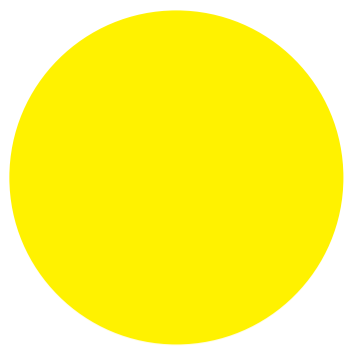


Leader:
Turnout
in runoff
'backbone'
of Islamic
Republic



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**Voter turnout
crucial in
electing
president**

By Ebrahim
Beheshti
Staff writer

OPINION

Iran is set to hold the second round of its 2024 presidential election tomorrow. The two candidates concluded their respective campaigns at 8 a.m. today, which began on Sunday following their victory in the initial round of voting on June 28.

Masoud Pezeshkian, the candidate supported by reformists and moderates, and Saeed Jalili, the candidate supported by conservatives, have advanced to the second round of the election. On Saturday, one of these two will be announced as the new president of Iran. The two candidates are ideologically and politically opposed to each other. This stark contrast has led to highly challenging debates between the two on television. Pezeshkian represents the reformist and progressive segments of Iranian society and fundamentally disagrees with his rival Jalili, a conservative, on both domestic and foreign policy issues. Jalili, in terms of his ideological stance, belongs to the same political camp as the previous government led by Ebrahim Raisi, who died alongside seven other Iranian officials in a helicopter crash in Northwestern Iran on May 19. Although Jalili asserts that he possesses detailed and expert plans for different aspects of domestic and foreign policy and acknowledges certain economic issues in society, he envisions himself as carrying on the trajectory of Raisi's government.

From his perspective and that of the conservative faction, Raisi's government managed to resist Western pressures, maintain the country's independence, and enhance the regional and international position of the Islamic Republic. They also believe that it has made strides in addressing domestic issues, including significantly increasing Iran's oil sales despite anti-Iran sanctions and the failure of negotiations to revive the nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

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UNSC should avoid double standards in fight against terrorism: *Iran*

Economy Sparks Blazing Row in Final Runoff Debate



Supporters of presidential candidates Saeed Jalili and Masoud Pezeshkian watch a live debate outdoors in Tehran, Iran, on July 2, 2024. © ISNA



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**Over 30% rise expected
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in Iran: *Official***

Gholamreza Miri, the vice chairman of Iran's National Saffron Council (NSC) said that the country is expected to produce 30-50% more saffron during the current Iranian year (to end in March 20, 2025).

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EXCLUSIVE

Iran's non-oil exports up 7.6% to \$13.5b in three months: **IRICA**



Iran's non-oil exports rose by 7.6% in the quarter to late June compared to the same period last year, according to figures announced by the head of the country's customs office (IRICA).

IRICA chief Mohammad Rezvani Far told the Iranian state TV that exports of non-oil goods and commodities from the country had reached \$13.5 billion in the three months to June 20, Press TV reported.

Rezvani Far said shipments in the aforementioned period had increased by 5.6% in volume terms compared to the same quarter in 2023 to reach 38 million metric tons (mt). Exports of petrochemicals accounted for nearly 9% of the shipments at 15.6 million mt worth \$6.2 billion over the period, he said.

China was the biggest purchaser of Iranian goods in April-June with some \$3.56 billion worth of items, followed by Iraq at \$3 billion and the United Arab Emirates at \$1.9 billion, said the IRICA chief. Imports into Iran rose 1.4% in value terms year on year in the three months to late June to hit \$14.3 billion, said Rezvani Far, adding that the shipments had increased by 7.8% in volume terms to reach 9.4 million mt.

Basic goods, which include a list of 25 items subsidized by the Iranian government, accounted for 32% or \$4.6 billion worth of imports into the country over the June quarter, he said.

The UAE, the main re-exporting hub in the Persian Gulf, was the largest supplier of goods and commodities to Iran over the three months to late June with \$4.5 billion worth of exports, followed by China at \$3.9 billion and Turkey at \$1.8 billion, the official underlined. Iran's total trade in the June quarter, including its oil exports of more than \$12 billion, reached nearly \$40 billion, Rezvani Far said, adding that the country had a trade deficit of 0.8 billion over the period without considering its oil exports.

Turkmenistan to sell gas to Iraq via swaps with Iran

Turkmenistan signed a swap deal with Iran under which Ashgabat will sell 10 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas a year to Iraq, the Turkmen government announced on Wednesday.

Iran, which lies between Turkmenistan and Iraq, has its own substantial gas reserves, and under the swap deal Tehran will supply gas to Baghdad in exchange for receiving the same volumes from Ashgabat, as reported by Reuters. Iranian companies will build a new gas pipeline with a length of 125 kilometers and three gas compressor stations on the territory of Turkmenistan to boost annual gas imports in that direction to 40 bcm.

This will be achieved by expanding capacity in the Dauletabad-Sarakhs-Khangiran directions and through Chaloyuk Gas Metering Station. Iran and Turkmenistan are two major global gas suppliers. Cooperation between the two countries stalled for a period in the last decade over disputes on settlement of Iran's energy arrears to Turkmenistan.

Iran can take advantage of the situation where it can buy gas from the extensive regional hydrocarbon reserves and sell it to poten-



tial clients and thus establish itself as a strong gas hub of the region.

By importing gas from Russia, Turkmenistan and Qatar, Iran can

receive some 100 billion cubic meters a year of gas and sell it to such

countries as Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon.

Over 30% rise expected for saffron production in Iran: *Official*



By Sadeq Dehqan & Reza Abesh Ahmadlou
Staff writers

Gholamreza Miri, the vice chairman of Iran's National Saffron Council (NSC) said that the country is expected to produce 30-50% more saffron during the current Iranian year (to end in March 20, 2025).

Last year, between 300 and 350 tons of saffron were harvested from the cultivation fields across the country, he told Iran Daily adding that some statistics released by the

Agriculture Ministry show lower production figures, which seem not to include the production of all farms.

According to official statistics, 127,000 hectares of land are allocated to the cultivation of saffron in Iran, but the figures do not include all the lands under saffron cultivation across the country.

"Usually, from each hectare of saffron fields, in the previous years, about 6 kilograms of saffron was harvested on average, but due to drought and lack of water, the figure has dropped

to 3-3.5 kilograms," Miri said, expressing optimism about a growth in production for the current year, thanks to the notable precipitations during March, April and May.

According to him, in some years, due to the proper condition of cultivation and the favorable precipitation, the record amount of saffron harvest from each hectare in Iran has reached 30 to 40 kilograms.

Most of the country's saffron farms are located in provinces and areas with low rainfall, such as South Khorasan, and therefore

droughts lead to insufficient water to reach the farms, Miri stated.

"As figures indicate, Iran exported a sum of 221 tons of saffron to 67 countries during the year to March 19," he noted.

