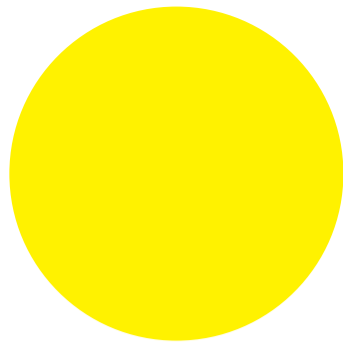


TPO cites 26 official crossings to offset maritime curbs



3 >



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## Armed Forces respond to US assault with missiles, drones

2 >



OPINION

Persian Gulf countries doubt America's security umbrella

4 >



Iran threatens to suspend World Cup matches over unofficial flags, political chants

6 >



Mashhad-e Kaveh emerges as potential world heritage candidate

7 >

## Pezeshkian calls for shifting away from 'no war, no peace' stalemate

FM spox: US harming diplomacy with ceasefire breaches

2 >



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian delivers a speech at a memorial for martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei in Tehran on June 10, 2026.

## US venting its frustration with Iran through football

By Delaram Ahmadi  
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INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE

The United States, as host of the 2026 World Cup, has adopted discriminatory measures against certain countries, including Iran, which has encountered visa delays and ticketing restrictions. In an interview with Iran Daily, football veteran Mirshad Majedi argued that such actions stem from fear.



Mirshad Majedi

He said Washington understands the significance of football in Iran and having failed to achieve its broader objectives against Iran during the war, it is now taking out its frustrations on the football field. Majedi stressed, however, that despite these obstacles, Iran's national team remains fully capable of producing its best performance.

IRAN DAILY: Has similar behavior national teams and fans ever occurred at previous World Cups or major sporting events?

MAJEDI: There is no precedent for this kind of treatment at any World Cup—whether in football, futsal, beach soccer, men's competitions, women's competitions—or even at the Olympics. I believe had this aggressive war not been launched by the US against Iran, such levels of fear and anxiety would not have emerged. These measures stem from fear. Such conduct runs contrary to the Olympic Charter, FIFA's Code of Ethics, and the provisions set out in FIFA's contracts, directives, disciplinary regulations, security protocols, and safeguarding guidelines. When dogs are brought in to sniff players from Senegal, Uzbekistan, or other countries, or when Iranian personnel are subjected to this kind of visa process – while it remains unclear what treatment Iranian players might face upon arrival at airports – this reflects fear and insecurity. FIFA should tear up all of its guidelines and regulations if they are not going to be applied equally. What this demonstrates is that these rules and executive regulations are enforced only against developing countries, while the same standards are not applied to the United States or countries with comparable influence.

Are such actions befitting of a

host country and are they not contrary to the spirit of sport? They are unquestionably at odds with sporting regulations, the spirit of sport, and the principle of fair play.

It is like inviting a guest into one's home and, instead of offering hospitality, bringing them in under an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. All of these actions are being taken by the United States out of fear.

In this context, FIFA and the International Olympic Committee should seriously reconsider future events hosted by the United States. Even the upcoming Los Angeles Olympics should be carefully reviewed, and if possible, it should not be held there at all, because these actions undermine human dignity and respect.

What consequences could these measures have for the United States' credibility and image as host of the world's biggest football tournament?

I believe that America's aura of dominance has been broken. Public perceptions of the United States have changed, and these actions are likely to achieve little beyond fueling hostility toward the country and intensifying criticism regarding racism.

FIFA has reportedly warned that players who cover their mouths while speaking during matches could face ethical or disciplinary consequences, but rather than focusing on such matters, efforts should be directed toward confronting racist attitudes in the United States. America is merely the host country, and FIFA regulations contain no provisions granting hosts special authority. Hosts are expected to comply with FIFA rules, not operate above them. It is regrettable that FIFA's president and his colleagues have disregarded established principles and are acting in service of Donald Trump.

What impact will this issue have on FIFA's efforts to keep sporting competitions separate from political disputes?

Anyone who still believes football is separate from politics, or that politics has no place in football, understands very little about the game. Football is deeply political. This has been evident since the era of João Havelange, continued under Sepp Blatter, and remains true under Gianni Infantino. Everything is political. Those with greater power are able to shape the rules and even rewrite them.

When Trump failed to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, FIFA went on to create what is described as an unofficial award and presented him with a FIFA Peace Prize. This demonstrates that politics has fully, demonstrably, and undeniably entered FIFA. From this point forward, football can be viewed as a political instrument.

What impact could this have on FIFA's future policies? Might FIFA seek stricter guarantees from future host nations?

FIFA's approach depends heavily on who the host is. Its flexibility has reached a point where rules and regulations can be interpreted in whatever manner it chooses. Imagine if the host country were Qatar, Saudi Arabia, or Iran instead of the United States. Would FIFA have tolerated this kind of visa policy? Certainly not. It would have taken a firm stance, immediately referring to specific articles, clauses, and ethical provisions in case of objection. If another major event is awarded to the United States, the same situation is likely to repeat itself. Yet when events are hosted outside the United States and by countries with less influence, every rule will be rigorously enforced against them.

From a technical standpoint, how could these developments affect the performance of Iran's national team?

All technical and tactical plans can be fully realized only when coaches, players, technical staff, and everyone involved are operating in a calm and stable environment. The effects of these issues inevitably show up on the pitch.

A team whose mental and emotional balance has been disrupted will find that no tactical system can fully compensate for that. The United States understands the role football plays in different countries. Having failed to achieve its broader objectives toward Iran and having suffered setbacks both internationally and domestically, it is now venting its frustration through football.

Yet, this discriminatory treatment does not mean Iran's national team is incapable of producing its best performance. The team must not become distracted by off-field controversies. Iranians are a resilient people and the team must prove itself despite all these injustices. A strong victory over New Zealand would leave qualification for the next round almost assured. Therefore, the players should set aside all of these imposed difficulties and claim their due on the field.