

Foreign policy dominates 1st runoff debate

National Desk

Masoud Pezeshkian and Saeed Jalili, the two candidates running for presidency, locked horns in the first televised debate ahead of the Friday's runoff election.

The candidates presented their plans on political, cultural and economic issues. Pezeshkian, a former health minister and current lawmaker, touched on the important issue of sanctions which have had significant impacts on the country's economy for several years.

Pezeshkian said he considers the sanctions a serious detriment to the country, stressing that his foreign policy aims to normalize relations with the world. He also said that he supports the implementation of FATF and the 2015 nuclear agreement from which the United States unilaterally withdrew and reimposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

"For me, foreign policy means interaction, economic growth, and engagement — for peace and for people, not at their expense," he underlined.

In response, Jalili said that in the cases of FATF and the nuclear deal, "We should ask the other side to fulfill its commitments. But we shouldn't stall ourselves. We should also pursue other avenues in parallel."

"If the other side says they won't fulfill their commitments, we shouldn't bow down," he added.

Jalili said that, "We must definitely remove the tool of sanctions from the hands of the opponent. One way is through dialogue and compelling the opponent to fulfill its commitments."

Jalili said that no one in Iran prevented the implementation of the nuclear agreement.

"Let's not accuse our own nation and absolve the other side. The (UN nuclear) agency said Iran fulfilled its commitments, and I say we even went beyond our commitments. But what was the result? They withdrew and sanctions increased from 800 to 1500."



Iranian presidential candidates Masoud Pezeshkian (R) and Saeed Jalili participate in a live election debate at the Iranian national television studio in Tehran on July 1.

MORTEZA FAKHRINEJAD/IRIB

Sanctions and their impacts

Pezeshkian also referred to the impacts of the sanctions on the country's economy, saying that right now, due to lack of oil extraction technology, Iran is extracting 18 percent of oil from the ground, while in the world it is 48 percent.

"We are currently selling oil cheaply and not even disclosing its price," he said.

He said that Iran has lost its markets and Qatar is taking away Iran's gas. A country that holds the second largest gas reserves in the world shuts off gas in winters for factories.

"Why doesn't China return our money and rips us off with any shoddy goods it feels like? Why doesn't it execute the 25-year (strategic) contract? Why doesn't Iraq, which we have served so much, return our money?" Pezeshkian asked during the debate.

The Reformist candidate said the division among officials as the main problem in the country.

"When a government is in power, FATF is opposed, but when the next government takes over, it supports it."

Pezeshkian also pointed to the fate of the nuclear agreement also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"(Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu was doing everything to prevent the JCPOA from being implemented. We also fought internally to prevent the JCPOA. When you make a deal and negotiate, you give something and get something in return.

"Do you know how much we are losing right now because of FATF and JCPOA? We are losing several thousand billion daily. Some people are profiteering from sanctions."

Cyberspace

Both candidates also talked about the cyberspace and its economic capacities. Jalili believes that a significant portion of opportunities today lies in cyberspace.

"If we say cyberspace is an opportunity, we need to have a plan for it and clearly tell people what we want to do. Foreign platforms can operate in Iran if they act responsibly," the Conservative candidate Jalili said. He said that the people should be active,

not passive, in cyberspace.

Pezeshkian pointed to the people's problems in access to internet, saying that "Today people spend more money on VPNs than on the internet itself, and these VPNs don't have the same restrictions or controls."

"You cannot say we want to live in a cage and have no connection with the world. Many people lost their businesses due to actions taken in cyberspace," Pezeshkian added.

Low turnout

Both candidates also pointed to the low turnout in the first round of the election. The interior Ministry announced that voter turnout was around 40%.

Pezeshkian said that the participation is concerning. It is unacceptable that 60 percent of the people did not come to the polls.

"We must have an ear to listen to the voices of 60 percent who did not come to the polls.

Jalili also said that the reasons behind the decrease in people's participation should be considered.