Talking on the price of the product, Miri said it depends on the quality of the harvested saffron, which is currently purchased from farmers from 65 million to 105 million tomans (\$1,000) to 105 million tomans (\$1,700) per kilo.

"Iran is the largest producer and exporter of saffron in the world, he noted adding that some countries

including India, Afghanistan, and Spain are considered our rivals, but the presence of some problems such as sanctions has created some barriers to the export of Iranian saffron," he said, adding that as a result, some rivals take advantage of the opportunity to export Iranian saffron under their own brands. Surveys show that every month at least 10 tons of saffron products are smuggled out of our country and sold in

the world market, Miri criticized.

According to the Iranian official, saffron is used in various industries such as pharmaceutical industries, cosmetics and food industries.



Voter turnout crucial ...

The most prominent official position held by Jalili was Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council in pres-



ident Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government. He is now a member of the Expediency Council and the Leader's representative on the Supreme National Security Council.

On the other side, Pezeshkian is the representative of change-seekers in Iran. Critics of Raisi's government, including reformists, moderates, and even some conservatives, are looking forward to his success in the election. As emphasized in his recent two debates, Pezeshkian does not consid-

er Raisi's government as ultimately successful and believes that Jalili gaining power will worsen the country's internal and external situation. Pezeshkian positions himself as inclined towards engaging with the world and resolving the nuclear issue to lift sanctions. Regarding internal matters, he claims to have a more open approach compared to his rival. He has explicitly stated his opposition to the morality police and restrictions on internet access.

Pezeshkian, who has been a member of Parliament for several consecutive terms, previously served as the Minister of Health in the reformist government of president Mohammad Khatami. He is also a cardiac surgeon.

Previously, in elections with less than 50% voter turnout, the conservative faction often came out on top. However, in the first round of this election on July 8, despite a relatively low turnout of 40%, the reformist candidate succeeded

in obtaining the most votes, although his percentage did not meet the necessary threshold for a first-round victory. Now, Pezeshkian and his supporters hope that in the second round, a percentage of those who did not participate in the first round will come to the polls. Jalili and his supporters also hope to add the three million votes of Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, another conservative candidate from the first round, to Jalili's tally. Qalibaf has announced his

support for Jalili in a statement. However, it does not seem that all of Qalibaf's votes will go to Jalili, and political experts believe that some of these votes will instead go to Pezeshkian.

Therefore, it seems that voter turnout in the second round of the election will be a determining factor in the election's outcome. According to expert assessments, relatively low turnout will benefit Jalili, while relatively high turnout will favor Pezeshkian.



Ovan Lake in Qazvin, a magnet for tourists

borna.news

Iranica Desk

Ovan Lake is one of the pristine natural lakes in Iran, located in the province of Qazvin. It shines like a beautiful gem in the mountainous and pleasant climate region of Alamut, Qazvin Province. The proximity of the lake to Tehran has made this place a suitable location for one-day nature tours and it annually hosts hundreds of domestic and foreign tourists. This lake is one of the protected wetlands of the Environmental Protection Organization of Iran and is also registered on the Iran's National Heritage List.

Ovan Lake is situated amidst four villages with a beautiful

and unique landscape. Ovan in Persian means a place filled with water. This lake covers an area of over 70,000 square meters, and its depth reaches approximately six meters at its deepest point. The lake does not receive water directly from its surroundings; its only source is from rainfall and springs at the bottom of the lake. Additionally, a small river is formed by the overflow of the lake, and its water is used by the farmers in the villages of Kooshk and Ayeen.

If you look at Ovan Lake from the top of the surrounding mountains, you will see it surrounded by a beautiful vegetation cover. The plants continue up to the high mountains surrounding the

lake, with the towering mountains enclosing it like a gem.

Recreation

Bird watching: Ovan Lake is one of the best bird-watching destinations in Iran for wildlife enthusiasts, as during bird migration and in the autumn season, birds such as swans, geese, and ducks migrate to this area, providing a great opportunity for bird watching.

Ice skating: One of the recreational activities you can enjoy at this lake is the thrilling sport of ice skating, which is possible in winter due to the cold weather and frozen surface.

Boating: Pedal boats are available at the lake for boating and

enjoying this delightful pastime. **Hiking:** The surrounding mountains of Ovan offer you the opportunity to hike and see the lake from the heights, allowing you to enjoy the views.

Photography: The beauty and landscapes around Ovan are the best subjects for photography. If you are into photography, do not miss capturing the beautiful landscapes of Ovan, especially in the early morning mist over the lake.

In the spring, Ovan Lake and its nature are exceptionally beautiful, and in the summer, it becomes a delightful sightseeing spot for tourists. The best time to enjoy its pleasant and refreshing air is from April to October. Due to the high altitude of the lake and its location in

the Khoshchal Mountains, the climate around the lake is very cold in winter and autumn.

If you plan to spend the night by the lake and camp, make sure to bring the necessary equipment with you as Ovan is far from the city. During the autumn and winter seasons, the temperature drops significantly, sometimes reaching -20°C , therefore, if you intend to camp around this lake, ensure you have warm and suitable clothing. If you prefer to stay in a lodge, there are several eco-lodges in the Alamut region where you can stay and explore the beautiful climate of Qazvin with more patience and time.

To preserve the lake ecosystem, hunting and fishing are prohib-

ited in this area. Please refrain from these activities to protect the wildlife and environment of the lake. Swimming in the lake is also prohibited due to sediment at the bottom and existing vegetation, making it a highly risky activity for tourists.

The lake is not just a recreational area and tourist attraction; it holds significant climatic and economic importance, especially for the local community. Any alterations to the lake have a profound impact on the lives of people and the local ecosystem. Without this lake, a substantial portion of agricultural products and the Alamut climate would be affected, leading to challenges in the regional economy.

Lorestan Province to host int'l conference on hand-carved architecture

Iranica Desk

The head of Lorestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Organization announced that the Fourth International Conference on Hand-Carved Architecture will take place in the province from November 12-14.

Ata Hassanpour, speaking in an interview with ISNA, mentioned that the conference has previously been held at an international level in Kerman, Tehran, and Hamedan. He also noted that the papers to be sent to the conference will be reviewed and evaluated by the organizing committee in Tehran.

He added, "I submitted three articles on Kogan Cave, Eraz Cave in the Papi district, and Bahram-e Choobin Gorge in Darehshahr to all three conferences. Subsequently, I was selected as a member of Tehran's Hand-carved Architecture Committee. The conference

will be held under the supervision of the 'Research Center for Historical Buildings and Texture'."

He said that given that Lorestan Province is home to a large number of hand-carved structures, extensive efforts have been made to prepare the conditions for holding the conference in the province.

