

## Asian Taekwondo Championships: Kiani crashes out as Iran bags double bronzes

### Sports Desk

Reigning world champion Nahid Kiani suffered an early exit from the 26th Asian Taekwondo Championships, but Iran still managed to grab a couple of consolation bronzes on Day 1 of the kyorugi contests in Da Nang, Vietnam. Representing the country in the women's -53kg event, Kiani was stunned by Chutikan Jongkolrattananawattana of Thailand in straight rounds in her first bout – a reality check ahead of the Paris Olympics in July for the Iranian, who also fell short against Thursday's opponent in last year's Asian Games.

Elsewhere, Saeideh Nasri, stepping into the women's -46kg contests fresh from a bronze-winning campaign in April's Galeb Belgrade Trophy in Serbia, also walked away with a bronze in her debut at the Asian Championships.

Nasri came out on top against Mongolian Badam Lkhagva in back-to-back rounds and then beat Ruka Okamoto of Japan with the same scoreline for a place in the semifinals, before a 2-1 defeat against China's Wang Shiyi saw the Iranian girl settle for a joint third-spot finish.

Matin Rezaei won his third bronze in a major event in 12 months – following last year's world event and the Asian Games – in the men's -63kg competitions.

Rezaei eased past Jin Tsuruoka of Japan and Saudi Zakariya Ghali without conceding a single round but Jang Jun – a bronze medalist in Tokyo Olympics and former world gold and silver winner – proved too tough to beat in the semifinals as the Iranian finished on the third podium after a 2-0 loss to the South Korean.

Contested by more than 570 athletes from 36 countries, the event will finish with the para taekwondo competitions on Sunday.



## Iranian Hazfi Cup: Sepahan lands Golgohar in last four; Tractor stunned by Mes



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Farshad Ahmadzadeh headed home late in the first half as Sepahan edged out Malavan 1-0 in the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium in the Iranian Hazfi Cup quarterfinals.

With the Isfahan-based club lagging behind Tehran archrivals Esteghlal and Persepolis in the Persian Gulf Pro League table with three games to spare, the domestic cup will give Sepahan the last opportunity to end the nine-year trophy drought.

Awaiting Sepahan and Portuguese head coach Jose Morais in the last four will be Golgohar Sirjan, which thrashed Masoud Shojaei's Havadar by five unanswered goals in Sirjan on Thursday to progress.

Ahmadreza Zenderouh's sublime header gave Golgohar an eighth-minute lead but the home supporters had to wait until the closing stages of the contest for their team to finish off the game.

Young striker Saeid Saharkhizan found the net in the 71st minute before substitute Masoud Zaer Kazemeini put the game to bed with a bouncing header three minutes later.

Kazemeini bagged his second of the afternoon in the fifth minute of added time and then set up Mahdi Mamizadeh, who rounded off his side's emphatic display with a curling effort from the edge of the box.

Elsewhere, Tractor's quest for a second cup title in four years came to an end after a 1-0 loss to Mes Rafsanjan in Tabriz.

It could have been a different outcome for the host in the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, had Rahman Ja'fari not sent his effort from the spot wide with 13 minutes left on the clock.

Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi's low drive in the 91st minute sealed the victory for the visiting side as Mes continued its impressive run under Moharram Navidkia, who took over from

● Sepahan's Farshad Ahmadzadeh (10) heads home in the 1-0 victory over Malavan in the Iranian Hazfi Cup last eight in Isfahan, Iran, on May 16, 2024.  
● RASOUL SHOJAEI/IRNA

Saket Elhami during the winter break. Standing between Mes and a place in the final showpiece is Iralco.

Iralco, which stepped into the last-eight round on the back of a memorable shootout win against Persepolis, made hard work of facing Chadormalu – the only non-top flight side in the semifinals – on Thursday as Majid Hosseini's side had Reza Jabireh to thank for scoring a 119th-minute winner in a 1-0 victory in Ardakan.

As if the four semifinalists need more reason to go all out for the cup glory, a place in the playoff round of next season's inaugural AFC Champions League Elite will be the on the line in the final, with the winner joining Esteghlal and Persepolis in the continent's revamped club competition.

## FIFA delays decision on Palestinian request to ban Israel amid Gaza war

**AL JAZEERA** – Football's world governing body FIFA has said it will seek legal advice before convening in July to decide on a Palestinian proposal to suspend Israel from international matches.

On Friday, FIFA President Gianni Infantino announced the plan at the organisation's annual congress in Bangkok, Thailand, after the Palestine Football Association (PFA) presented arguments accusing the Israel Football Association (IFA) of violating FIFA statutes with its war on Gaza and its inclusion of teams located in Palestinian territory in its domestic league.

"I ask you to stand on the right side of history ... If not now, when?" said PFA President Jibril Rajoub, speaking before delegates from 211 member associations. "FIFA cannot afford to remain indifferent to these violations or the ongoing genocide in Palestine." Infantino said FIFA "will mandate as



● FIFA President Gianni Infantino makes a speech during the international football governing body's annual congress in Bangkok, Thailand, on May 17, 2024.  
● FIFA

of now, independent legal expertise to analyse the three requests [from the

PFA] and ensure the statutes of FIFA are applied in the right way", with an

extraordinary council meeting scheduled to be held by July 25.

The PFA is calling for "appropriate sanctions, with immediate effect, against Israeli teams," according to FIFA documents released a month before the congress and council meetings in Bangkok.

The motion noted "international law violations committed by the Israeli occupation in Palestine, particularly in Gaza" and cited FIFA's statutory commitments on human rights and against discrimination.

The PFA wrote that "all the football infrastructure in Gaza has been either destroyed, or seriously damaged, including the historic stadium of al-Yarmouk" and said it had support for the motion from the federations of Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Yemen.

Rajoub said "the Palestinian people, including the Palestinian football family, are enduring an unprecedented hu-

manitarian catastrophe".

### AFC backing

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) had given its backing to Palestine's proposal during the 34th AFC congress in Bangkok on Thursday.

AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa voiced his support for the Palestine Football Association's motion, saying: "The AFC is only as strong as its members and when one suffers, all its other members are affected."

"The AFC stands together with the Palestine FA, and we join them in seeking effective football-related solutions to the grievances raised by the Palestine FA in their proposal.

"It is our duty to support the Palestine FA for a swift and effective resolution in line with the rules, regulations and statutes of the AFC and FIFA."