an

assistant to a domestic head coach and he worked there for years just to learn about the Japanese players and culture," said Akbari. "They have now found such a high confidence that they can replace the whole of first team for a game and still get the result. We should follow in their footsteps."

"We have had seven different head coaches on the bench since 2015, while the number has been one or two for top teams like Brazil and France. It takes the right infrastructures for every coach to deliver results. We have to move on as we have four years to plan and prepare for the next Olympics."

## Iran retains men's team crown at Taekwondo World Cup

### Sports Desk

Iran defeated South Korea in its own backyard to win the men's title at the WT World Cup Team Championships Series on Monday.

Stepping into the final showdown in Chuncheon on the back of a straight-round win (175-30, 140-80) over Côte d'Ivoire, the Iranian four-man team came out victorious against the taekwondo powerhouse in two rounds (175-115, 140-70) to lift the trophy – a fourth successive men's title for the country in 12 series editions.

Mahdi Abedini, Mohammad-Hossein

Yazdani, Ali Khoshravesh, and Abolfazl Zandi were the members of the Iranian team as Arian Salimi and Mehran Barkhordari skipped the tournament to continue preparation for the upcoming Olympic Games – starting July 26 in Paris.

The competition continues with the women's event today, with the Iranian team – comprising Melika Mirhosseini, Yalda Valinejad, Mahla Mo'menzadeh, and Saghar Moradi – taking on defending champion South Korea for a place in the final.

India will face the winner of the battle between Morocco and Côte d'Ivoire for the other final berth.



● MNA

## After sweet taste of big time, Georgia want more

**REUTERS** – After their sensational big tournament debut, Euro 2024's lowest-ranked team Georgia were packing their bags with no regrets and only one thought in mind: how to do it all again. The Georgians were seen in advance by most football pundits as no-hopers making up the numbers in Germany. Yet guided by canny French coach Willy Sagnol and inspired by tricky-dribbling talisman Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, they shocked opponents with a simple formula of old-school defending and rampaging counter-attacks. "The Crusaders" even beat Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal en route to the knockouts. Then in a last-16 defeat to Spain, they gave the watching world a jaw-dropping moment, taking the lead with the only goal their illustrious opponents have let in at these Euros.

"Everyone will want only one thing: to come back," said a proud Sagnol, who had already declared his team the real "winners" of the tournament after the Portugal win.

"We will try our best to come back in a major competition. Playing against the best players, the best teams, in great stadiums, in great atmosphere, and to give the opportunity to a lot of Georgian fans to come here."

All of Georgia's games were thrillers. In their group opener, they were unlucky not to draw with Turkey, coming so close to an equaliser before succumbing to a last-gasp goal against the run of play in a 3-1 loss. And against the Czech Republic, Saba Lobjanidze should have won it at the death, blazing over to leave the score at 1-1.

As well as on the pitch, Georgia won admiration for their legions of white-



● GETTY IMAGES

and-red clad fans, whose ubiquitous St. George's cross flag was sometimes confused with England's.

The team's magnificent performances brought thousands onto the streets of the capital Tbilisi and eclipsed bitter disputes between a Georgian government that has deepened ties to Russia, and a more pro-Western opposition. Usually at loggerheads, President Salome Zourabichvili and Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze even sat together at the stadium in Cologne for the Spain game.

"Sometimes losing is winning!" Zourabichvili said.

"This is history and means that Georgian football has taken one very big step forward," said Kobakhidze.

Despite the hunger for more big game experience, Sagnol said it was premature to talk about the 2026 World Cup qualifiers with Georgia's team and 3.7

million people first entitled to sit back and drink in all that happened in Germany.

Georgians are quietly confident that Euro 2024 will prove no fluke. It followed a three-year project by Sagnol and careful cultivation of the game from grassroots to the national squad by the ambitious Georgian Football Federation.

Qualification for Germany actually came thanks to a stellar run in the 2022/23 UEFA Nations League, where Georgia won their group and have risen to League B.

And whereas in the past Georgia had barely a single starter in a major European league, they now have players dotted around Spain's La Liga, France's Ligue 1 and Italy's Serie A.

"Now it's the end of a journey," said Sagnol. "But I'm sure the next one will also be very exciting."