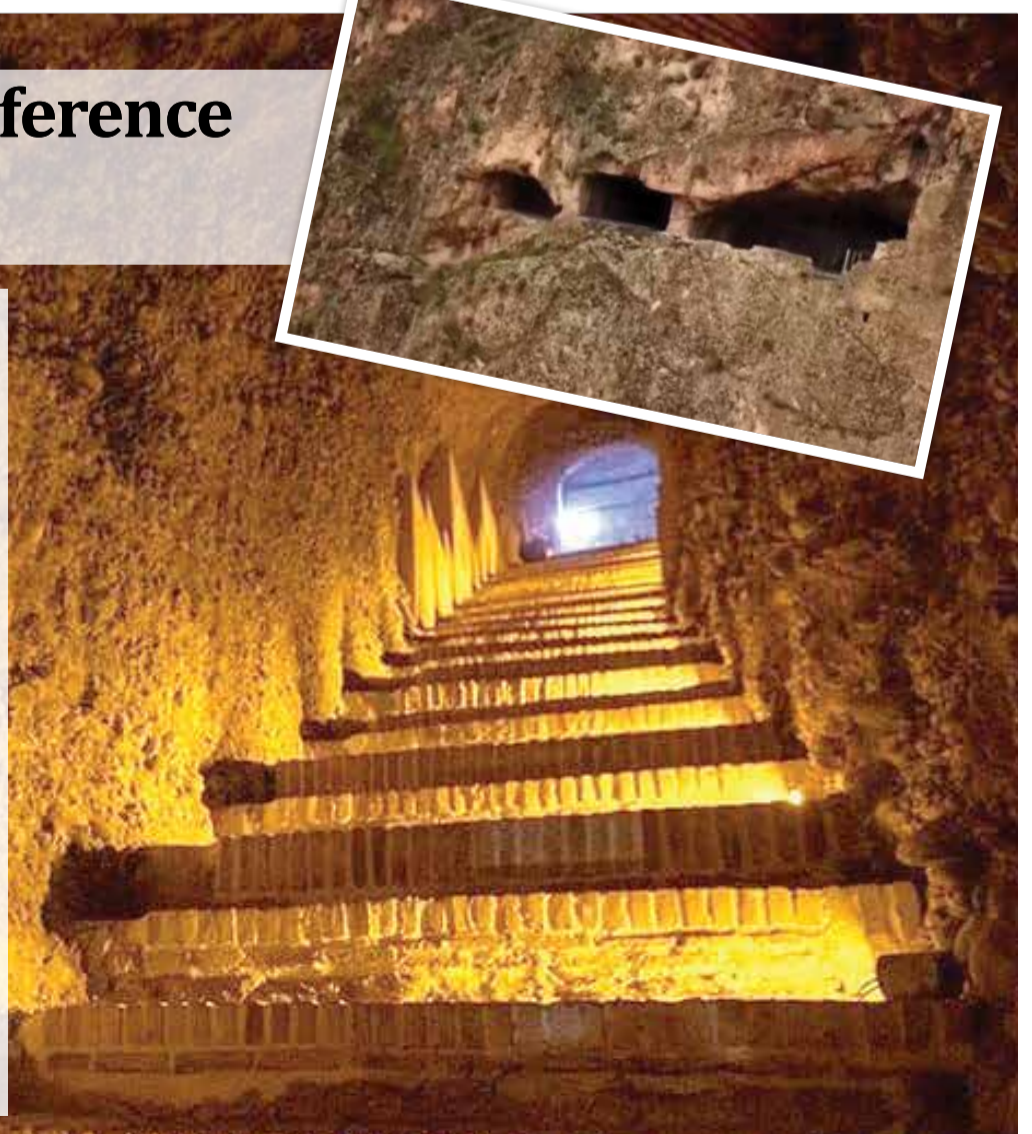
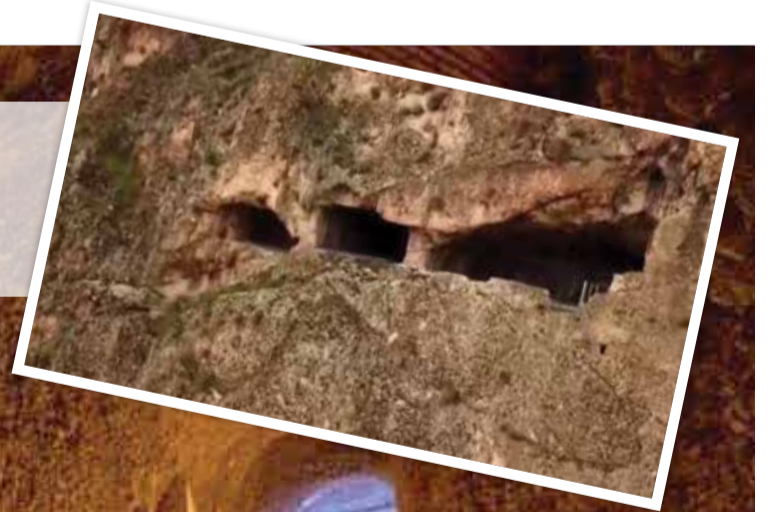
"Due to the existence of Mithraism and Zoroastrian religions, about fifty hand-carved structures have been identified in the province dating back to the Sassanid and Parthian eras," he said.

The official said that due to the topographic features of the province, which is a mountainous region, numerous hand-carved structures were built in the area during the pre-Islamic period. He pointed out that several underground spaces have been discovered and explored in the province.

Hand-carved architecture is a unique architectural style

where no materials are used to create space, and unlike traditional practices, structural aspects are not a primary focus in this form of architecture. This type of architecture can be viewed as the generation of spaces within rock and stone substrates, formed by the interplay of solid and empty spaces, in response to human climatic requirements. In this architectural approach, desired spaces are crafted by excavating rock masses from their original substrate, allowing for the creation of spaces in diverse shapes.

The development of a series of hand-carved architectural creations is influenced by a range of factors, such as climatic and geographic conditions, defense and security requirements, longevity and durability, along with religious and cultural influences, all within the framework of cultural, political, social, and economic contexts.



How did it go so wrong for Britain's Conservatives?

UK's self-inflicted political meltdown explained

The illustration shows British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak fading away. ● GETTY IMAGES



By Joshua Keating
Journalist, author

PERSPECTIVE

If you're looking for electoral suspense, don't look across the pond. Barring a polling error of world historic proportions, 14 years of Conservative rule will come to an end in the United Kingdom on July 4. The question isn't whether Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's party will lose, it's whether anything will be left of them the day after.

Just five years after the Conservatives won their own historic landslide, pollsters are warning that the party faces "electoral extinction." The current forecast from the Economist predicts the opposition Labour Party will win around 431 seats in the 650-seat parliament, up from the 205 they currently hold. That would be the center-left party's biggest majority of the post-war era, eclipsing the landslide 1997 election, when the Tony Blair-led party trounced John Major's Conservatives, ending an 18-year period of Tory dominance. The Conservatives, meanwhile, are projected to fall from 344 seats to just 109. Constituencies that have been loyal Tory bastions for decades are in play.

