

# Reformist faces Conservative as Iran votes in presidential runoff



Masoud Pezeshkian

TASNIM



Saeed Jalili

ISNA

## National Desk

Iranians cast their votes on Friday in the second round of the country's presidential election to pick the successor for the late president Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a tragic helicopter crash on May 19. Opinion polls conducted before the runoff election predicted higher turnout than the first round during which 40% of 61 million eligible voters participated – the lowest turnout in any presidential election since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The Friday's race was between Reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian and the Conservative Saeed Jalili, both of whom failed to secure an outright majority in the first round of the election on June 28. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei cast his ballot when polling stations opened nationwide in the morning.

"I heard that the enthusiasm and interest of the people is more than before, praise to God that it will be like this, and if it is like this, it will be gratifying," he said. "At this stage, people should be more motivated to finish the job and have our president tomorrow," he said. "May God help the nation succeed and prosper the country and make all those who are struggling in this way subject to his grace and mercy." In last week's first round, Pezeshkian, who was the only Reformist permitted to stand, won the largest number of votes, around 42 percent, while Jalili came second with 39 percent, according to figures from Iran's elections authority. Pezeshkian and Jalili have held two televised debates during which they discussed a range of issues from Iran's economic woes, international relations and internet restrictions.

The candidacy of Pezeshkian, a relatively unknown until recently, has revived cautious hopes for Iran's Reformist wing after years of dominance by the conservative camps. Pezeshkian has called for efforts to salvage the nuclear agreement and lift crippling economic sanctions. The 69-year-old heart surgeon has advocated for "constructive relations" with the world in order to "get Iran out of its isolation". A member of parliament representing the northwestern city of Tabriz since 2008, he has earned the support of Iran's Reformists, with former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani backing his bid. Casting his ballot on Friday, Khatami urged Iranians to vote "for the future and good of the country." While campaigning, the 58-year-old Jalili criticized moderates for having signed the 2015 deal which promised

Iran sanctions relief in return for curbs on its nuclear program. Jalili, the former nuclear negotiator, said the accord, which the United States withdrew from in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump, "did not benefit Iran at all." Both Jalili and Pezeshkian voted in southern Tehran, home to many poor neighborhoods, in a bid to boost turnout. Though Pezeshkian came out on top in the first round of voting on June 28, Jalili has been trying to secure the votes of people who supported Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who came in third and later endorsed the former negotiator. Mohsen Eslami, the election headquarters spokesperson, said on Thursday that there are 58,640 polling stations, the same as before. He also said that early results could be announced by Saturday morning.

## SCO capacities should be used to promote member states' welfare: *Iran*

### Mokhber proposes establishment of SCO joint bank

Iran's Interim President Mohammad Mokhber said that there are many capacities in the realm of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states that should be used for the benefit of the welfare of nations. Mokhber made the remarks on Thursday in an address to the 24th Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO in Astana, Kazakhstan.

He called on the SCO members to enhance their transit, commercial and banking relations and move towards ditching the US dollar in their economic transactions. "There are many opportunities and capacities in the territory of the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the field of trade, production, energy, transportation, agriculture,

customs, telecommunications, as well as the development of technology in the field of artificial intelligence, for interaction, which should be used for the benefit of the welfare of nations and consolidation of sustainable peace and inclusive development in the Shanghai region and around the world," Mokhber said. He also underlined that the activation of transit corridors plays a key role in

The SCO is one of the world's largest regional organizations, accounting for around one-third of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), roughly 40 percent of the world's population, and nearly two-thirds of the entire Eurasian landmass.