Iran to back Hezbollah in case of all-out Israeli war

An adviser to Iran's Leader warned that if Israel launches an all-out offensive against Hezbollah resistance movement in Lebanon, it would risk triggering a regional war in which Tehran and the "axis of resistance" would support the Lebanese movement with "all means".

Kamal Kharrazi, foreign affairs adviser to Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, told the Financial Times that the Islamic republic was

"not interested" in a regional war and urged the US to put pressure on Israel to prevent further escalation.

But asked if Iran would support Hezbollah militarily in the event of a full-blown conflict, Kharrazi said: "All Lebanese people, Arab countries and members of the axis of resistance will support Lebanon against Israel."

"There would be a chance of expansion of



Kamal Kharrazi

the war to the whole region, in which all countries including Iran would become engaged," he said in an interview. "In that situation, we would have no choice, but to support Hezbollah by all means."

He added: "The expansion of war is not in the interest of anyone — not Iran or the US." Since the beginning of Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip in October, Hezbollah has traded almost daily cross-border fire with Israel. Fears of a full-blown war grew this month after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was preparing for "a very tense operation" on the border with Lebanon.

Iran's mission to the UN on Friday warned of an "obliterating war" if Israel launched an offensive against Hezbollah, saying "all options" were on the table.

"All options, [including] the full involvement of all Resistance Fronts, are on the table," the mission wrote in a post on X.

It also called Israel's threats to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon "psychological warfare" and "propaganda".

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah has also threatened a war with "no restraint and no rules and no ceilings" in case of a major Israeli offensive against Lebanon.

Hezbollah's strikes started on 8 October, the day after the Hamas attack on Israel. The group has said the campaign, in support for Palestinians amid Israel's war on Gaza, will stop only when there is a ceasefire in Gaza.

Most of the violence has remained contained to areas along the border, although Israeli strikes have increasingly hit targets deeper into Lebanon. Hezbollah attacks have also reached far into Israel. So far, more than 400 people have been reported killed in Lebanon, the vast majority Hezbollah fighters, and 25 in Israel, mostly soldiers.

Iran urges European action against Israel's crimes in Gaza

International Desk

Iran's interim President Mohammad Mokhbar called on Italy, Hungary, Spain, Serbia, Finland and Australia to take measures to stop Israel's crimes in Gaza.

He made the remarks in separate meetings with new ambassadors of the European countries who submitted a copy of their credentials in Tehran on Tuesday.

During his meeting with Italy's new ambassador Paola Amadei, Mokhbar said that Iran expects Italy, as a country with a rich and ancient civilization and culture, to take effective measures to stop the Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip despite the support of certain countries to the occupying entity.

Italy's ambassador, for her part, said her country is doing its utmost to cooperate with different countries, including Iran, to find solutions to the crisis in Gaza.

The Israeli regime has so far killed at least 37,900 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 87,060 others, since it waged the brutal war on the Gaza Strip in October 2023, according to the Gaza-based health ministry. It has also imposed a "complete siege" on the territory, cutting off fuel, electricity, food, and water to the more than two million Palestinians living there.

On Tuesday, Israeli forces bombarded several areas of the southern Gaza Strip and thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee their homes in what could be part of a final push for Israel's intensive military offensives in nine months of war.

The latest strikes on Tuesday killed at least eight people and wounded more than 30 in several neighborhoods of Khan Younis.

The wave of attacks, just weeks after Israeli tanks left the area, caused panic among residents, many already displaced multiple times and with no clear path to safety.

The Israeli military's newly declared evacuation zone in Khan Younis encompasses an area where 250,000 people live, said Sam Rose, planning director at the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The order "means yet another day, week, chapter of misery for these hundreds of thousands of people — we expect 250,000 people in areas under the evacuation order," Rose told Al Jazeera from Nuseirat in central Gaza.

Some had just returned from Rafah, also in the south of the enclave, where they were displaced a few weeks ago.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