The party is likely in for a brutal internal battle over its future, with some right-wingers calling for a merger with Trumpian gadfly Nigel Farage's right-wing Reform UK party. Some polls suggest Sunak might become the first ever sitting prime minister to lose his own seat. (Though, he fortunately has a \$7.2 million mansion in Santa Monica, California, to fall back on, which presumably has many seats.)

The Conservatives ended up on the brink of a historic loss the way Hemingway described going bankrupt: Gradually, and then suddenly. The Tories have been underwater in the polls since late 2021, but Sunak only called this election in late May, likely sensing his party's prospects were not likely to improve any time soon.

That's a swift, though not exactly painless, end to a political era that radically changed a country and its place in the world. The consensus view is that it has not changed for the better.

A forthcoming book, *The Conservative Effect, 2010–2024: 14 Wasted Years?*, co-edited by Anthony Seldon,

a veteran chronicler and biographer of contemporary British prime ministers, attempts to take stock of the legacy of this period. Seldon is unsparing in his concluding essay, writing, "By 2024, Britain's standing in the world was lower [compared to 2010], the union was less strong, the country less equal, the population

less well protected, growth more sluggish with the outlook poor." He concludes: "Overall, it is hard to find a comparable period in history of the Conservatives which achieved so little, or which left the country at its conclusion in a more troubling state."

So how, exactly, did we get here?

14 years, five PMs, one Brexit

This 14-year period of Conservative rule is really two different periods: pre- and post-Brexit.

The first period began in 2010, when then-prime minister David Cameron, leading a coalition government consisting of the Conservatives and the centrist Liberal Democrats, moved into 10 Downing Street, ending 13 years of Labour rule under Tony Blair and his dour successor Gordon Brown. Relatively youthful at 44, Cameron, a self-described "liberal conservative," distinguished himself from previous generations of conservatives with stances like his calls for action on climate change.

But his economic policies were anything but moderate. Cameron's government came into office in the wake of the global financial crisis facing a budget deficit of some \$225 billion. In response, the government carried out a program of fiscal consolidation and budget cuts that the UK budget office has described as "one of the biggest deficit reduction programs seen in any advanced economy since World War II." Public spending fell from around 41 percent of GDP to 35 percent, with deep cuts to social programs, infrastructure, and international diplomacy.

Heading into the 2015 election, Cameron was also coming under pressure from the insurgent UK Independence Party, led by Farage, and from his own party's right-flank, to hold a referendum on whether the UK should remain a member of the European Union. Though Cameron personally

opposed withdrawing from the EU, in part to respond to dissidents from his right, he vowed that if he won, he would attempt to renegotiate Britain's relationship with the EU and then, hold an "in/out referendum" on whether Britain should stay.

As a short-term political move, it worked out great. The Conservatives won an overall majority in 2015, ending the coalition era. But Cameron was less successful in convincing Brussels to give Britain "special status" within the EU. Cameron won only minor concessions on sovereignty and immigration. There has always been an undercurrent of Euro-skepticism in British politics, but it grew stronger in the 2000s and 2010s. The financial crisis of 2008 and the eurozone debt crisis that followed undermined the appeal of the EU as an economic union. The unprecedented number of migrants who attempted to reach Europe in 2015 reduced support for the EU's open border policies.

In retrospect, it was a perfect storm for Brexit, but it was still stunning when the country voted 52 to 48 percent in 2016 to leave the EU. Cameron, who had campaigned for the "Remain" side, resigned as prime minister. He was replaced by Theresa May, previously the home secretary and a fellow Remainer, who had the unenviable task of negotiating Britain's withdrawal from the EU while simultaneously presiding over a civil war within her own party over how exactly Brexit should be implemented.

Moderates wanted a "soft Brexit" that would preserve Britain's access to Europe's common market. Hardliners wanted a "hard Brexit" that would prioritize ditching EU regulations and controlling immigration. European negotiators in Brussels were not going to let the Brits have both. Further complicating the process was an issue that few anticipated before the referendum: the economic and political status of Northern Ireland — the only part of the UK with a land border with the EU. Finding a way to avoid a hard border across the island of Ireland — a key pillar of the Northern Irish peace process — while also removing the UK as a whole from the EU turned out to be excruciatingly difficult.

May stepped down in 2019, and after an internal party leadership election, was replaced by former London mayor and omnipresent media figure Boris Johnson. Johnson is not exactly known for holding consistent views. In a 2014 interview for Slate, two years before the Brexit vote, he told me that when it came to the EU, "We may want to change our relationship a bit, but fundamentally we will remain within the European common market." Just a few years later, he would be one of the most visible and enthusiastic campaigners for "Leave".

A few months after taking office, Johnson called a national election, campaigning on a pledge to "get Brexit done" — and won a landslide victory. It didn't hurt that Labour at the time was led by the veteran

left-winger Jeremy Corbyn, who had both failed to take a strong stance on Brexit and was beset by accusations of anti-semitism.

Armed with his new large majority, Johnson did something unusual for him: He did what he said he would do and indeed got Brexit done. Britain formally left the EU on January 31, 2020. Just two years later, however, Johnson left as well, forced to resign over a scandal over allegations that he misled parliament over parties held in his office during Covid-19 lockdowns.

That was followed by the 50-day reign of Prime Minister Liz Truss, which was the shortest in British history — so short, in fact, that she was famously outlasted by a head of lettuce. Truss is mainly remembered for a proposed set of tax cuts so extreme it triggered weeks of panic in global bond markets and the kind of upbraiding from the IMF normally reserved for failed states.

Truss was then replaced by Sunak, who made history as the first prime minister of Asian descent, as well as the youngest one since William Pitt (the Younger, of course) in 1783. Under Sunak, the lingering effects of the pandemic and the shock to energy markets caused by the war in Ukraine have contributed to a cost-of-living crisis that has disproportionately impacted the poorest Britons. Sunak has tried to make the case that the UK economy is turning the corner — and indeed inflation is now starting to ease — but it's almost certainly too little too late.



British opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer attends a Labour general election campaign event at Hitchin Town Football Club in Hitchin, Britain, on July 1, 2024.
● GETTY IMAGES



Liberal Democrat leader Sir Ed Davey (front-left) is greeted by Tory "dinosaurs" as he unveils a banner and joins local Lib Dem campaigners at a celebratory rally in Winchester, following the results in local government elections.
● STEFAN ROUSSEAU/PA IMAGES

The aftermath

To some extent, Sunak's biggest crime is simply to be in office during a widespread anti-incumbent trend throughout the Western democratic world. He's deeply unpopular but not significantly more so than G7 counterparts like France's Emmanuel Macron and Germany's Olaf Scholz. Defenders of the Conservatives' time in office will point to the external shocks the party had to contend with, including the legacy of the 2008 financial crisis, the Covid pandemic, and the economic impact of the war in Ukraine. But every major economy had to deal with those shocks. Only one country — and one

party — chose Brexit.

