

Iran Remain Asia's Highest Ranked Team



KUALA LUMPUR (AFC) - Iran have retained their status as Asia's top ranked side following Thursday's release of the latest FIFA Ranking.

Team Melli, who exited the 2015 AFC Asian Cup at the quarter-final stage, slipped one place globally to be ranked 42nd in the world, but remained ahead of Japan who, after climbing two spots, are second in Asia, and 53rd in the world.

Korea Republic move down one to third in Asia and 56th overall, while January's AFC Asian Cup winners Australia are fourth.

In a month of modest rises for Asian sides, Afghanistan climbed seven places, the most by any AFC team, to be ranked 18th in Asia and 137th globally.

Full FIFA Ranking for Asia
Iran: (Asia Ranking 1/ Global Ranking 42 / Movement Down 1)
Japan: 2 / 53 / Up 2
Korea Republic: 3 / 56 / Down 2
Australia: 4 / 65 / Down 2

United Arab Emirates: 5 / 69 / Down 3
Uzbekistan 6 / 72 / Down 1
China: 7 / 83 / Down 1
Oman: 8 / 96 / Down 5
Iraq: 9 / 97 / Down 3
Saudi Arabia: 10 / 99 / Down 1
Jordan: 11 / 101 / Down 4
Bahrain: 12 / 104 / Down 1
Qatar: 13 / 109 / No Change
Kuwait: 14 / 125 / Up 3
Philippines: 15 / 128 / Up 4
Vietnam: 16 / 130 / Up 2
Maldives: 17 / 133 / Up 2
Afghanistan: 18 / 137 / Up 7
Palestine: 19 / 140 / Down 14
Tajikistan: 20 / 141 / Down 4
Thailand: 21 / 142 / Up 1
Turkmenistan: 22 / 144 / Up 3
Lebanon: 23 / 146 / Down 25
DPR Korea: 24 / 149 / Up 3
Kyrgyzstan: 25 / 150 / Up 1

Syria: 26 / 152 / Down 2
Myanmar: 27= / 153= / Down 12
Singapore: 27= / 153= / Up 3
Malaysia: 27 / 153= / Up 1
Indonesia: 30 / 156 / Up 2
Hong Kong: 31 / 157 / Up 2
Bangladesh: 33 / 162 / Down 5
Guam: 33 / 167 / Down 5
Pakistan: 34= / 170= / Up 1
Laos: 34= / 170= / Down 9
India: 36 / 173 / Down 2
Sri Lanka: 37 / 174 / Down 1
Yemen: 38 / 175 / Up 4
Nepal: 39 / 180 / No Change
Cambodia: 40 / 181 / Up 3
Timor-Leste: 41 / 185 / Up 2
Macau: 42 / 187 / Up 1
Chinese Taipei: 43 / 188 / Down 4
Mongolia: 45 / 195 / Down 1
Brunei Darussalam: 45 / 198 / No Change
Bhutan: 46 / 209 / No Change

Halilhodzic: It's My Job to Fix Japan's Confidence

TOKYO (FIFA) - Vahid Halilhodzic promised to repair Japan's shattered confidence and restore fragile egos as the Franco-Bosnian was unveiled as the new Blue Samurai coach.

"I was extremely honored to accept the offer to coach Japan," the 62-year-old told a news conference a few hours after arriving in Tokyo. "Japan have slipped since last year's World Cup and certain things need to improve. But they have some quality players with good technique and discipline, so I'm optimistic about getting back to winning ways."

Halilhodzic, who steered Algeria to the knockout stages of the FIFA World Cup™ in Brazil, called for patience after replacing Mexican Javier Aguirre, who was sacked last month following Japan's AFC Asian Cup flop amid allegations of match-fixing dating back to a previous tenure

in Spain.

"Clearly the team is low on confidence," he said. "One or two of the players were better a few years ago than they are now. It's my job to fix this. I will talk to all the players about my philosophy and remind them of their abilities. There's a lot of hard work to be done and it will take time - please be patient."

The former Yugoslavia striker insisted he was the man for the job, despite confessing he was not a fan of sushi. "My family are more into sushi than me," he said with a brief smile before adding: "Japan have fallen to 52 in the FIFA rankings but I was in a similar situation in Algeria. In three years I took them to 17th in the world. I'm convinced I can do the same with Japan."

Japan exited Brazil 2014 with barely a whimper under Italian Alberto Zaccheroni before their

Asian Cup defence ended in a quarter-final defeat to the United Arab Emirates on penalties. Halilhodzic



Vahid Halilhodzic

warned that no player's place would be guaranteed under his regime. "Nobody has a right to be selected," he said.

"The door is open and the team will be picked on merit. I won't

stand for negativity and I hate losing so much it makes me feel sick. I think only of winning and

I am fully confident of turning things around. Obviously Japan can perform better than their current form. It's a huge responsibility but I'm optimistic of success."

Team NY Queens Wins Big East 3x3 Battle, Makes Return to FIBA 3x3 World Tour

NEW YORK (FIBA) - Team NY Queens [also known as Team Bang] became the first team to secure its ticket to the 2015 FIBA 3x3 World Tour by winning the BIG EAST 3x3 Battle at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York on Saturday 7 March.

It will be the second time Team NY Queens features at the FIBA 3x3 World Tour after reaching the Quarter-Finals of the San Juan Masters in 2013, the memory of a lifetime for team leader Haron Hargrave aka "H2O".

