

Iranian clubs face flight restrictions, hectic schedule on return to Asian action

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League trio Esteghlal, Tractor and Gol Gohar are facing an additional challenge ahead of a congested run of domestic and continental fixtures, with new restrictions on Iranian airlines threatening to complicate their travel arrangements as they resume action in Asian club competitions this week.

The restrictions could force the clubs to reconsider how they reach their destinations, potentially turning what were previously straightforward journeys into lengthy, multi-stage trips involving overland travel and connecting flights.

The problem extends beyond away fixtures. With all three clubs also scheduled to play designated home matches in neutral countries, even games in which they are technically the hosts require international travel.

Clubs may have to consider several alternatives, including travelling overland to

a neighboring country before boarding a flight, flying from Iran to a transit hub such as Turkey and continuing to their destination, or combining ground transportation with multiple flights.

Such arrangements would not only increase travel time but could also disrupt training schedules, recovery periods and preparations for subsequent matches. Esteghlal face a particularly challenging run of fixtures, with eight matches reportedly scheduled across a 30-day period.

The Tehran Blues, who played out a 1-1 away draw against Tractor in the Iranian top flight on Thursday, are due to travel to Qatar to meet Al Gharafa in the AFC Champions League Elite on Monday. They will then host Gol Gohar on October 18 and visit Chadormalou four days later in Yazd.

Their schedule continues with an away match against Shabab Al Ahli in Dubai on October 27, followed by a designated home fixture in the



continental competition against Qatar's Al Shamal SC in Basra on November 3.

With domestic and continental commitments coming in quick succession, any additional travel could significantly reduce the time available for recovery.

The difference between a direct flight and a journey involving several hours on the road, border formalities and

connecting flights could prove decisive in determining how well Esteghlal prepare for their next assignment.

Tractor face similar difficulties. The Tabriz-based side will play Al Shamal in Muscat on Monday before returning for a domestic league match against Malavan in Bandar Anzali next Saturday. Tractor will then travel to the United Arab Emirates to face Al Ain

on October 26, followed by another trip to Muscat on November 2 for a continental fixture against Uzbekistan's PFC Neftchi.

The schedule leaves little room for lengthy journeys between matches.

The challenge is particularly significant because the club must complete an international round trip for a nominally home match before

returning to domestic competition.

Gol Gohar, representing Iran in the AFC Champions League Two, also face a demanding sequence of matches across several countries. The club are scheduled to meet Bahrain's Muharraq on Wednesday in Seeb, Oman, before returning to domestic action against Esteghlal in Tehran.

The team will then face

Kheybar on October 25, followed by a designated home match against Turkmenistan's Arkadag in Tajikistan three days later.

The Sirjan-based outfit are due to play Sanat Naft in Abadan on October 31 before travelling to Turkmenistan to face Arkadag again on November 4.

Their itinerary could require repeated journeys between Iran, Bahrain, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, alongside domestic trips to Tehran and Abadan.

Under normal circumstances, additional travel time might be manageable. However, the combination of a congested schedule and uncertainty over flight connections makes the situation considerably more complicated.

Every extra stop, border crossing or ground transfer could eat into the limited time available for rest and preparation.

The difficulties facing the three clubs also present a challenge for Iran's league organizers, who must coordinate

domestic fixtures with the Asian Football Confederation's continental competitions while accounting for the practical realities of international travel.

A gap of three or four days between matches does not necessarily provide sufficient preparation time if a team must undertake a lengthy, multi-stage journey between them. The situation is particularly unusual for designated home matches abroad, when clubs must travel internationally despite nominally enjoying home advantage.

Any intervention would require the organizers to balance the domestic calendar, AFC commitments and the teams' actual travel requirements. For the three clubs, the immediate challenge is no longer limited to preparing for their continental opponents. They must also find a way to reach their matches without sacrificing too much of the recovery time needed to compete across an increasingly demanding schedule.

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Iran's aquatic sports squad returned from the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games without a medal despite national records, individual swimming finals and a fourth-place finish in water polo, highlighting both signs of progress and the persistent gap between the country's athletes and the continental podium. The campaign offered a mixed picture. Swimming ended a 16-year wait for an Iranian finalist in an individual event, diving produced the country's best individual result at the Asian Games since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and the water polo team reached the last four for the third consecutive edition.

However, none of the three disciplines managed to secure a medal, raising questions about whether the progress made in Nagoya can translate into podium finishes at future major competitions.