Disentangling the effects of the withdrawal from other post-2020 shocks isn't easy, but a recent study from Britain's National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), an independent think tank, estimated that the UK's real GDP is about two to three percent lower today, compared to a scenario where it stayed in the union. Real income is about eight to nine percent lower.

According to the government's own figures, Britain's GDP today is only about 1.7 percent higher than it was pre-pandemic, compared to 3.7 percent for the Eurozone and 8.7 percent for the United States.

Ironically, Brexit didn't even accomplish the goal that motivated many of its supporters to vote for it: Net migration to the UK has actually increased since the withdrawal. Much of the debate around immigration policy has focused on the government's bizarre and inhumane plan to fly asylum seekers to Rwanda to have their claims processed, as a means of deterring them from trying. But asylum seekers are only about 11 percent of the UK's immigrants, and half of those are Ukrainians who entered under a specially tailored system and significantly more public support.

The real driver of migration is economic — including the economic

needs of Britain itself. As migration researcher Hein de Haas has written, while "Brexit successfully curtailed free inflows of EU workers, it did not eliminate labor shortages that had been driving increasing migration to the UK ever since the 1990s." Some jobs staffing Britain's stores and its much-beloved National Health Service have been filled by non-EU migrants instead of European ones; some European migrants who previously traveled back and forth between the UK and the continent have stayed put.

Brexit's advocates had argued that the benefits of trade with Europe could be offset by a free trade agreement that a new "global

Britain," unshackled from the EU, could pursue. But other than new deals with Australia and New Zealand, progress has been slow on that front. Johnson and Truss both promised a new free trade deal with the United States as a benefit of Brexit but badly misjudged the changing mood in Washington, where both the Republicans and Democrats have taken a turn toward protectionism. (Credit where it's due: Johnson did get the US to lift a ban on the imports of British lamb.) More than 60 percent of British voters, including more than a third of "Leave" voters, now say Brexit has been more of a failure than a success. But the damage is done.

Not-so-global Britain

The reality is that far from broadening Britain's horizons, Brexit has forced it to confront what it really is: a mid-sized country with a mid-sized economy that has a mid-sized influence on the world.

Asked what role foreign policy and national security have played in this election, Nick Witney, a former British diplomat and defense official now with the European Council on Foreign Relations, told Vox, "Not much because we don't have much of a foreign or defense policy at the moment. And there's going to be no money available to buy ourselves one for a number of years under new government."

Indeed, for all Johnson's talk of a "global Britain" recovering its "buccaneering" spirit, the UK cuts a more modest profile on the world stage today than it did when Conservatives took over. London has cut funding to the foreign office, foreign aid, and one of the country's most significant soft power assets: the BBC. Defense spending has increased since Russian President Vladimir

Putin's assault on Ukraine, but the size of the military in terms of manpower has shrunk. A last-ditch campaign proposal by Sunak to mandate national service for 18-year-olds did not go over well.

"No one talks about 'global Britain' anymore," said Witney. "It's extraordinary how our horizons have shrunk. If you go back 20 years, there was practically not a sparrow that fell anywhere around the globe where the British didn't feel they would have something to say about it. Nowadays, we are an impoverished and ultimately less ambitious country."

One very notable exception has been the war in Ukraine, where the UK has been a significant provider of military aid, training, and economic support — often taking a more aggressive stance than the US on providing new weapons systems and capabilities to the Ukrainians. Johnson may be persona non grata in British politics right now, but there are streets named after him in Ukraine.

What's next?

Probably due in part to the fact that the result hasn't really been in doubt, the election itself has been heavily dominated by gaffes and scandals, including Sunak's ill-advised decision to leave D-Day commemorations in France early and the revelations that candidates in both parties have been betting on the election.

It's also true that compared to figures like Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair, or even David Cameron — all of whom came into power in landscape-shifting change elections — current Labour leader Keir Starmer isn't exactly promising radical change. Starmer has managed to stabilize his party after the politically disastrous Corbyn years, and — perhaps not surprisingly given that he entered the race with a huge lead — has run on a relatively modest policy platform. It's too modest for some allies, who accuse him of "limping into No. 10," while the party has also angered progressives by barring several left-wing candidates, including two women of color, in the run-up to the election. Though the party opposed Brex-

it during the referendum, Labour does not plan to try to rejoin the European Union. Ahmet Kaya, an economist with the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, told Vox that wouldn't really be practical in the near term anyway, and that the focus should be on negotiations with Europe aimed at "reducing the barriers on trade and facilitating some of the free movement of people," particularly students. Steps like these, he said, could "reduce the overall negative impact of Brexit."

There won't be a huge shift in foreign policy either. Unlike in the US, support for Ukraine is pretty bipartisan in the UK. In the wake of the poisoning of a former Russian spy and his daughter on British soil in 2018 as well a flurry of coverage of how Russian oligarchs have manipulated the British financial system, there's little pro-Russian sympathy in the UK, though Farage recently caused a media uproar with remarks suggesting NATO was partly to blame for the war in Ukraine. Starmer has also taken some criticism from Muslim Labour supporters over being slow to call for a ceasefire in Gaza.

This hasn't mattered much for his election chances, but his choices on this and other contentious issues are going to get a lot tougher when he's actually in power.

Above all else, Starmer will face the challenge of overcoming the perceptions built up during the past decade. "Brexit has kind of defined how the UK is perceived internationally by many of our partners," Evie Aspinall, director of the British Foreign Policy Group, told Vox. "We're seen as a more isolated nation than we were prior to Brexit." There are some parallels here with the Biden administration, which came into office promising allies that "America is back" following the isolation of the Trump years. As with the Democrats in 2020, Labour has gone with a broadly popular — if somewhat dull — candidate, whose promise is that he can turn down the political temperature after a period of chaos and upheaval. It may not be enough to get them another 13- or 14-year stint in power, but it's almost certainly enough to turn the page on July 4.

The article first appeared on Vox.

Fasihi, Taftian punch Paris tickets as Iran seals 40 Olympic berths

Sports Desk

Iranian sprinters Farzaneh Fasihi and Hassan Taftian secured their places at the upcoming Paris Olympics, taking the country's slots at the sporting extravaganza to 40.

The final World Athletics Rankings before the Games – starting July 26 – were released on Tuesday, with Fasihi and Taftian obtaining wild cards for the women's and men's 100m contests respectively through the IOC's Universality Places program, which allows any country with no male or female qualified athlete or relay team enter its best-ranked athlete in either the 100m, 800m or marathon events.

This will be a second Olympic participation for Asian silver medalist Fasihi, who was part of the Iranian mission in the Tokyo Olympics three years ago, while Taftian will head to a third successive Games.

The two sprinters will be joined by 28 male and 10 female Iranians in 13 other sports in Paris.

While the two freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling squads are expected to lead the country's quest for glory, there could be a couple of Iranian dark horses emerging in other sports.