# US, European support emboldens Israel to continue crimes: *Iran*



Foreign guests participating in a ceremony to mark Iran's national day of campaigning against chemical and microbiological weapons look at photos of the victims of Iraq's chemical attack on the Iranian city of Sardasht on July 1, 2024.  
● MARZIEH SOLEIMANI/IRNA

**International Desk**

Iranian Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani on Monday said the Western support for Israel in international bodies paves the way for the regime to press ahead with its atrocities in the Gaza Strip. Bagheri Kani was speaking at a ceremony that marked the national day of campaigning against chemical and microbiological weapons on the 37th anniversary of a chemical attack on the Iranian city of Sardasht by the Iraqi army under former dictator Saddam Hussein. "European countries and the United States supplied Saddam with materials to make chemical bombs and sometimes provided chemical weapons during the war," Bagheri Kani said referring to the Iraqi war against Iran in 1980s. The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that Saddam's des-

potic nature was not the only factor that led to the chemical attack on Sardasht. He explained that the US incapacitated global mechanisms and thwarted any effort in the international organizations to prevent Saddam from conducting the attack. Bagheri Kani emphasized that the US and its Western allies are now blocking Iran's access to medicines required by victims of chemical attacks despite the Islamic Republic's constant efforts over the past four decades to provide them with medical and therapeutic services. "The same Western nations that backed the Baath regime in Iraq are now supporting the Zionist regime [of Israel] and set the stage for them in international mechanisms to continue their crimes," he added. The top diplomat appeared to be alluding to meetings of the UN Security Council in which

the US and its certain European allies blocked resolutions that demanded an immediate cease-fire to let aid into the Gaza Strip. The Israel's ongoing war on the Palestinian enclave, that started on October 7, has killed nearly 38,000 Gazans, mostly civilians, and displaced more than two million people. "Today, we are witnessing the same situation in Gaza. Chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are condemned because they lead to the massacre of humanity," Bagheri Kani said. He described Western nations as "the main suspects and perpetrators" of crimes against humanity and genocide. The minister called on "independent and freedom-seeking countries" not to allow Western powers to "justify their crimes" through the mechanisms they own.

## French parties rush to team up against far right

France's political parties rushed to build a united front aimed at blocking the path to government of Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) on Monday, after it made historic gains to win the first round of a parliamentary election. The RN and its allies won Sunday's round with 33% of the vote, followed by a left-wing bloc with 28% and well ahead of President Emmanuel Macron's centrists, who scored just 20%, official results from the Interior Ministry showed, Reuters reported. While financial markets rallied on relief the RN tally was not greater, it was still a huge setback for Macron who had called the snap election after his ticket was trounced by the RN in the European Parliament election last month. Whether the anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic RN can form a government will depend now on how

successfully other parties manage to thwart Le Pen by rallying round the best-placed rival candidates in hundreds of constituencies across France. Leaders of both the left-wing New Popular Front and Macron's centrist alliance indicated on Sunday night they would withdraw their own candidates in districts where another candidate was better placed to beat the RN in next Sunday's run-off. However, it was not clear whether such a pact would always apply if the left-wing candidate was from the far-left France Unbowed (LFI) party of Jean-Luc Melancon, one of the main members of the New Popular Front. A fiery orator, Melancon is one of the most divisive figures in French politics, both enthusing and horrifying voters with his unbridled tax-and-spend proposals and class war rhetoric. Finance Minister Bruno

Le Maire, a Macron party ally, ruled out calling on voters to choose an LFI candidate. "LFI is a danger for the nation", he told France Inter radio. A longtime pariah for many in France, the RN is now closer to power than it has ever been. Le Pen has sought to clean up the image of a party known for racism and antisemitism, a tactic that has worked amid voter anger at Macron, the high cost of living and growing concerns over immigration. An RN-led government would raise major questions over where the European Union was headed, given the party's longstanding resistance to further EU integration. Human rights groups have raised concerns about how its "France first" policies would apply in practice to ethnic minorities, while economists question whether its hefty spending plans are fully funded.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Candidates seeking to expand voter base ahead of July 5 runoff

**National Desk**

Election fever is heating up in Iran as more officials and political parties threw their weight behind the two presidential candidates ahead of the Friday run-off election. Ali Tayebnia, economy minister under former president Hassan Rouhani, held a meeting with the Reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian and supported him in the upcoming election. Meanwhile, a group of religious scholars, clerics and pundits in a statement on Monday supported Pezeshkian who secured a narrow lead over Conservative candidate Saeed Jalili in the first round of election which was held on June 28. The Moderate former president Rouhani, who had the support of Reformists during his tenure, released a statement and called for people to participate in the second round of the election. "Today we have two candidates, one of whom considers sanctions as a blessing and the other one considers them as a disaster. One considers disconnection from the world as an opportunity, and the other calls it the loss of opportunities," the statement said. Rouhani underlined that Iranians are now facing two choices. The first is participation or boycotting elections and the second choice is sanctions or interaction with the world. On the other side, Justice-seekers Party and Motalefeh (Islamic Coalition Party)



in separate statements supported the Conservative candidate Saeed Jalili for the presidency. Campaigning continued on Monday as both candidates met their supporters in different cities before they attend the first televised debate in the second round. Addressing his supporters in the northeastern city of Gorgan, Jalili said that the country should have extensive and constructive interaction with the world, not minimal interaction and from a position of weakness. In a meeting focused on women and girls, the Reformist candidate emphasized that the capacity of Iranian girls should not be used to achieve their rights, but it should be used for the development of the country. The candidates began their campaign-

ing on Sunday after the Guardian Council confirmed the results of the June 28 election. 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. 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 and have thrown their weight behind Jalili.

