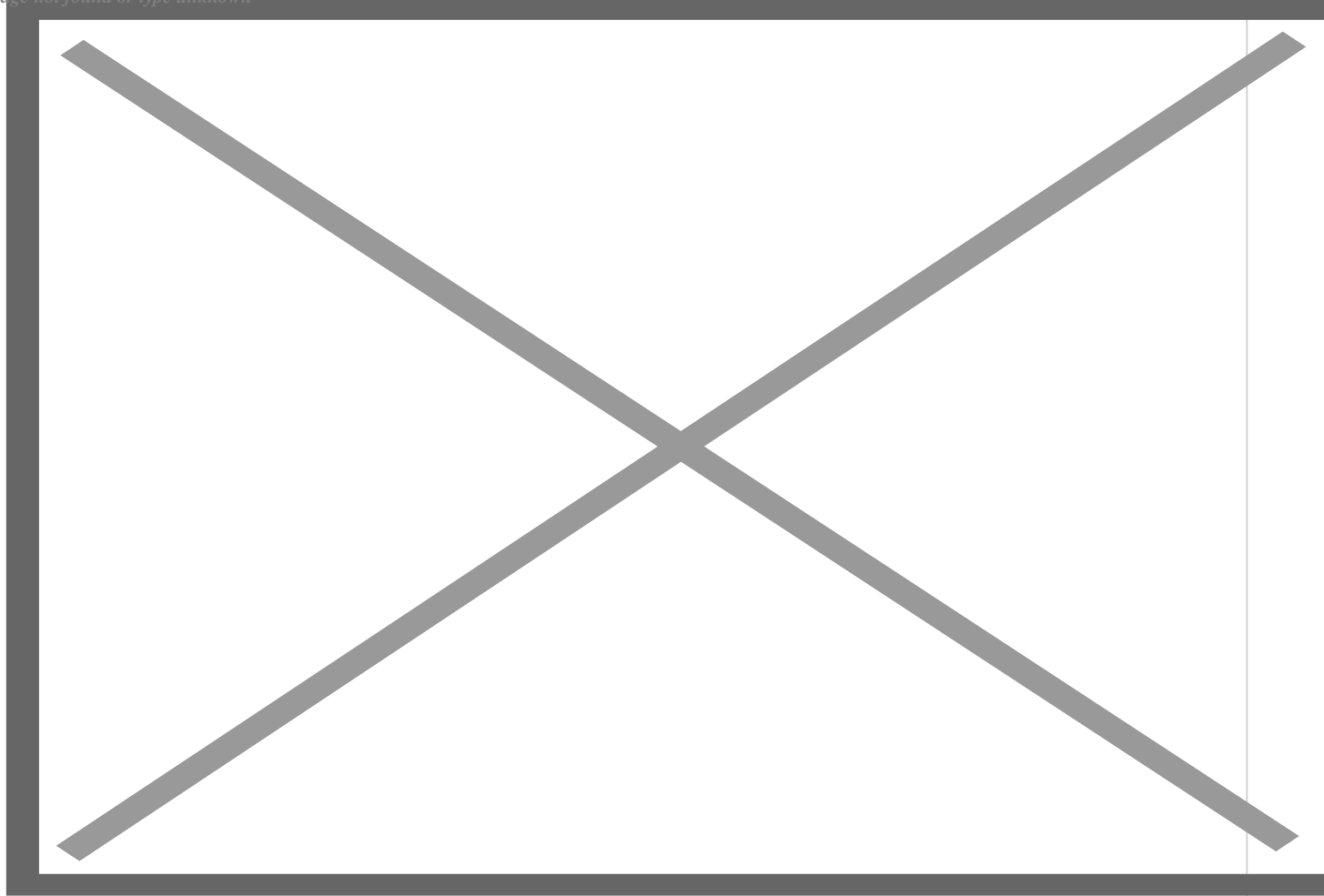


Fans unimpressed amid flag row ahead of Iran-U.S. World Cup clash

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U.S. Soccer social media post that depicted a modified Iranian flag triggered a furore ahead of a critical Group B match.

Doha, November 29 (RHC)-- Iranian and American football fans in Doha have criticised a U.S. Soccer social media post that depicted a modified Iranian flag and triggered a furore ahead of a crucial World

Cup match between the two sides.

The row erupted over the weekend after the U.S. Soccer Federation posted a graphic of the Iran flag without the word “Allah” written on it on its social media feeds. The Iranian Football Federation condemned the move and lodged a protest with the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), demanding sanctions against the United States team.

By Sunday afternoon, the standard flag with the emblem had been restored on U.S. Soccer’s Twitter banner, and the Facebook and Instagram posts with the altered flag had been removed. U.S. Soccer said the post was a show of solidarity with the “women in Iran fighting for basic human rights” in the wake of the death of 22-year-old Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in police custody. “We wanted to show our support for the women in Iran with our graphic for 24 hours,” the federation said.

On Monday, the US team coach Gregg Berhalter apologised over the furore and said his staff were not made aware of the posts. “All we can do is apologise on behalf of the players and the staff, but it’s not something that we were a part of,” he said.

Fans in Doha, however, said they thought the original posts were in poor taste and added unnecessary heat to an already politically charged atmosphere around the game. Iran and the U.S. are geopolitical foes and have not had diplomatic relations for more than four decades.

Gholam, an Iranian fan in Doha who will attend Tuesday’s match, slammed the move and accused the United States of trying to “stoke a fire” before the match. “They [the U.S.] are out to use every opportunity to mislead people about Iran. It is hypocrisy. “Before they criticise others, they should look at what happens in their own country. They have mass shootings every other day, they ignore the problem of racism but these are very serious issues.”

Vicky, a U.S. national living in Qatar, said the World Cup has brought people together and raised concerns that the U.S. Soccer posts were ill-judged and could stoke divisions. “The spirit of such a tournament should be of inclusion and grace, and politics should be kept out of the game.” “There are so many countries trying to take a stand on certain issues and not always doing it in the right way. For the US to mess with a country’s flag is not graceful.”

The two nations have faced each other on three previous occasions. Iran won the most recent encounter 2-1 during the 1998 World Cup in France. Gholam said he expected the U.S. would face the same result in Tuesday’s match, where a place in the last 16 of the tournament is at stake.

“Americans used the same tactics before the game in 1998, and look at what happened? We won. We’re going to do the same tomorrow.”

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