Aiming to become the most-decorated Iranian in the Olympic history, Hassan Yazdani (86kg) as well as reigning world champion Amirhossein Zare'

(125kg) will headline the five-man freestyle wrestling team – also including Rahman Amouzad (65kg), Younes Emami (74kg), and Amir-Ali Aazarpira (97kg).

Having beaten Turkish great Rıza Kayaalp to the world 130kg gold last year, Amin Mirzazadeh will be the Iranian to watch in the Greco-Roman contests, with Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) keen to improve on his Olympic bronze in Tokyo.

Mahdi Mohsennejad (60kg), Saeed Esmaeili (67kg), Amin Kavianinejad (77kg), and Alireza Mohmadi (87kg) are the other members of the GR squad. In taekwondo, Iran will fancy a first medal since Kimia Alizadeh's bronze in Rio 2016 when Nahid Kiani (women's -57kg), Mobina Ne'matzadeh (women's -48kg), Mehran Barkhordari (men's -80kg), and Arian Salimi (men's +80kg) on August 7.

Iranian girls Haniyeh Rostamian, Shermineh Chehel-Amirani, and Fatemeh Aminipajouh, as well as male prodigy Mohammad Beiranvand will be part of the shooting competitions, while Mobina Fallah will be the sole Iranian archer in Paris.

Mahsa Javer, Zeinab Norouzi, and Fatemeh Mojallal will take part in the women's rowing, with Mohammad-Nabi Rezaei and Ali Aqamirzaei participating in the men's canoe contests, though it is hard to believe any of the five Iranians will leave Paris with a medal.

The four-man saber team – comprising Ali Pakdaman, Mohammad Rahbari, Mohammad Fotouhi, and Farzad Baher – will be hoping to grab a historic fencing medal for Iran, while Pakdaman will still chase a last-gasp individual quota through the FIE World Rankings. Weightlifter Mirmostafa Javadi will step into the men's 89kg event as the reigning world champion and Ali Davoudi will be eager to add to his superheavy-weight silver in Tokyo, though Georgian sensation Lasha Talakhadze remains the ultimate favorite to win the +109kg gold.

Alamian brothers, Nima and No-shad, will be looking to build on their medal-winning runs in last year's Asian Games when contesting in the men's table tennis, with Neda Shahsavari vying for a decent campaign in the women's draw.

While Mahdi Ol-fati (artistic gymnastics – men's vault), Ali Labib (cycling – men's road race), and Samyar Abdoli (swimming – men's 50m) will be looking to improve their personal records in Paris, former world champion Reza Alipour will be full of hopes for a first-ever medal in the men's speed climbing.



MNA



IRNA

Iran settles for mixed silver in Taekwondo World Cup

Iran finished as the runner-up in the mixed contests of the WT World Cup Team Championships Series in Chuncheon, South Korea, following a final defeat against China.

The Iranian team came out victorious in straight rounds against the host for a place in the final showpiece but surrendered a first-round win (140-90) and lost 175-135 and 195-45 in the next

two rounds against the Chinese opponents.

The runner-up finish came after Iranian girls – Melika Mirhosseini, Yalda Valinejad, Mahla Mo'menzadeh, and Saghar Moradi – had beaten Morocco 2-1 (180-175, 120-145, 145-79) to walk away with a maiden women's trophy for the country in the competition. The Iranian four-man team – comprising Mahdi Abedini,

Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani, Ali Khoshravesh, and Abolfazl Zandi – had also marched to the men's title, thanks to a straight-round victory over South Korea in the final.

Iranian Olympians Nahid Kiani, Mobina Ne'matzadeh, Mehran Barkhordari, and Arian Salimi skipped this year's event to stay in Tehran and continue preparation for the upcoming Games in Paris.



IRNA

Turkey ride 'best save' and wave of emotion into Euros quarters

AFP – Turkey are turning their second home into a fortress at Euro 2024 as a blistering start and a stunning save from Mert Gunok at the death engineered a 2-1 win over Austria to reach the quarter-finals.

Austria boss Ralf Rangnick complained some games at the tournament had sent him to sleep. There was no chance of nodding off amid the cacophony of noise in Leipzig as Germany's Turkish diaspora descended once more to dominate three-quarters of the stadium.

Merih Demiral lit the fuse for an explosive atmosphere by smashing home the fastest ever goal in the knockout stages of a European Championship after just 58 seconds. The Al-Ahli centre-back, who had scored just two international goals in 47 caps before Tuesday, then remarkably bulleted in a header for his second of the night on the hour mark.

Michael Gregoritsch quickly pulled a goal back to set up a grandstand finish that produced arguably the most remarkable

save in the competition's history.

Christoph Baumgartner seemed certain to be Austria's hero in the 94th minute with a downward header that skipped off the slick surface and bounced up towards the far corner, only for Gunok's flying stop to turn it round the post.

The Besiktas goalkeeper wheeled around, to face the Turkish fans, roaring in celebration at his career-defining moment.

"I couldn't believe it," said Demiral. "Maybe one of the best saves I saw with my own eyes."

The save has drawn comparisons with England goalkeeper Gordon Banks' iconic stop from Pele in the 1970 World Cup.

"It is difficult when they have Gordon Banks in goal," beamed Rangnick when asked if Gunok's was the best he had ever seen.

Austria had emerged as dark horses for the tournament after winning a group that contained France and the Netherlands to end up on the perceived easier side of the draw.

Instead, it is Turkey who will now roll into Berlin on the weekend backed by a huge following with eyes on defeating the Dutch to match their best ever run at a Euros.

Five of Vincenzo Montella's squad were born in Germany, which is home to nearly three million people with Turkish roots.

"We are playing this tournament like we are playing at home," added Demiral.

"We are going to Berlin and we know there will be even more Turkish fans in the stadium so we are very excited."

Turkey's limitations were exposed in a 3-0 defeat to Portugal in the group stage despite the backing of a deafening support in Dortmund.

However, they are one of just three teams, along with Spain and Germany, to have won at least three of their four games at the tournament.

Captain Hakan Calhanoglu will return for the last eight after missing the Austria game due to suspension and they have one of the young stars of the tourna-



ment in Arda Guler. "I saw Turkish heart today and that's what I love about this country," said former Italian international Montella. "This passion and love is very visceral. I'm very happy to give

the Turkish people here in Germany, back home and all over the world this pride. "This support we constantly feel it but you can only embrace these dreams if you work really hard."

Turkey's goalkeeper Mert Gunok makes a save in the dying seconds of a last-16 victory over Austria in Euro 2024 in Leipzig, Germany, on July 2, 2024.

EBRAHIM NOROOZI/AP



Leader: Turnout in runoff 'backbone' of Islamic Republic

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei underscored the turnout of Iranians in the presidential runoff election on Friday as the "backbone" of the Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with scholars from Shahid Mottahari University in the capital Tehran on Wednesday as Iranian people, in their millions, are scheduled to cast their ballots for the second round of the presidential election on July 5, Press TV reported.