#### Mokhber meets with Xi, Putin

The Iranian interim president also held separate talks with several heads of states participating in the conference. During his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Mokhber said relations between Iran and China are built on the principles of common interests and mutual respect. He underscored that Iranian and Chinese officials are determined to further expand mutual cooperation in economic, commercial and energy spheres. Xi, for his part, said the relations between Beijing and Tehran were strategic, emphasizing that China's policy to enhance relations with the Islamic Republic is not influenced by external factors. The Iranian interim president also held a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, during which Mokhber said strategic relations between Iran and Russia have changed the world's power equations and challenged the unjust order based on unilateralism. He said Iran and Russia enjoy deep-rooted, strategic and unchangeable relations which influence the ongoing developments in the world.

facilitating trade and economic development. All the SCO members, he added, can trade with other countries faster and cheaper than before through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the southern Iranian ports. The interim president also offered the creation of a joint network of free zones, as well as preferential and free trade agreements within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. He emphasized that Iran supports the use of national currencies in multilateral transactions with the aim of reducing reliance on the US dollar or ditching it. The establishment of an SCO joint bank can improve the level of financial and economic cooperation among the organization's member states, Mokhber added.

## Tories expelled from Downing Street after historic defeat

Labour leader Starmer becomes UK prime minister



Britain's Labour Party leader Keir Starmer delivers a speech during a victory rally at the Tate Modern in London early on July 5, 2024.

JUSTIN TALLIS/AFP

Keir Starmer has become the UK's first Labour prime minister since 2010 after his party's landslide general election victory. Labour is returning to power with a huge parliamentary majority of 174, following a collapse in support for the Conservatives, BBC reported.

Keir has been formally appointed by the King at Buckingham Palace, replacing Tory leader Rishi Sunak.

"We did it!" Starmer said in his victory speech. "Change begins now."

Outgoing Prime Minister Sunak concedes defeat, says he will step down as leader of the Conservative Party. In a short farewell speech, Sunak apologized to unsuccessful Tory candidates and told the public: "I have heard your anger, your disappointment."

Labour's victory has come largely as a result of a dramatic 20 point drop in Tory support, with the party down 250 seats to 121, a historic low.

It marks a dramatic turnaround in fortunes for Keir's party, which suffered its worst result in terms of seats - 202 - at the last election in 2019 under Keir's predecessor Jeremy Corbyn.

Despite only increasing its share of the national vote by around 2%, the party has won 412 seats with just two seats yet to declare, delivering a result just short of the historic 179 majority won by Tony Blair in 1997.

Its vote share increase came entirely as a result of a 17-point increase in support in Scotland, where it regained its status as the largest party as the SNP slumped from 48 to just nine seats.

On a good night for smaller parties, the Liberal Democrats won 71 seats, the party's best result in a century, whilst Nigel Farage will become one of four MPs for Reform UK, following a breakthrough night for the fledgling party. Keir fought a cautious campaign in which Labour made very few new policy pledges, but managed to largely retain the large polling lead over the Tories it began with when outgoing Tory PM Rishi Sunak called the election in May.

This polling lead had remained steady since the disastrous premiership of Liz Truss, who lost her previously safe seat of South West Norfolk.

Despite its resounding overall victory, Labour lost a number of former strongholds to independent candidates campaigning on pro-Gaza platforms.

In one of the biggest shocks of the night, shadow minister Jonathan Ashworth lost his Leicester South seat, which had a majority of more than 22,000.

Shadow culture secretary Thangam Debbonaire lost in Bristol Central to the Greens, who celebrated their most successful election night ever after winning four seats, up from the one they held in the last Parliament.

And shadow health secretary Wes Streeting - one of Labour's most high-profile figures during the campaign - saw his majority in Ilford North slashed from more than 9,000 to just 528.

Labour fought its campaign on a manifesto centered around boosting the UK's sluggish rate of economic growth in recent years.

It pledged to do this largely through changes to the planning system, and by making the country more attractive to inward investment. But against a difficult economic backdrop, party figures have admitted they face a challenge amid challenges to the public finances.

The party has also promised to overhaul UK employment law, renationalize nearly all passenger rail and set up a state-owned energy investment and generation company, along with boosting green investment.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

