

Iran's oil exports near 18m barrels after US blockade removal



3 >



> irandaily.ir

newspaper.irandaily.ir

IranDailyWeb

Iran shuts Hormuz again over Israel's unabated strikes on Lebanon

2 >

Pakistan: US-Iran technical talks due Sunday in Switzerland

2 >



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) meets with Pakistani Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi in Tehran, Iran on June 20, 2026.

IRNA



Why Germany failed to gain admission into UN Security Council?

4 >



Ahar Qanat discovery opens path to heritage recognition

7 >



Minab's silent farewell crowned News Photo of the Year

8 >

Football Word Cup 2026

Iran's challenging 90 minutes against Belgium

Chance to keep path to qualification open

FEATURE REPORT

After drawing with New Zealand, Iran's national football team is now preparing to face Belgium on June 21 in a match that could prove decisive in determining its fate in the group stage. Although Iran's performance, particularly in defense, came under fire from analysts and fans following the opening match, major tournaments have repeatedly shown that one poor display cannot serve as the ultimate measure of a team's capabilities. The World Cup has often seen top sides get off to unexpected starts before turning things around and reshaping their fortunes as the tournament progresses. Against New Zealand, Iran appeared noticeably below its usual standards in terms of focus and cohesion. However, securing a point has kept the path to qualification open, making the clash with Belgium a major

opportunity to make amends. Belgium, too, was held in its opening match against Egypt, demonstrating that, contrary to initial perceptions, it is not an unbeatable side. That alone could provide Iran's players with an additional source of motivation as they take to the field with greater confidence. One of Iran's strengths lies in the wealth of experience within the squad. While the team's average age has drawn criticism from some analysts, experience at major tournaments can prove invaluable in matches of this nature. Players who have spent years competing at different levels understand better than anyone how to cope with the psychological pressure of high-stakes encounters. That experience, coupled with the desire to prove themselves, could become Iran's trump card against its European opponent. In matches like these, technical quality is not the only determining factor. Motivation, concen-

tration and faith can sometimes alter the equation. Iranian football has repeatedly shown that when the team steps onto the pitch with determination and self-confidence, it can produce valuable results against renowned opponents. More than anything, that fighting spirit is what the national team needs now—a mindset capable of transforming the pressure generated by the opening result into motivation for a standout performance. Football has repeatedly proven that names and statistics do not decide outcomes. If Iran can enter the match with greater focus, improved defensive organization and a high level of motivation, it has the ability to secure an encouraging result and revive its qualification hopes. The match against Belgium is not merely another game; it is an opportunity to restore confidence and showcase the capabilities of Iranian football on the world's biggest stage.

Speaking to IRNA, former Iran international Mohammad Reza Rasoul Korbekandi said the outcome of Iran's opening match had been largely predictable, adding that the Football Federation and coaching staff also appeared to be aware of the difficulties surrounding the encounter. According to him, the absence of a preparation camp at the tournament venue and numerous travel-related challenges before the match were among the factors that may have affected the players' performance. "It was difficult to play against a team about which there was limited knowledge. In that match, perhaps two-thirds of Iran's players failed to perform at their true level. Conceding an early goal also had a psychological impact on the team and forced the players to continue under greater pressure." The football analyst added that opening matches at the World Cup always carry unique cir-



cumstances because teams do not possess complete knowledge of one another. He pointed to the performances of contenders such as Portugal and Spain in their opening fixtures, where neither side managed to deliver its usual standard of play. However, he said the most important task now is for the players and coaching staff to put the New Zealand match behind them and focus entirely on the upcoming contest. "I believe Iran's national team will perform better in its next match than it did in the opener, regardless of the result, because

we usually produce stronger displays against more powerful opponents." The former player stressed the importance of conducting a thorough technical review of the opening match, saying the coaching staff must carefully assess both Iran's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the characteristics of the next opponent. He cited the team's defensive shortcomings in the previous match and emphasized that appropriate measures must be taken ahead of the next two fixtures.

Page 3 >