

FIFA World Cup:

Iran given injury boost ahead of New Zealand game

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee has been handed good news on six injured players ahead of his team's World Cup opener today, the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI) has confirmed. Star striker Mahdi Taremi, along with Saman Qoddous, Rouzbeh Cheshmi, Mohammad Mohebbi, Mahdi Torabi and Shahriar Moghanlou, had been struggling with various injury problems since Team Melli arrived at its World Cup base in Tijuana, Mexico, last week. However, the FFIRI said a full squad was available for Saturday's training session.

Iran will begin its Group G campaign against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, California, before taking on Belgium at the same venue next Sunday.

Qalenoee's side will complete its group-stage fixtures against Egypt at Lumen Field in Seattle, Washington, on June 26.

Despite playing all three group matches on U.S. soil, Iran moved its training base to the Mexican border city from Tucson, Arizona, as originally planned – a measure taken to avoid possible visa denials for members of the delegation in

what will be the most politically charged event in the country's sporting history. It will be the first FIFA World Cup hosted by a nation receiving the team of a country with which it is at war.

The United States nevertheless declined to issue visas to 15 members of the team's support staff, including FFIRI chairman Mahdi Taj, Secretary-General Hedayat Mombeini and Vice-President Mahdi Mohammad Nabi.

However, four members of the delegation have won appeals against the rejection of their visa applications.

Those granted visas include a member of the team's technical staff working as an analyst and two officials from the federation's international department, but Taj's application was rejected again.

Speaking to Italian outlet La Gazzetta dello Sport, former Inter striker Taremi said: "Sport and politics should remain separate," adding that the World Cup conveys a message in support of "a conflict-free world."

Asked about the team's condition ahead of today's game, the Iranian talisman said: "If I speak purely about the physical and mental side, I can say I

feel good. My teammates and I remain focused on football. Of course, things always happen outside of the game, but the only useful thing to do in these situations is to try and maintain focus on what we can control." Taremi, who is set to play in his third World Cup, underlined his team's unprecedented build-up to the tournament, saying: "It's always said that once you step off the plane and enter the host country, you should feel an atmosphere of warmth and unity. Perhaps it's just my impression, but I don't feel it right now."

"It's obvious there's a lot of tension, but I believe sport and politics should always be separate. Sport is about respect, peace and unity. The World Cup has an audience of billions of people and can promote these sentiments; it can push for a world free from conflict, not just for Iran but for everyone."

"I'd only add that any country agreeing to host a World Cup must follow FIFA regulations and fulfil its responsibilities as a host nation. That's what I mean when I say politics should be separated and the principles of sport preserved."

"We want to convey a message of peace through our game and



Iran's Mahdi Taremi (L) and Mohammad Mohebbi are pictured during a training session in their World Cup base in Tijuana, Mexico, on June 13, 2026.

● MOHSEN DAVOUDI/FFIRI

our culture, which is very rich. The media does not portray it accurately to the world. I believe our people are proud of us simply for going there and playing under these circumstances. Now, after that pride, we need to bring them some joy, which means winning matches."

Despite facing a series of obstacles in their World Cup preparations, Taremi and his

teammates will look to secure the country's first-ever knockout-stage berth in seven attempts.

On Team Melli's chances of a historic breakthrough, Taremi, who came within inches of the feat in 2018 and 2022, said: "Let's not get ahead of ourselves."

"Every match in our group will be difficult. Teams like Belgium

and Egypt have a lot of quality and experience, but New Zealand certainly should not be underestimated either. We respect all our opponents and focus on the best possible preparation for each encounter."

"We know that if we do things well, we'll have a chance. And we could achieve a positive, even historic, result for Iranian football."

Golmohammadi named Duhok coach in Iraqi top flight

Sports Desk

Iranian coach Yahya Golmohammadi has taken the helm at Duhok SC, the Iraqi Stars League club announced on Saturday. "Welcome to the Eagles' Nest, Emperor," the Iraqi side wrote in a social media post confirming the appointment. Golmohammadi, who had been without a job since leaving Iranian top-flight side Foolad Khu-

zestan in January, is the second Iranian coach to join the Iraqi league in recent months. Alireza Mansourian took charge of Al Talaba last November, leading the club to a sixth-place finish.