Describing the participation of people as the "backbone and source of pride for the Islamic Establishment," the Leader said, "The better, clearer and more evident the participation, the more capable the system will be to achieve its domestic goals and to pursue the goals in the strategic development of the country, which is a

big opportunity."

"This election is very important and anyone who loves Islam, the Islamic Republic, the progress of the country, the improvement of the situation and [favors] bridging the gaps should show this interest by participating in the election on Friday," the Leader said.

Ayatollah Khamenei described the turnout in the first round of the election as less than expected and contrary to predictions, stressing that the reasons are being investigated by politicians and sociologists.

Campaigning for the runoff vote officially began on Saturday, shortly after the results of the June 28 election were approved and announced by the Interior Ministry.

Masoud Pezeshkian and Saeed Jalili received the highest number of votes but no candidate managed to secure the absolute ma-



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks during a meeting with a group of scholars from Shahid Mottahari University in the capital Tehran on July 3, 2024.
● leader.ir

majority, paving the way for the runoff election. Pezeshkian is a former health minister and senior

lawmaker from the northwestern city of Tabriz. Jalili is the former lead nuclear negotiator and head of

the top security body. More than 24 million people cast their votes in Friday's election to replace

the late president Ebrahim Raisi, who lost his life in a helicopter crash on May 19.

UNSC should avoid double standards in fight against terrorism: *Iran*



International Desk

Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs has underscored the United Nations' leading role in the fight against terrorism, calling on the UN Security Council to avoid double standards in this regard.

Addressing the 63rd Annual Session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO) on Preventing and Countering Terrorism on Wednesday, Reza Najafi said that the UN should take appropriate steps in the fight against terrorism.

The Iranian official referred to the unilateral approaches adopted by some countries, including the United States, saying that such approaches have endangered the international peace and security.

He also said that a recent move taken by Canada to list Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps as a "terrorist" organization violates Iran's national sovereignty. Najafi underlined that Iran will decisively respond to the Canada's violation of its national security.

Najafi said terrorist groups act as the tools of some trans-regional actors to achieve their goals. He also pointed to the regional cooperation on the fight against terrorism, calling for the governments not to use their soil as a safe haven for terrorists.

He said that the dispatch of terrorists to the Middle East region is a threat to the peace, stability and security of all countries in the region. The Iranian official also warned about the relocation of terrorists in the region following the defeat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq. Najafi also described the designation of resistance groups in the Middle East region, including in the occupied Palestine, as "terrorists" by the Western governments as one of their destructive moves in the region.

"In fact, the repression of people under occupation (Palestinians) should be considered as a terrorist act, and so the Zionist regime is a clear example of a terrorist regime."

Iran's capital, Tehran, is hosting the two-day meeting of AALCO on Preventing and Countering Terrorism. AALCO, originally known as the Asian Legal Consultative Committee (ALCC), is an inter-governmental organization that was founded on 15 November 1956 with seven Asian states as its first members.

AALCO has presently 48 members comprising of the major states from Asia and Africa. Two-thirds of the world's population lives in AALCO member states.

Back in 2014, Iran held an AALCO meeting where such topics as maritime laws, rights of refugees and migrants, economic sanctions, latest developments in Palestine, as well as international trade laws and sustainable development were discussed.

Economy sparks blazing row in final runoff debate

National Desk

Three days before presidential runoff election on Friday, two candidates running for Iran's presidency, took part in the second and last televised debate to present their plans.

The Reformist Masoud Pezeshkian and Conservative Saeed Jalili discussed the country's economy, sanctions, and the 2015 nuclear deal on Tuesday night after the first debate, revolving basically around foreign policy, was held on Monday.

Campaigning for the runoff vote officially began on Saturday, shortly after the results of the June 28 election were approved and announced by the Interior Ministry.

Pezeshkian and Jalili received the highest number of votes but no candidate managed to secure the absolute majority, paving the way for the runoff election.

Pezeshkian, a cardiac surgeon, said that sanctions imposed by the West have badly hurt Iran's economy. He cited a 40 percent inflation over the past four years and the increasing poverty rates.

"We live in a society in which many are begging on the streets," he said, adding that his administration would "immediately" work to try to get sanctions lifted and vowed to "repair" the economy.

Nuclear deal

Pezeshkian said he would find a solution to revive the nuclear deal by dis-



Saeed Jalili (r) and Masoud Pezeshkian, the two candidates running for presidency, take part in a televised election debate at the Iranian national TV in Tehran, Iran on July 2, 2024.
● MORTEZA FAKHRINEJAD/IRIB

cussing the plan with the country's parliament and finding possible alternatives.

"No government in history has been able to flourish inside a cage," he said, referring to the impact of sanctions on Iran's economy.

However, he underlined that he will implement Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions, a law that was approved by the Iranian Parliament in December 2020.

Jalili, who strongly opposed the deal, said the US must honor its commitments on par "with the commitments we fulfilled." He condemned his opponent for not having any plans for getting sanctions lifted and said he would resume talks about a nuclear deal.

"You do not offer any solution for sanctions. Your only solution is to give more concessions, Jalili said.

Both candidates pledged to revive the economy, provide energy subsidies to poor people and facilitate importing cars while supporting the domestic auto industry.

Jalili said production volume is one of the most important issues related to cars. One of the ways

to increase production volume of cars is through imports.

Pezeshkian said there are many people who have dollars and if you allow, they will import cars into the country. Why don't we allow it?

"If you open up competition and allow cars to be imported, the market will regulate itself," he said.

Inflation

Jalili pointed to the high inflation rate in the country and said that the issue of inflation must be resolved, without blaming individuals.

"I have repeatedly said that the cause of inflation is the government that takes money out of people's pockets," Pezeshkian said.

"Amid sanctions, prices inevitably rise, and we cannot make purchases, leaving the government to dip into people's pockets," he added.

The candidates also discussed subsidy, stock market and oil export.

Iran sanctions US officials over suppressing pro-Palestine protests



The Iranian Foreign Ministry imposed sanctions on nearly a dozen US authorities for their role in suppressing pro-Palestinian protests that erupted at university campuses across the United States in condemnation of Israel's bloody onslaught against the Gaza Strip.

The ministry announced in a statement on Wednesday that the punitive measures were taken in accordance with the Law on "Countering the Violation of Human Rights and Adventurous and Terrorist Activities of the United States in the Region", (2017) particularly Article 5, which blacklists the following American individuals for their involvement in violation of human rights by quashing the peaceful rallies.

The statement further noted that the individuals will be subject to sanctions, pursuant to Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Sixth Section of the Law.

Accordingly, their accounts and transactions will be blocked in the Iranian financial and banking systems, and their assets will be frozen within the jurisdiction of the Islamic Republic of Iran. No visa granting their entry to the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be issued as well.

