

# Iran, Saudi agree to reschedule Sepahan-Al Ittihad fixture: **FM**

## Sports Desk

Iran and Saudi Arabia have agreed on a second date for the AFC Champions League game between Persian Gulf Pro League side Sepahan and the Jeddah giant Al Ittihad, said the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. The match in Group C of the Asian elite clubs competition was called off at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on Monday after the Saudi side refused to take to the pitch.

Al Ittihad is yet to officially announce the reason behind the controversial decision but wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that the club was informed by the AFC's organizing official that "the game would not take place on the scheduled date and the team is allowed to leave the venue." Al Ittihad flew back to Saudi Arabia on Monday night. "The Saudi Foreign Minister [Faisal bin Farhan] and I have been in contact regarding the issue and

we have already agreed to reschedule the fixture," Amir-Abdollahian said on the sidelines of a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday. "The Tehran-Riyadh ties are on the right track and we can't afford to let the sports be manipulated as a political leverage," added the Iranian top official, while calling on the AFC to "act on a technical basis when deciding on the situation." In a statement on Monday night, the Asian football governing body said the game was canceled

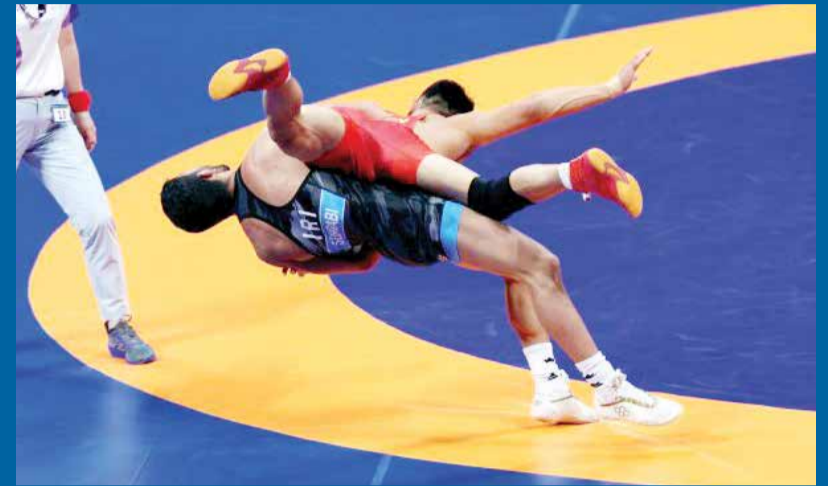
"due to unanticipated and unforeseen circumstances," adding: "This matter will now be referred to the relevant committees." Several sources, including the Iranian Fars and Tasnim new agencies, reported that the players of the Saudi side refused to leave the dressing room due to a bust of Iranian Quds Force General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in a US drone strike in Baghdad in January 2020, being placed at the entrance to the pitch.



▶ Sepahan fans are seen in the stands at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on October 2, 2023.  
● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

## Hangzhou Asian Games:

# Alizadeh, Kavianinejad grab GR silvers, Sohrabi bags bronze



▶ Iran's Danial Sohrabi (blue) is in action in the Greco-Roman 67kg contests at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, on October 4, 2023.  
● hangzhou2022.cn

## Sports Desk

The first day of the Greco-Roman wrestling contests at the Hangzhou Asian Games saw Iranians collect two silver medals and a bronze across four weight classes. Nasser Alizadeh made it to the final showdown of the 87kg event, only to suffer a 7-4 defeat against Uzbekistan's Jalgasbay Berdimurtov. Amin Kavianinejad also finished his campaign with a silver after a loss to Kyrgyzstan's Akzhol Makhmudov – two-time world champion and a silver winner in Tokyo Olympics – in the 77kg final. Danial Sohrabi, meanwhile, recovered from a last-four setback

against Meirzhan Shermakhanbet of Kazakhstan to beat China's Li Lei 3-2 and walk away with the joint 67kg bronze. Elsewhere in the Games on Wednesday, the Iranian kabaddi teams came out victorious against their opponents. The country's men's side defeated South Korea 64-23 to win Group B and progress into the semifinals. In the women's competitions, Iran also secured a last-four place, thanks to a 54-16 triumph over Bangladesh. In water polo, Iran fell to a 15-7 defeat against the host but still managed to qualify for the men's quarterfinals as the runner-up in Group B.

## AFC Champions League:

# Nassaji outclassed by Al Hilal; Persepolis shows character against Al Duhail

## Sports Desk

Iranian minnow club Nassaji Mazandaran was given a reality check by Al Hilal in the AFC Champions League group stage, falling to a 3-0 home defeat against the Saudi giant on matchday two in Group D on Tuesday. The result came a day after Persian Gulf Pro League champion Persepolis bounced back from a first-day loss in Group E to walk away with a massive 1-0 victory at Al Duhail.

## Stars make the difference

Saudi clubs stole the global headlines in the summer transfer window by luring some top-notch players in the European leagues to the country's top-flight, and it was the different class offered by Al Hilal's international stars that inspired the Riyadh-based side to a commanding win at the Azadi Stadium.

Ex-Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic headed home from close range 18 minutes into the game and Brazilian magic man Neymar summed up his man-of-the-match performance with a goal in the second half before his corner-kick led to Saleh al-Shehri adding a third in the stoppage time. "We put in all our efforts into the game but some of our players are playing in the competition for the first time and today you could easily see what kind of contribution a \$200m player can make," Nassaji keeper Rashid Mazaheri said after the game. With Al Hilal the ultimate favorite to win the group, it already looks like a battle between the other three teams for a runner-up finish and a possible place in the knockout phase. Nassaji is third in the group – thanks to a first-day 2-0 win at Mumbai City

– trailing Al Hilal and Navbahor, who shared the points in Riyadh two weeks ago, by a single point. Elsewhere on Tuesday, Navbahor defeated the Indian side 3-0 at home.

## Reds recover

Stepping into Monday's game

in Doha, Persepolis knew a second successive defeat would have left the Reds' chances of progress in the balance. When the Tehran giant was beaten 2-0 by Al Nassr at home a fortnight ago, Yahya Golmohammadi's side was thoroughly criticized for being overwhelmed by the opponent's big names in Cristiano Ronaldo, Sadio Mane, and Marcelo Brozovic. The Iranian domestic double champion was a shadow of itself on the day, and a second-half red card for Milad Sarlak, coupled with Mahdi Torabi's early injury, added to the Reds misery. However, despite missing the key trio in Sarlak, Torabi, and Vahid Amiri, the Tehran Reds rose up to the occasion, producing one of their finest performances in recent months to beat the Qatari champion and revive hopes of progress. Making only a third start

since March, Omid Alishah seized the opportunity in style as his second-half strike led Persepolis to the victory, though the margin would have been more superior had the Reds been more clinical in the opposition box. "I enjoyed the win as we showed we are a good team. We expected a very tough match but we were able to hold our own," said the Iran international keeper Alireza Beiranvand after the match. "We are in one of the most difficult groups but we asserted our quality against a good Al Duhail side. I hope we can continue with this form domestically as well as on the continental front." Al Nassr, meanwhile, came from behind for a 3-1 home win against Istiklol to maintain its perfect record, with Persepolis in second. Next for Persepolis is a double header against Istiklol.



▶ Al Hilal's Neymar (blue) is seen in action against Nassaji Mazandaran at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on October 3, 2023.  
● AFC