The 56-year-old has reportedly signed a one-year contract worth \$500,000 with Duhok. League champions in the 2009-10 season, Duhok finished the previous campaign in 10th

place, winning 13 of their 38 matches and losing 14 to finish 39 points behind champions Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya.

A former Iranian international centre-back, Golmohammadi enjoyed the most successful spell of his coaching career with Persepolis, guiding the Tehran Reds to three Persian Gulf Pro League titles and a domestic cup trophy during his four-year tenure. He part-

ed ways with the capital club midway through the 2023-24 season following a falling-out with the club hierarchy.

He then took over at Foolad ahead of the 2024-25 campaign and led the southern Iranian side to an impressive fourth-place finish. However, a run of poor results saw him leave the club by mutual consent midway through the following season.



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AVC Women's Nations Cup:

Iran claims consolation win over host Philippines

Sports Desk

Iran's women's volleyball national team found some consolation after defeating host Philippines in straight sets (25-21, 25-12, 25-21) in Candon on Sunday to finish seventh at the AVC Women's Nations Cup.

Opposite hitter Elaheh Poursaleh led the scoring for Iran with 18 points, while outside hitter Fatemeh Khalili added nine.

Middle blockers Zahra Salehi and Yasna Ahankoub contributed eight points apiece as Iran secured its third victory in six matches at Candon City Arena.

Entering the tournament fresh off a second successive CAVA Championship title earlier this month, Iran got off to a losing start in Pool B, falling 3-1 to Indonesia before suffering another defeat by the same scoreline against Kazakhstan – a team it had beaten twice at the CAVA event.

The Iranian women bounced back with a comfortable victory over Lebanon but were swept aside in

straight sets by defending champion Vietnam.

A 3-0 win over Hong Kong saw Iran finish fourth in the six-team standings and advance to the seventh-place playoff.

Despite recording its lowest finish in four appearances at the continental showpiece, Iran head coach Lee Do-hee said her players are making steady progress and expressed confidence in the team's future.

"Regardless of the position we finished in, today's match against the Philippines was a very good opportunity to assess the players' progress," said the South Korean, whose team faced unprecedented circumstances in recent months after leaving Iran on April 21 amid wartime conditions in the region to continue its preparations in the Far East.

"The Iranian players are improving and I am very optimistic about their future. They are young players and have plenty of room to develop further," Lee said, adding that her team is already look-

ing ahead to the Asian Women's Volleyball Championship, which begins on August 21 in Tianjin, China.

Khalili, meanwhile, underlined the high level of competition at the Nations Cup.

"We had hoped to achieve a better result, but unfortunately it didn't happen. However, we are not discouraged by the final outcome," she said.

"I would also like to thank the federation for everything it has done for the women's national team. Hopefully, in future competitions, we will finally be able to turn our efforts into the results we are striving for and repay that support."

"The tournament was very competitive this year, and Iran was drawn into a difficult group. Unfortunately, we were unable to achieve the results we wanted, and we are very disappointed about that. However, we finished the tournament with a victory. Hopefully, we can make up for it in future editions."

Iran captain Shabnam Alikhani,



Iranian players celebrate a point during a 3-0 victory over the Philippines at the AVC Women's Nations Cup in Candon, Philippines, on June 14, 2026.

● VOLLEYBALL WORLD

meanwhile, regretted the team's inability to execute some of the tactical plans prepared by the coaching staff during key matches. "Unfortunately, in some games we could not implement on the court what the coaching staff had instructed us and what we had

worked on in training. As a result, we ended up losing those matches," the veteran setter said.

"For the first time, the women's national team had the opportunity to hold a long-term overseas training camp lasting more than 60 days.

"Unfortunately, we were unable to take full advantage of this opportunity, and we feel we have let our people down. I hope that in the future, and in upcoming tournaments, we can achieve results worthy of Iran's women's volleyball players."