Swimming provided some of the most encouraging developments, as Homer Abbasi reached the final of the men's 50m backstroke, while Amir Motaei qualified for the finals of the 50m and 100m breaststroke.

Abbasi broke Iran's national record in the 50m backstroke heats, while Motaei improved the national mark in the 50m breaststroke on his way to the final.

Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Iran makes strides in aquatics but finishes empty-handed



Their achievements represented a significant step forward for Iranian swimming, which has struggled to challenge Asia's leading nations for years.

Nevertheless, reaching the final was not enough to contend for a medal. National records are important indicators of progress, but they must also be assessed against Asian and world standards. Breaking an Iranian record does not necessarily mean an athlete is close to the podium.

A more clearly defined development strategy is therefore needed, with measurable performance targets for the 2030 Asian Games, regular international competition and structured training programs designed to close the gap. Develop-

ing young swimmers to challenge established athletes would also be essential to sustaining progress.

Diving offered another encouraging sign, with Sam Vajir and Mohammad Moqaddasi reaching finals in several events. Vajir finished fourth in the men's 1m springboard, delivering Iran's best individual diving result at the Asian Games since the Islamic Revolution. The pair also placed fifth in the 10m synchronized platform and reached the final in the 3m synchronized springboard.

The results suggested that Iranian divers are moving closer to the continental elite. However, a limited pool of top-level athletes and insufficient exposure to high-quality

international competitions remain significant obstacles.

In leading diving nations, elite athletes regularly compete against strong domestic and international opposition, gaining technical experience and learning to handle pressure. In Iran, preparation has often relied heavily on training camps, leaving athletes with fewer opportunities to test themselves against the best in Asia.

Water polo, meanwhile, presented the most pressing questions. Iran reached the semifinals for the third consecutive Asian Games but again failed to secure a medal, having won bronze at Jakarta 2018 before finishing outside the podium at Hangzhou 2022.

After losing 12-8 to China in the group stage in Nagoya, Iran suffered a semifinal defeat against Japan before meeting China again in the bronze-medal match. The Iranians lost 13-9, finishing fourth once more.

A defeat against Japan was perhaps unsurprising given the strength of the Japanese team, one of Asia's leading water polo nations. However, the second loss to China raised questions about Iran's ability to adjust tactically between meetings with the same opponent.

Reaching the semifinals consistently demonstrates that Iran remains competitive at the continental level. Yet repeated fourth-place finishes also suggest that maintaining a place among the top four is no longer sufficient.

The federation must conduct a thorough assessment of the team's performance, identifying tactical shortcomings and areas requiring improvement rather than simply seeking individuals to blame.

Overall, Nagoya was neither a complete failure nor a major breakthrough for Iranian aquatic sports. Swimming and diving showed encouraging signs, while water polo maintained its place among Asia's leading teams.

The next challenge is to turn those encouraging performances into tangible results.

Asia Pacific Deaf Athletics Championship:

Iran bags 12 medals, finishes runner-up in team standings

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Iran collected 12 medals, including five golds, to finish as runner-up in the team standings at the Asia Pacific Deaf Athletics Championship in Penang, Malaysia.

clocking 56.47 seconds in the final.

Mahdi Vahidian and Yazdan Eslami added two silver medals to Iran's haul, finishing runner-up in the men's 200m and shot put, respectively.

Hashem Yadegari, meanwhile,



Elaheh Golmohammadi secured the country's sole medal in the women's competition, claiming gold in the discus throw with a best effort of 35.21 meters in the final.

Ali Alizadeh was the most successful Iranian across three days of action at Batu Kawan Stadium, settling for silver in the men's 1,500m before claiming the top prize in the 800m final. Amirhossein Zare' won gold in the men's discus throw with a best attempt of 46.97 meters, while Yashar Vaqar raced to gold in the men's 110m hurdles.

Iran's fourth men's gold medal came in the 400m, where Tarouq Abiyat shattered the Asian record on his way to victory,

claimed two bronze medals in the men's 100m and long jump before teaming up with Vahidian, Vaqar and Abiyat to finish third in the 4x100m relay. The Iranian quartet of Alizadeh, Vahidian, Mohammad-Mahdi Zare' and Mehran Sarafraz also settled for bronze in the men's 4x400m relay.

The championship was part of the eight-day Asia Pacific Deaf Multi-Sport Championships in the Malaysian city.

Iran's Tarouq Abiyat poses with his new Asian record after winning gold in the men's 400m at the Asia Pacific Deaf Athletics Championship in Penang, Malaysia, on October 8, 2026.

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