

Iran calls on AFC to reinstate hosting rights

Sports Desk

The Iranian Football Federation called on the Asian Football Confederation to restore the country's hosting rights in the international and club games.

The Iranian national team had to host Qatar in Dubai when the two teams met at the World Cup qualifiers on October 15, while Persian Gulf Pro League sides Persepolis, Esteghlal, Sepahan, and Tractor have been forced to play their home fixtures at the Asian club competitions in neutral venues in recent months amid regional tensions between Iran and Israel.

The AFC made the decision after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched a missile strike on targets in the Israeli-occupied territories on October 1 – days after the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli air strike in Beirut, Lebanon.

"Over the past two months, there have been no safety or security concerns in our country. However, our teams have been subjected to substantial financial burdens for playing outside the Islamic Republic of Iran," Mahdi Taj, the chairman of the Iranian Football Federation, wrote in a letter to AFC president Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa.

"It is evident that the situation that led to the suspension of all international and domestic flights for approximately 36



● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

hours on October 1, 2024 has returned to normal, and all domestic flights and some international flights have resumed their regular schedules as of the morning of Friday, October 3," the letter wrote, adding that

airlines from Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, China, and Turkey have resumed their services to Iran.

"Other sport federations in Iran have been hosting international tournaments and participants

from different countries have been traveling to Iran without any problem.

"Therefore, our Federation and clubs wish to hold all their home matches in Iran as previously scheduled, in order to

provide fair and satisfactory conditions for all participating clubs in the ACL Elite and ACL Two competitions, as well as the Iranian national team in the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup."

19-year high

Meanwhile, the Iranian national team reached its highest spot in 19 years in the FIFA Men's World Ranking, coming in 18th in the latest monthly list released on Thursday.

Amir Qalenoee's men tallied 1635.31 points to move up by one spot from the previous ranking, though they remained second to Japan among the Asian teams as the Blue Samurai retained the 15th place with 1652.79 points.

The latest ranking comes after Iran defeated North Korea 3-2 in Laos and then went on to beat Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek by the same scoreline in November's international break to maintain its hold on the top spot in Group A of the World Cup Asian qualifiers with 16 points – three clear of second-place Uzbekistan and six above the United Arab Emirates – with four games to spare. With the top two of the group progressing to the World Cup finals, Team Melli can clinch a place in the 2026 showdown in North America when taking on the UAE and Uzbekistan in late March.

Japan opened a nine-point gap on Australia on top of the Group C table, thanks to comprehensive away wins against Indonesia (4-0) and China (3-1), and is on the verge of an eighth successive World Cup participation.

Following the top two in the list of AFC's member states in the FIFA ranking are South Korea (23rd), Australia (26th), and Qatar (48th).

ITTF World Youth Championships: Faraji wins historic U15 bronze

Sports Desk

Iranian table tennis wunderkind Benjamin Faraji bagged a historic bronze at the ITTF World Youth Championships in Helsingborg, Sweden – a first global medal of the sport for the country.

Faraji, who is fourth in the under-15 category of the ITTF World Ranking, suffered a 4-2 loss (6-11, 11-4, 13-11, 12-10, 10-12, 11-4) to Chinese world No. 1 Li Hechen in the

U15 boys' singles semifinals in Helsingborg Arena, though it still saw the 14-year-old prodigy etch his name into history books of Iranian table tennis.

Having beaten the host's Adam Wallin 4-1 on in his first matchup, Faraji came from behind twice to defeat Japanese Shunto Iwaida 4-2 in the round of 16.

The Iranian then came out on top against world No. 17 Lin Ching-Ting of the Chi-

nese Taipei 4-2 (11-6, 6-11, 11-8, 4-11, 12-10, 11-9) in a thrilling last-eight encounter on Thursday, before sharing the third podium with South Korean Lee Sengsoo, who was beaten 4-1 by China's Tang Yiren in the other semifinal on Friday.

Faraji stole all the table tennis headlines in October's Asian Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, where he rallied from behind to stun world seniors' No. 1 Wang

Chuqin 3-2 (11-8, 3-11, 9-11, 13-11, 11-9) during a 3-1 loss to China in the men's teams quarterfinals.

Faraji then came within touching distance of another major upset in Astana, going neck-and-neck with China's Lin Shidong – second to Wang in the World Ranking – but ultimately relinquished a six-point lead in the deciding game to suffer a 3-2 defeat in the men's singles competitions.



● ITTF

Amorim enjoys 'special' first Man Utd win despite 'anxiety'



BBC – New Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim celebrated victory on his Old Trafford debut thanks to a thrilling 3-2 Europa League triumph against Bodo/Glimt – but admitted to a sense of anxiety as his players try to understand his demands.

The scream of relief the 39-year-old let out as Rasmus Hojlund scored the first of his two goals to level the contest at half-time underlined the strain Amorim is under.

The Portuguese has moved clubs – a third of the way through the season – with a determination to implement a wing-back formation United have no recent history of using. And this at a point in the campaign when fixture congestion is at its greatest.

Amorim had two full training sessions with his entire squad before his first game at Ipswich on Sunday, and two more in the build-up to this European success.

He has already revealed his only way around the situation is to push those who do not start matches through

full training sessions the day after. And Amorim is not sure how it will work.

"I get anxious because I don't know what will happen," he told TNT Sports. "We don't control anything at the moment."

"I don't know the players and we have not worked a lot together. "We go to the game excited, but at the same time you are nervous because you don't know how the game will go."

Although the lengthy injury list that blighted Erik ten Hag's last weeks at Old Trafford is starting to ease, the lingering issues created by lengthy absences continue.

In his first game for 18 months, Tyrell Malacia lasted just 45 minutes in the left wing-back role that places huge physical demands on the player picked to fill it.

Luke Shaw made a second substitute appearance, coming on for Lisandro Martinez, who was playing his first game since getting injured before this

month's international break.

It was a relief for Amorim, therefore, that his team came out on top, having profited from Alejandro Garnacho's 48-second opener, then recovering – courtesy of Hojlund's double – after falling behind to two first-half goals in seven minutes.

"We improved different things since the last game," he said. "We controlled more of the tempo, pushed the team a bit higher (up the pitch) and created more chances."

Amorim's complaint was that "we should kill the game before the end", as he lamented two wasted opportunities for Garnacho and another that substitute Marcus Rashford flashed across goal, all in the second half.

"I like the way the players tried to play our game," he added.

"Sometimes we won the ball and have had problems in the past giving the ball away too much – the mindset is keeping the ball.

"They are really trying and I think we deserved the win."