"We had a really good time in Puerto Rico two years ago. The World Tour is such a cool event," the sharpshooter said.

In 2013, NY Queens reached the last eight despite Hargrave's half-brother Anthony Soares tearing three ligaments in his foot as they lost to eventual finalist Team Saskatoon (CAN).

The 1.83m ball-handler believes his team will be a lot harder to beat at the World Tour this year.

"This time we'll be more prepared. Now we are very familiar with the rules. This 3x3 game is intense."

"Every possession counts and

you can't catch a break. Besides, match-ups are extremely important.

"In the Final against Team Triumph, with the score tied at 15, I



Team NY Queens (from left to right: Haron "H2O" Hargrave, Michael Liander, Amseshem Foluke-Henderson and Anthony Soares) became the first team to clinch a spot at the 2015 FIBA 3x3 World Tour after winning the BIG EAST 3x3 Battle in New York City.

took my personal pride aside and subbed myself out to put my brother back in the game for match-up purposes," Hargrave pointed out.

This is also a reason why Team NY Queens made one major adjustment to the team that came in eighth in Puerto Rico two years ago, replacing the athletic Anthony

Cox with the extremely versatile Michael Liander.

The voluble Hargrave explained: "To win this game, you need a

nice balance on the team and have shooters on both wings to knock down shots. With Liander on the court, teams can't double team anymore or else he will punish them from outside the arc."

Liander is another World Tour alumni, having played at the inaugural 2012 edition in New York. As

well as Hargrave, the team features the skilled Soares and the blue-collar Amseshem Foluke-Henderson, whom Hargrave describes as the "heart and soul of the team."

Team NY Queens was undefeated in New York, reaching the 21-point mark in every game except the Final and notably defeating Team Philadelphia, a two-time FIBA 3x3 World Tour participant in the Semi-Finals.

"It was a very well-organized event with some pretty good teams. It's fun to see 3x3 grow so much. It is big that a huge college conference like the BIG EAST gets involved," the 30-year-old rejoiced.

Former NBA Executive Vice President and current BIG EAST Senior Associate Commissioner of Men's Basketball Stu Jackson attended the Final.

Besides qualifying for the FIBA 3x3 World Tour, Team NY Queens also clinched a spot in the USA Basketball 3x3 National Tournament and an opportunity to play at the legendary Madison Square Garden during the Big East Tournament Championship on 14 March.

Belarusian Envoy Asks for Consolidation of Ties With Iran



Iranian Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports (L) and Belarusian Ambassador (R)

TEHRAN (FNA) - Belarusian Ambassador to Tehran Victor Reebok underlined the necessity for providing the ground for broadening relations with Iran.

Reebok made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Mahmoud Goudarzi in Tehran on Wednesday.

During the meeting, he voiced desire in the expansion of relations in the field of sport with Iran, and said grounds for consolidation of mutual cooperation should be considered and strengthened.

Goudarzi, for his part, said that that strengthening sport diplomacy will lead to the further expansion of economic and cultural ties between Iran and Belarus.

Last month, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Belarusian counterpart Vladimir Makei in a meeting in Minsk underlined the need for bolstering and reinvigorating bilateral ties, specially in economic fields.

During the meeting in the Belarusian capital today, Zarif and Makei reiterated that en-

hancement of economic and trade relations should take place in pace with the political ties.

The Iranian foreign minister pointed to the Iran-Belarus relations, and said, "Iran and Belarus have always shared an understanding on the international scene and will continue to support each other in the future."

He noted that Iran and Belarus have always had good political and economic relations, adding that the bilateral ties are expanding at a good pace now.

Zarif pointed to the Iran-Belarus economic relations, and said, "The two countries will hold a meeting of their joint economic and trade commission in the near future to discuss broadening of mutual cooperation."

The Belarusian foreign minister, for his part, said Minsk and Tehran rapidly developed their political relations in 2014, and added, "The value of trade exchanges between Belarus and Iran hit \$130 billion in 2014."

Naft Stays Top of Iran Professional League

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Naft Tehran stayed top of the Iran Professional League (IPL) after beating Esteghlal 1-0 here on Thursday.

Brazilian striker Leonardo Padovani found the back of the net with a header in the 80th minute.

Elsewhere, 10-man Naft Masjed Soleyman came from Behind to draw 2-2 with Persepolis.

Omid Alishah scored for the visiting team in the 23rd minute and Ali Alipour made it 2-0 for Persepolis.

Keyvan Amraei pulled a goal back in the 43rd minute.

Ruslan Melziddinov received a straight red card in the 57th minute after reckless challenge on Persepolis keeper Sosha

Makani.

Naft put Persepolis under pressure in the last minutes and Reza Karmolachaab finally equalized the match in the injury time.

In Tehran, Tractor Sazi beat Rah Ahan 3-0 in its away game. Farid Karimi scored in the 43rd minute. Mehdi Kiani and Luciano Edinho also scored in the 85th and 87th minutes respectively.

In Tabriz, title holder Foolad lost to Gostaresh 3-1. Jaber Ansari scored twice in the 9th and 65th minutes and Magno Batista also found the back of the net from the penalty spot in the 37th minute.

Mohammad Ghazi scored a consolation goal in the 72nd minute.