

Algeria agree to host Palestine games



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BBC – Algeria says it has agreed to host the Palestine national team's forthcoming football matches following a request from the Palestinian FA.

Palestine are scheduled to start their 2026 World Cup campaign in the Asian section next month.

Their first qualifier, away to Lebanon on 16 November, will be played in the United Arab Emirates.

A 'home' match against Australia five days later looks set to be played in the North African country. Following the attack on Israel by Hamas on 7 October, the Gaza Strip has been the subject of retaliatory air strikes, which have resulted in nearly 3,000 deaths, with the Israelis looking set to launch an imminent ground offensive.

"The president of the Algerian Football Federation, Mr Walid Sadi, announces that our country will host the official Palestine-Australia match, scheduled for November," the Algerian federation wrote on its website.

The statement added that the decision to host "all official and unofficial matches as part of the Palestinian football team's preparation for the 2026 World Cup and the 2027 Asian Cup qualifiers" was taken "in accordance with Algeria's leading authorities".

The Algerian federation added that it will pay all costs, such as transport and accommodation, related to Palestine's stay.

Iranian volleyball in quest of high-profile coach for national team: *Report*



● legavolley.it



● volleyball.ir



● worldofvolley.com

⬆ L-R: Italian Gianlorenzo Blengini, Russian Vladimir Alekno, and Brazilian Renan Dal Zotto are the three candidates for the Iranian national team job.

Sports Desk

The Iranian Volleyball Federation is considering a shortlist of world-class coaches for the national team, according to sports news website Varzesh 3.

The job has been vacant for the past two weeks after Behrouz Ataei stepped down from his role in the aftermath of a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through the FIVB Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Rio de Janeiro.

A disappointing run in the competition saw the Asian powerhouse hit rock bottom as a seventh-place finish in the eight-team table in Pool A left Iran on the brink of missing out on a

berth for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The qualification campaign was the latest episode in a woeful five months for the team under Ataei, during which Iran finished third from bottom in the preliminary round of the Volleyball Nations League in July before losing out to Japan in straight sets in the Asian Championship final on home soil.

Iran still managed to grab the gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games in early October but the 53-hour trip from China to Brazil surely hindered Iran's quest for direct Olympic qualification. Ataei's resignation came only two years after he had become the first domestic

head coach on Iran bench in more than a decade, when he took over from Russian Vladimir Alekno following a group stage exit at the Tokyo Olympics.

And now, in a last-ditch effort to secure a place in next year's Games, the Iranian volleyball governing body has decided to go back to the foreign coach solution, coming up with a three-man shortlist for the position, Varzesh 3 wrote this week. Alekno, who steered his country to a famous five-set victory over Brazil for the Olympic gold in London 2012, is back in contention for the job, though he has been away from coaching since the Tokyo Games and told Varzesh 3 that he

would only consider working with the Iranian federation in a "consultancy capacity".

However, Alekno's former Italian assistant Tomaso Totolo has reportedly been in talks with the Russian in recent days, trying to lure him back to the coaching role of Iran.

Meanwhile, Gianlorenzo Blengini is the favorite candidate for the chairman of the Iranian federation, Mohammadreza Davarzani, and the Italian has already sent a positive signal in early negotiations, but Iran still faces a tough task in securing the services of the 51-year-old coach as he is under contract with Volley Lube club in his home country.

The pinnacle of Blengini's coaching career came in the Rio 2016 Olympics, where he led Italy to the silver medal. He was also in charge of the European heavyweight when it came out on top in four sets against Alekno's Iran at the Olympics two years ago.

Brazilian Renan Dal Zotto is also regarded as serious contender for the position by the Iranian federation. Dal Zotto is currently the head coach of Brazil – a job he took in 2016 – but could make way for a new face ahead of the Olympics after a run of below-par results in recent months – including a last-eight exit in the VNL Finals in the summer. Whoever is appointed to

the Iranian role will have a daunting task on his hands to keep the faint hope of the Olympic qualification alive. With Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan having already joined host France, and Egypt likely to take the African slot, only four quotas remain up for grabs, which will be decided through the FIVB Men's World Ranking by the end of the preliminary phase of 2024 Volleyball Nations League.

As it stands, Italy – third in the ranking – as well as Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the favorites to book a ticket for the French capital, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

'We were very clear': Lindelöf on stopping Belgium v Sweden game

Victor Lindelöf has said it was the players who made the decision to abandon the Euro 2024 qualifier against Belgium after they were told that two Swedish fans had been shot dead in Brussels before the game. The attack on the supporters happened before the game at the King Baudouin Stadium, which kicked off at 8.45pm local time, but the players were not informed of the incident until half-time, at which point Lindelöf, Sweden's captain, felt it was impossible to carry on.

"I tried to talk to all the players about how they felt," the Manchester United defender said. "And then I felt that I wanted to speak to the Belgian players. I explained the situation and we were very clear that we did not want to carry on and they completely understood that."

The game was abandoned after a short delay but fans were told that they would be safer inside the stadium for the time being. They were then let out after sev-



⬆ Belgium (red) and Sweden players observe a minutes of silence for the victims of the war in Palestine and Israel at the King Baudouin Stadium, Brussels, Belgium, on October 16, 2023. ● YVES HERMAN/REUTERS

eral hours. Lindelöf added: "There are players who had family and friends

here and we wanted to look after our fans. Those who had family and friends

here wanted to make contact with them to see if they were OK. People were

worried but our security team handled it very well." The Sweden coach, Janne

Andersson, who will leave his post after the team failed to qualify for the European Championship in Germany next year, said:

"We came down to our dressing room at half-time and were given this information and I felt straight away that this is completely unreal. What kind of a world are we living in today? I feel incredibly sad."

"When the group started to talk about this we agreed 100% that we did not want to play the game, out of respect for the victims and their families."

Lindelöf and Andersson said there would not be much point in playing the second half at a later date. "It doesn't matter," Andersson said. "If something had rested on this game ... but as far as we are concerned we're out and it feels like we shouldn't be playing football when these kind of things are happening in the world." Lindelöf added: "I agree with Janne. I don't think there is any point to finish this game."

Shooter gunned down
Police in Brussels shot dead the man who killed two Swedish nationals on Monday evening.

The 45-year-old man named as Abdesalem was shot in a café in the Schaarbeek neighbourhood. Two Swedes were killed and a third injured in the automatic rifle attack on Monday.

The gunman is believed to be a man of Tunisian origin who was in Belgium illegally, after his asylum application was rejected in 2020.

He posted a video online saying he had killed people in the name of God and the prosecutor's office believes he was inspired by the Islamic State group. Belgian Interior Minister Annelies Verlinden told Flemish public broadcaster VRT that the automatic weapon found on him was the same as the one used in Monday's attack.

The Guardian and the BBC contributed to this article.