**Notice of tender for export sale No. Z/1403/10**

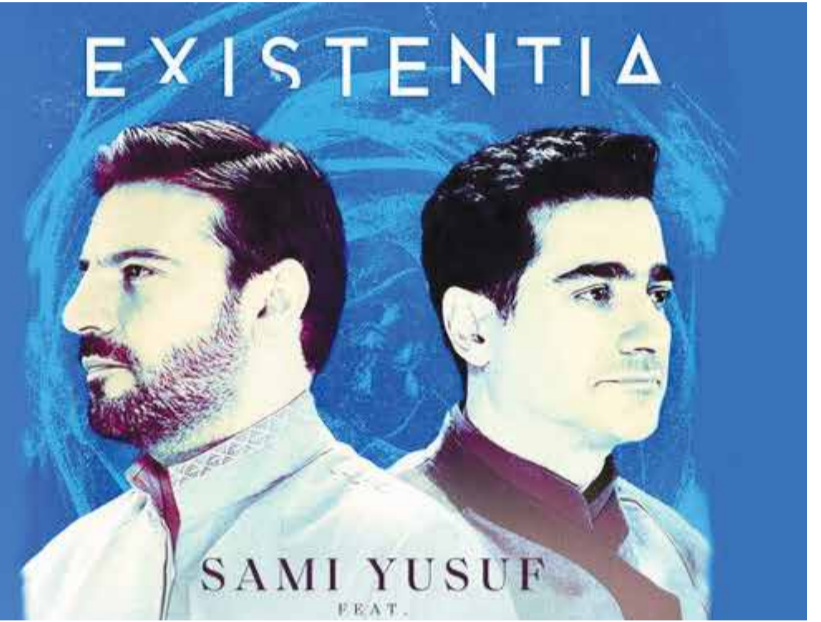
**Golgohar Mining and Industrial Company**

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 70,000 metric tons of Pellet (%Fe:65) on basis of F.O.B at Rajaei Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: [www.geg.ir](http://www.geg.ir). All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 09:00 A.M. on 09. July.2024 to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road). Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 09:00 A.M. on 09. July.2024 at the office of the Seller.

		Analysis %	
Fe%	65.00	Min	
FeO%	1.0	Ave	
P%	0.05	Max	
S%	0.01	Max	
SiO2%	3.5	Max	
Al2O3%	0.7	Max	
CaO%	0.9	Max	
MgO%	2.5	Max	
CCS (kg/p)		Ave	250
8-16 mm%		Min	90
-6 mm%		Ave	5
A.I%		Max	4
T.I%		Min	95
Prosity%			19-24
Reducibility%		Min	90

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# Iranian, British singers release joint track on Rumi poem



Well-known Iranian-born British singer Sami Yusuf and renowned Iranian classical vocalist Homayoun Shajarian released a new song based on a poem by the 13th-century Persian mystic poet Rumi. The track, titled 'Existencia,' is from Yusuf's upcoming album

'Ecstasy.' It features both artists singing in Arabic and Persian. The song became available on Sunday on various music platforms, according to IRNA. Exuding delightful ebullience, Sami Yusuf dropped some lines about the release on his X handle a few days ago, saying, "I'm

excited to announce that the first track, 'Existencia,' from my upcoming album Ecstasy will be released on 1 July. And I'm thrilled that it features my incredibly talented dear friend, the brilliant vocalist, Homayoun Shajarian. His performance is breathtaking, and I know you're

going to love it as much as I do." Sami Yusuf, born Siamak Radmanesh, is known for his work that often explores spiritual themes. He has been recognized as one of the most prominent British Muslim figures globally, with The Guardian describing him as "perhaps the most

famous British Muslim in the world." Yusuf has performed songs in multiple languages, including Azerbaijani, Turkish, Persian, Urdu, and Hindi. His collaboration with Shajarian, a prominent figure in traditional Iranian music, marks a significant cultural

fusion in the music world. In June, Yusuf and Shajarian shared a photo together, sparking speculation about their collaboration. Now, their joint effort has come to fruition, offering fans a blend of their unique musical talents and cultural heritage.



