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Senior Editor-in-chief: Hadi Khosroshahin
Editor-in-chief: Asgar Ghahramanpour

Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711560
Address: 208, Khorramshahr Ave., Tehran, Iran
Advertising Dept. Tel/Email: +98 21 88500601/irandaily@iranagahiha.com
Website: www.irandaily.ir/newspaper.irandaily.ir
Email: irandaily@icpi.ir

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Science minister calls TOEFL, GRE suspension 'stone age' behavior

Social Desk

Iran's Science Minister Hossein Simaei Sarraf on Tuesday condemned the suspension of TOEFL and GRE testing in Iran as "Stone Age" behavior, while Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said the move showed that Washington was targeting Iranian citizens across fields including education.

The US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) indefinitely suspended General License G on August 24, which had authorized certain academic exchanges and the export and import of specified educational services involving Iran, IRNA reported.

Following the regulatory change, the US-based Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administers the TOEFL and GRE, halted both examinations in Iran pending further review. ETS said the decision was taken to comply with US sanctions laws and that affected candidates would be contacted directly.

The suspension directly affects Iranian students, researchers and other applicants who use standardized test scores as part of applications to universities abroad. TOEFL measures English proficiency in reading, listening, speaking and writing, while the GRE is a standardized graduate admissions examination used by many universities and programs internationally.

Simaei Sarraf said the National Organization of Educational Testing, which oversees international examinations in Iran, was reviewing the situation. "It is interesting that participation in an examination is essentially being prohibited based on Iranian nationality," he told reporters on the sidelines of an event in Tehran.

"These are no longer anything but 'Stone Age' behaviors," the minister said, arguing that sanctions were intended to pressure Iran into submission. He also pointed to what he described as a longer record of restrictions affecting Iranian universities and academic publications.

Baghaei said Foreign Ministry departments were working to facilitate access to such examinations for Iranian students and applicants.

"If there were even the slightest sincerity in their claims about nuclear concerns," Baghaei said, "what does a student examination, or an issue solely related to student exchanges, have to do with the nuclear issue?"

He described the latest restrictions as part of what Washington itself has called economic pressure on Iran, saying their effects extended to "science, knowledge, technology" and academic exchanges. Baghaei acknowledged that the measures created difficulties but said Iran would pursue alternative mechanisms to enable students and researchers to continue their academic activities.

Iran unveils rial, foreign-currency tourism credit cards

Trust, seamless payments key to winning over tourists: *Salehi-Amiri*

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran on Tuesday unveiled an instant-issuance platform for rial and foreign-currency tourism credit cards, as Tourism Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri called for modern financial infrastructure to make payments easier for international visitors and strengthen their overall travel experience.

The Payval platform, unveiled at the headquarters of Refah Bank in Tehran in the presence of Salehi-Amiri, Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Minister Ahmad Meydari and the bank CEO Esmaeil Lalegani, enables travelers to obtain virtual tourism cards online without an in-person visit.

"Trust-building is more important than the volume of cards," Salehi-Amiri said, stressing that the quality of a traveler's experience should be the main measure of the platform's performance.

The minister said foreign visitors should not have to carry large amounts of foreign currency or struggle with payments for accommodation, restaurants, transportation, shopping and souvenirs in different cities.

"They should be able to use a reliable payment instrument just like a citizen," he said.

Developed by Danesh Refah Pardis, a Refah Bank subsidiary, the platform provides access to rial and foreign-currency cards through an online registration process. Users can fund a multi-asset wallet and receive a virtual card instantly.

The platform supports holdings in rials, dollars and digital gold, with provisions for converting assets into the currency needed to fund the card. It also offers online services for currency conversion and digital-gold transactions.

Iranian Tourism Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri (1st R) and Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Minister Ahmad Meydari (1st L) as well as officials unveil the Payval platform for instant-issuance rial and foreign-currency tourism credit cards in Tehran on September 1, 2026.
CHTN

Security features include TLS encryption, two-factor authentication, one-time passwords and instant transaction alerts.

Salehi-Amiri urged the operators to establish a continuous mechanism for identifying and resolving technical problems, warning that a poor first experience could discourage travelers from using the service.

He also called for dedicated support points at major airports, including those in Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan and Shiraz, so visitors can receive immediate assistance if they encounter problems with the card or platform.

The minister said neighboring countries should remain a priority market for Iran's tourism industry, noting that visitors from neighboring states already travel to Mashhad, northern provinces and other destinations across the country.

Iran has received more than 12.2 million foreign tourists over the past two years, Salehi-Amiri said, while the country has set a target of 15 million visitors under the Seventh Development Plan.

The ministry also said Refah Bank has allocated six trillion rials to help address part of the financial pressures and losses faced by tourism and handicraft businesses. Salehi-Amiri said the Payval platform should ultimately connect hotels, travel agencies, accommodation providers, transport services and retailers into a more seamless payment network.

The initiative, he said, goes beyond a financial tool and can help shape visitors' perceptions of Iran by making everyday services "smooth, smart and reliable."