

Iranian judo star seeking asylum after being ordered to lose fight to avoid Israeli competitor

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1567344347429603600

Sun, 2019-09-01 12:58

TOKYO: Iranian judo star Saeid Mollaei, who claimed he was ordered to deliberately lose a world championship fight, could compete under a refugee flag at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, officials said Sunday.

International Judo Federation (IJF) president Marius Vizer has thrown his support behind former world champion Mollaei, who reportedly complained he had been instructed by Iranian authorities to throw a match in Tokyo last week to avoid facing Israeli Sagi Muki.

"It is our mission to protect our athletes – that's clear," Vizer told AFP. "We will do our best that he will compete in the Olympic Games. Later we will see in which team – there are different options, but one of them will be applied for the Olympics."

Vizer was quoted by local media as saying that Mollaei had told him pressure was being exerted on his family in Iran, prompting him to lose to Belgium's Matthias Casse in the semi-finals of the men's 81-kilo class.

The 27-year-old Tehran native subsequently fled to Berlin where he is currently seeking asylum, Vizer told Japan's Asahi newspaper.

Germany's interior ministry refused to comment on the case when contacted by AFP at the weekend.

The IJF will issue a statement on Monday, Vizer confirmed, but insisted:

"First of all we will do everything to support the athlete so he can continue his career and participate in the Olympic Games."

Vizer added that an emergency meeting would be convened this week to investigate whether Mollaei and his family had been the victim of political coercion or threats and subsequently to decide whether to punish the Iranian judo federation.

"It's a part of life and part of the surprises that can happen," said Vizer.

"But we have rules. Everything has to happen according to the statutes of the international federation and the Olympic charter.

"Some countries have different rules – they can apply those rules in their country, but not at an international sports event," he added.

"It's a special situation. We have to live with that and act accordingly."

Among some of the more colourful online and social media reports, it was claimed Vizer had booked a car to whisk Mollaei from the world championship venue in Tokyo to the airport in a daring escape.

Iran's Fars news agency accused Mollaei of pre-planning his defection, quoting Iran's judo head coach Majed Zarian as saying: "Everything was set in advance – someone in Iran must have helped him."

Iran does not recognise Israel and Iranian passports remind holders in bold

red they are “not entitled to travel to occupied Palestine”.

There have been previous examples of Iranian athletes being told to lose to avoid facing Israeli opponents, most notably wrestler Alireza Karimi, whose coach was caught yelling “Alireza you must lose, the Israeli won” in a video that went viral in 2017.

Karimi was suspended for six months for throwing his bout, while his coach was banned for two years.

Vizer insisted his support of Mollaei was a question of “sporting values” and not politics.

“I’m not in favour or against any country,” he said.

“We are here to protect the interests, the integrity and the fairness of the sport.”



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Hezbollah and Israel exchange fire on the Lebanese border

Author:

Reuters

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1567339856319171700

Sun, 2019-09-01 11:03

Kiryat Shmona, ISRAEL: Israel and Hezbollah exchanged fire along the Lebanese border on Sunday after a week of rising tensions, sparking fears of an escalation and prompting UN calls for restraint.

There were no casualties reported and the violence subsided in the early evening.

Israel said it responded with around 100 artillery shells after Hezbollah fired two or three anti-tank missiles at a battalion headquarters and military ambulance, hitting both.

Israeli officials refuted Hezbollah claims that it had killed and wounded those inside the military vehicle, saying there were no casualties.

"We are consulting about the next steps," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

"I have ordered that we be prepared for any scenario. We will decide on the next steps pending developments."



After the exchange of fire began, Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri

contacted senior US and French officials to urge their countries and the international community to intervene.

France's foreign ministry later said it was engaged in "multiple contacts" aimed at averting an escalation.

The head of the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon called for "maximum restraint."

Israeli military spokesman Jonathan Conricus told journalists that the "tactical event" near Avivim, an Israeli community near the Lebanese border, was most likely over.

But he said the "strategic situation is still ongoing," meaning tensions with Hezbollah remained.

Conricus said Israel had targeted the squad that fired the missiles.

Hezbollah said in a statement its fighters had "destroyed a military vehicle on the road to the Avivim barracks, killing and wounding those inside."

Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Manar TV said that the group's attack targeted a Wolf armored vehicle that can fit eight soldiers.

After the initial reports of fire from Lebanon, an Israeli military spokesman said Israelis living within four kilometers (2.5 miles) of the Lebanese border should remain at home and prepare shelters.

The US State Department said Hezbollah should refrain from hostile actions which threaten Lebanon's security.

"This is another example of the destabilizing role of Iranian proxies in undermining peace and security in the region," a spokesperson said.

Tensions have risen in the last week between Israel and its enemy Hezbollah,

the Lebanese Shiite movement backed by Iran.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said Saturday his movement had decided to respond to an alleged Israeli drone attack on the group's Beirut stronghold. The pre-dawn August 25 attack involved two drones – one exploded and caused damage to a Hezbollah-run media center and another crashed without detonating due to technical failure.

Israel has not claimed responsibility for the incident, which came just hours after it had launched strikes in neighboring Syria to prevent what it said was an impending Iranian drone attack on the Jewish state.