## Iran, Vietnam to broaden tourism cooperation

Officials from Iran and Vietnam met in Hanoi on Monday to discuss ways to enhance tourism cooperation between the two countries. During the meeting, Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali-Asghar Shalbafian of Iran and Deputy Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Hoang Dao Cuong of Vietnam reviewed updating a tourism agreement previously signed, IRNA wrote. They also emphasized the im-

portance of further meetings between the governments and private sectors of both countries to maximize the potential for tourism cooperation. In addition, they explored the possibility of easing visa requirements for Iranian people who intend to visit Vietnam. Shalbafian is in Hanoi for the inauguration of an exhibition showcasing Iran's tourism offerings.



## Student happiness key to mental health: Minister

Social Desk

Iran's Education Minister Reza Morad-Sahraei emphasized the direct connection between students' happiness and their mental health. Speaking at the ceremony of summer activities at the Shahid Bahonar camp, Sahraei encouraged parents to support their children's participation in these programs, ILNA wrote. «Hope fuels our movement towards the future," Morad-Sahraei said. "One of the main goals of these activities should be to create hope and joy for the children."

The minister highlighted the richness of Iranian culture and the importance of teaching children values such as sacrifice, hard work, and respect for parents and teachers. He also noted the diversity of cultural activities planned for the summer, including camps, sports, and skill-building and scientific programs. The minister called for media to promote these activities to parents, stating, "There is a direct relationship between children's happiness and their mental health. Parents should encourage their children's participation in these programs."



## Int'l handicrafts center to open in Isfahan

An international handicrafts center is planned to be established within the former Risbaf Factory in Isfahan to boost development, promotion, and applied research of handicrafts from various countries, announced Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, Iran's deputy tourism minister. Shalbafian stated that the center will host artisans from around the world, aiming to foster international collaboration and exchange in the handicrafts sector, ILNA wrote. "The handicraft center will transform the historical Risbaf Factory into a hub for artisans from around the world," said a local official speaking at a press conference on Monday. "This

initiative aims to promote development, dissemination, and practical research in the field of handicrafts on an international scale." A memorandum of understanding between the UN Tourism and the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts is in progress to facilitate the establishment process, according to Mehran Zeinalian. This initiative, proposed by Iran, was reviewed and supported by the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific & the UNWTO Commission for South Asia and highlighted by the organization's secretary-general as a significant and innovative move by Iran.

Arts & Culture Desk

## Tunisia, Iran discuss expansion of tourism cooperation

Iran and Tunisia conducted their first joint meeting since the mutual visa waiver, aiming to overcome existing barriers and boost tourism between the two nations. Tunisian ambassador in Tehran, Imad al-Rahmuni emphasized the strong desire of Tunisians to visit the historic cities of Shiraz and Isfahan, despite the current challenges posed by the lack of direct flights and financial exchange issues, ILNA wrote. Following the mutual visa waiver agreement between Iran and

Tunisia, the first joint meeting to discuss tourism cooperation was held in Tehran. The meeting was attended by the Tunisian ambassador, representatives from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, and travel agency managers, hosted by the Association of Air Transport and Tourist Agencies of Iran (AATTAI). Hormatollah Rafiei, the head of the AATTAI, highlighted that Tu-

nisia was the first country to take steps toward a mutual visa waiver with Iran. He mentioned that Tunisia has long been a key destination for Iranian tourists, with charter flights operating at various times. Although these activities were halted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism relations between Iran and Tunisia have now not only resumed but are progressing with greater vigor.

Rafiei further noted the strong relations between the governments and private sectors of Iran and Tunisia, particularly in the tourism sector. Ambassador stated that tourism is a gateway to broader relations between countries. He underscored the need for direct flights to facilitate better connections between the people of Iran and Tunisia, which would positively impact other areas of

cooperation. Despite the challenges, including visa issues and the absence of direct flights, both countries remain determined to achieve their tourism development goals. The Tunisian ambassador's first action upon his appointment in Iran was to ensure Tunisia's participation in the Tehran International Tourism & related Industries Exhibition. Despite not being initially included in their

plans, the involvement was made possible with support from both countries' tourism ministries and Rafiei. Looking ahead, the envoy announced plans for a joint commission on tourism cooperation to be hosted by Iran. The Tunisian Minister of Tourism, along with representatives from Tunisian travel agencies and the airline sector, will visit Tehran. This visit will coincide with the Tunisia Culture Week, aimed at fostering partnerships between Tunisian and Iranian tourism professionals.