"All relevant national organizations and institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran will take necessary measures for the effective implementation of the sanctions, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the related authorities," the Iranian Foreign Ministry pointed out. Pro-Palestine student protests initially broke out at the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles in mid-April, with demonstrators calling for the end of the Gaza war and divestment with Israel.

Despite harsh crackdowns, including mass suspensions, evictions from university housing, and arrests, protests sprung up across the US with footage emerging of students, professors, and journalists being violently detained by the police on campuses. A new wave of demonstrations - marked by protesters setting up encampments on their campuses - also gripped the US while protests spread to other universities across the globe.

Iran kicks off tourism roadshow in Malaysia



Iran launched its Tourism Roadshow Southeast Asia 2024 in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday, underscoring the importance of strengthening bilateral tourism ties between the two Muslim-majority countries. Iran Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handi-

crafts, Ali-Asghar Shalbafian, said the launch highlighted the Iranian government's recent efforts to boost tourism and attract investment, which included organizing roadshows and fervently promoting the country's diverse tourist attractions. Shalbafian said his ministry had

invited renowned travel agencies from around the world to participate in business-to-business (B2B) sessions with their Iranian counterparts. "The government has received a positive response from global travel businesses and many individuals who recognize Iran's po-

tential as a tourism destination. This initiative will help counteract media distortion and fabrication about the country," he said during the event. Over 100 representatives from both Iranian and Malaysian travel companies attended the event. To attract tourists, Iran has

waived visa requirements for over half of the world's population, including Malaysia and most of the Southeast Asian countries. Recently, Iran granted tourist visa exemptions to 28 additional

na, Belarus and India. The ambassador of Iran to Malaysia, Valiollah Mohammadi Nasrabadi, who was present at the ceremony, emphasized the importance of opening Iran to tourism, and highlighted the numerous attractive destinations and the positive impact that tourism could have on the country's image. Nasrabadi acknowledged that Iran's reputation has suffered in recent years due to negative portrayals by Western media but he believed that tourists visiting the country would be pleasantly surprised to find out that the negative perceptions were unfounded. "Opening up Iran for tourism offers many benefits, including economic and social potentials, as well as advancements in science and technology. We invite people from all over the world to visit Iran and experience the reality in the country," he said.



Iran's tourism delegation including Ambassador to Malaysia Valiollah Mohammadi Nasrabadi (3rd L) and Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Ali-Asghar Shalbafian (4th L) pose for a photo at the opening ceremony of Tourism Roadshow Southeast Asia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on July 3, 2024. ● BERNAMA

countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, Tanzania, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Brunei, Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Iranian artist to stage Persian classic in Russia



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian playwright Peyman Khazeni will produce and perform the Persian cultural project 'Khosrow and Shirin' in Voronezh, Russia. The original story of Khosrow and Shirin was created by Persian poet Nezami Ganjavi in 1177. Melika Shahab, artistic director of the multimedia project, said this is part of Khazeni's ongoing efforts to promote Persian culture, language, and literature. The project will debut with support from the M.B.A. International Academy's music department, IRNA wrote. "The research phase of this project is complete, and the writing is in its final stages," Shahab said. "It will first be released as an audio production and later as a multimedia stage performance." Shahab described 'Khosrow

and Shirin' as a masterpiece of lyrical literature and one of the world's most famous romantic epics, with versions existing in other cultures. The story tells the tragic love tale of the Persian prince Khosrow and the Armenian princess Shirin, with the involvement of Farhad. The multimedia performance will incorporate visual arts and Iranian improvisational art, blending modern and traditional Iranian art forms, Shahab added, the music will be presented in contemporary Iranian styles and performed by an ensemble. Zohreh Firoozi, known for her acting and singing in 'Nowhere' will play the role of Shirin in the upcoming project. Peyman Khazeni has produced several works, including 'Where Is the Wind's Home,' 'Remember Me,' and 'Parichehreh.'

Tehran, Islamabad hold conference on academic-cultural dialogue

The Second International Conference on Iran-Pakistan Academic-Cultural Dialogue took place at Allama Iqbal Open University on July 2-3. The event, in collaboration with the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, brought together delegations from six Iranian universities and 20 participants from major universities in Pakistan. The two-day conference aimed to strengthen academic, research, and cultural ties between Iran and Pakistan. Attendees discussed the importance of scientific communication between the two countries' academic and cultural centers.

Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairperson of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, emphasized the necessity of cultural, scientific, and educational exchanges to enhance bilateral relations. He stressed the importance of utilizing shared experiences and overcoming mutual differences for the benefit of both nations. The head of the Iranian delegation leader Hojatoleslam Seyyed Abolhassan Navab, president of University of Religions and Denominations, expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to visit Pakistan and highlighted the shared values and cooperation opportunities between the two countries.



Both sides committed to enhancing interactions between their academic institutions and

promoting the mutual benefits of their cultural and educational collaborations.

Iranian men play twice as many video games as women

Social Desk

A new report by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation reveals that Iranian men play video games twice as much as women. The study, based on a sample of 34 million people, shows that 12% of players are professional gamers, with men making up a significant portion. The report provides detailed information on Iranian gamers, analyzing demographics, behavior, consumption, and geography. It examines game consumption patterns, preferred genres and characters, daily playtime, and spending, ILNA wrote. The study identifies three categories of gamers based on weekly playtime: Casual gamers (1-5 hours), dedicated gamers (5-21



hours), and professional gamers (21+ hours). Casual gamers, who represent 45% of the total, engage in gaming for short periods under specific conditions. Dedicated gamers are the middle group, while professional gamers are highly engaged, leading in spending, online play, and daily gaming hours. The report highlights daily gaming as a key indicator, with only 6% of professional gamers not playing daily. Preferences differ by gender: men favor sports games, while women prefer puzzle and strategy games.

'Salman the Persian' returns to northern Iran for new filming phase

The TV series 'Salman the Persian,' directed by Davood Mirbagheri, returned to Shahroud for its latest filming phase. The series, which began production nearly five years ago, features over 1,000 main actors and 4,000 extras. It is expected to continue filming in Shahroud until October before moving to Tehran's Ghazali Cinema Town, IRNA wrote. As the largest TV project in Iran's history, the series will undergo technical work for at least another five years. 'Salman the Persian,' produced by Hossein Taheri and written by Mirbagheri, began filming in Kerman in Decem-

ber 2019 and has also filmed in Qeshm, Jolfa, and various cinema towns. The series covers three historical periods: Sassanid Iran, the Byzantine Empire, and early Islamic Hejaz. The cast includes Farhad Aslani, Alireza Shoja Nouri, Dariush Farhang, Mohammad Reza Hedayati, Behnaz Tavakoli, Ehteram Boroumand, Ramona Shah, Ali Dehkordi, the late Changiz Jalilvand, Mehdi Faghih, Mohammad Javad Jafarpour, and Alireza Mehran, along with several international actors from Armenia, Greece, Morocco, and Tunisia, and about 1,500 local theater actors.