Hezbollah says two of its members were killed in that strike.

A source connected to Hezbollah called Sunday's missiles a response to those deaths and said a response to the alleged drone attack would take place in the air, alluding to a confrontation with Israeli drones.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes against what it says are Iranian and Hezbollah sites in Syria since the civil war began there in 2011.

It has pledged to prevent its main enemy Iran from entrenching itself militarily in neighboring Syria.

Iran and Hezbollah, along with Russia, have backed Syrian President Bashar Assad in the conflict.

But a drone attack by Israel inside Lebanon would mark a departure – what Nasrallah had called the first such “hostile action” since a 2006 war between them.

That conflict took the lives of 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and more than 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

UN peacekeeping force UNIFIL called Sunday for “utmost restraint” after what it called a “serious incident” that violated the UN resolution ending the 2006 conflict.

But mission head Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col added that “general calm has been restored in the area and the parties have reassured me of their continued commitment to the cessation of hostilities.”

On Thursday, Israel accused Iran of collaborating with Hezbollah to build precision-guided missiles in Lebanon.

British paper The Times reported last week that the suspected Israeli drone attack targeted crates believed to contain machinery to mix high-grade propellant for precision missiles.







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Israel accuses Iran of pushing Hezbollah missile plants in Lebanon

[Arab coalition hit legitimate military targets in Yemen's Dhamar says spokesman](#)

Sun, 2019-09-01 14:39

DUBAI: The Arab coalition attacked a legitimate "military target" in Yemen's Dhamar, to "neutralize Houthi capabilities," coalition spokesman Col. Turki Al-Maliki said Sunday.

He said the Houthi militia were placing the lives of Yemeni people in danger by "changing the narrative" of militia positions in the area.

Maliki said the coalition had taken all measures to prevent civilian

casualties while targeting a Houthi site in Dhamar

“We have proof that the site targeted at Dhamar was a Houthi military site,” Maliki added.

He said the ongoing development of the weapons used by the Houthi militia “proved the presence of elements of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard.”

And Maliki said the Houthis continued to use the port of Hodeidah, despite international agreements to the contrary, to import their weapons



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UAE minister urges Yemeni government, transitional council to enter Saudi initiative to ease tension Sweden's FM to tour Mideast to relaunch Yemen talks

Russia accuses US of risking Idlib cease-fire with missile strike

Author:

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Sun, 2019-09-01 10:26

MOSCOW: Russia accused the United States Sunday of having “compromised” a fragile cease-fire in the Syrian province of Idlib by launching a missile strike against jihadist leaders there.

The Americans hit the region “without advance notice to Russia or Turkey,” which both have troops on the ground in Idlib, the Russian military said. It described the attack as “indiscriminate.” The strike caused “great losses and destruction,” the Russian defense ministry added in a statement, accusing Washington of having “compromised the cease-fire in the de-escalation zone of Idlib.”

The US strike, which targeted leaders of Al-Qaeda in Syria, killed at least 40 jihadists, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. It came as renewed Syrian regime bombardment of Idlib killed a civilian in the first violation of a Russian-backed truce for the region that came into effect just hours before.

Syrian government air strikes on the jihadist-run Idlib region had halted earlier Saturday, after the regime agreed to a Moscow-backed cease-fire following four months of deadly bombardment that killed more than 950 civilians, the monitor said. Saturday’s truce is the second such agreement between Syrian President Bashar Assad’s regime and jihadists since August 1.

The Idlib region is home to some three million people, nearly half of whom have been displaced from other parts of Syria. The United Nations says the violence there has displaced more than 400,000 people.



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[US blacklists Iranian oil tanker Adrian Darya I](#)

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1567214702089088800

Sat, 2019-08-31 04:16

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday sanctioned an Iranian oil tanker previously held for weeks by Gibraltar and released despite Washington's efforts to keep it detained.

The US Department of Treasury said the vessel, previously known as the Grace

1, is “blocked property” under an anti-terrorist order, and “anyone providing support to the Adrian Darya 1 risks being sanctioned.”

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have risen since US President Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between major powers and Iran last year and reimposed crippling unilateral sanctions.

Two weeks ago, the United States threatened a visa ban on the crew of the tanker.

Washington says the vessel is carrying crude ultimately benefiting Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, which it has listed as a terrorist organization.

“Vessels like the Adrian Darya 1 enable the IRGC-QF to ship and transfer large volumes of oil, which they attempt to mask and sell illicitly to fund the regime’s malign activities and propagate terrorism,” said Sigal Mandelker, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

Treasury said the Adrian Darya’s captain, Akhilesh Kumar, is also sanctioned under the order, which generally prohibits dealings with the blocked property by US persons.

“In addition, persons that engage in certain transactions with the individuals and entities designated today may themselves be exposed to sanctions or subject to an enforcement action,” Treasury said.

Faced with the US warnings, the tanker has been bouncing around the Mediterranean with its cargo of 2.1 million barrels of crude.



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US says anyone who allows Iran tanker Adrian Darya I to dock risks sanctions
No docking request from Iran tanker, says Lebanon