The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Iran Women's Activist Says Blocked From Protesting at Russia World Cup

By Reuters

June 21, 2018



Dylan Martinez / Reuters

An Iranian women's activist said she was stripped of a banner at the World Cup in Russia on Wednesday and blocked from a stadium for two hours after an earlier demonstration drew international headlines.

Maryam Qashqaei Shojaei said she was held for two hours by security officials at the main stadium in Kazan ahead of the match between Iran and Spain, having planned to raise a banner to protest Iran's ban on women attending stadium matches.

"When I was trying to get in with my banner security told me I can't take it in," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Kazan.

Link: Iranian Women Take on Stadium Ban Back Home at Russia's World Cup

"I showed them my approval. They searched me and held me two hours and took the banner."

Anton Lisin, a spokesman for Russia's World Cup Local Organizing Committee (LOC), said he was aware of an incident involving Shojaei but had no further details.

A spokeswoman for FIFA said world football's governing body was looking into the matter as were the LOC and Russian public security authorities.

"We can confirm that banners supporting female presence in the stadiums in IR Iran were approved by FIFA and the LOC through the formal procedure ahead of the 2018 FIFA World Cup and have already been displayed in the match Morocco vs IR Iran in Saint Petersburg," the spokeswoman said in emailed comments.

"The banners are considered by FIFA to express a social appeal as opposed to a political slogan and were therefore not prohibited under the relevant regulations."

Related article: England Fan Ready To Fly the Flag for Gay Rights in Russia

Shojaei made headlines during Iran's first match against Morocco on Friday when she raised a banner in the St. Petersburg stadium with the slogan: "Support Iranian women to attend stadiums #NoBan4Women".

Ahead of the tournament – which is taking place in 11 cities and runs until July 15 – Shojaei launched an online petition urging FIFA President Gianni Infantino to put pressure on Iran to end the ban.

The Islamic Republic has long barred women from attending male football matches and other sports fixtures, partly to protect them from hearing fans swear.

Infantino said in May that Iranian President Hassan Rouhani had told him there were plans to allow women to attend matches in the country soon.

Related article: Foreign World Cup Fans Jailed in Russia

In April, female football fans donned fake beards and wigs to attend a major game in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

The Iranian group OpenStadiums, which is campaigning for women to be allowed to attend sports fixtures, said some women were arrested near the stadium in March during the Esteghlal-Persepolis match.

Iran's team captain Masoud Shojaei said on Tuesday that the World Cup was the wrong place to discuss the issue, although he has previously backed lifting the ban, according to media reports in Iran.

Saudi Arabia last year overturned a ban on women watching sporting events, one of a series of

reforms in the deeply conservative Sunni Muslim kingdom.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/06/21/iran-womens-activist-says-blocked-from-protesting-at-russia-world-cup-a61940