Iran soccer team silent during national anthem at its first World Cup game

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By Patrick Smith

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iran-soccer-team-silent-national-anthem-world-cup-game-rcna58121>

Iran’s national men’s soccer team refused to sing the country’s national anthem at the [World Cup in Qatar](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/2022-world-cup-qatar-rcna58013)on Monday, in an apparent act of defiance against their government, which has become the target of growing and [incendiary protests](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-death-clashes-ayatollah-ali-khamenei-rcna54251).

The team stood in a line with arms around one another's shoulders, before their opening match against England, but instead of singing the words, as is traditional, the players looked stony-faced and stared straight ahead.

England’s players, by contrast, sang a verse of their national anthem.

The moment was not shown on state TV in Iran.

The Iranian team has enthusiastically sung the anthem in previous tournaments, including the World Cup in 2018 and the Asian Cup in 2020.

Soccer is close to a national obsession in Iran, as it is in other nations, but public opinion has soured ahead of this year's tournament. Across the country, billboards for the team have been burned and people have taken to social media to support England, who went on to win the match by 6 goals to 2.

Earlier, Ehsan Hajsafi, Iran's captain, acknowledged widespread dissatisfaction at home, becoming the latest public figure to support the protesters.

“We have to accept that the situation in our country is not good and that our people are not happy, they are discontent," Hajsafi said at a press conference. "We are here, but it does not mean we should not be their voice or that we should not respect them. Whatever we have is theirs."

"We have to perform the best we can and score goals and dedicate those goals to the people of Iran who are feeling hurt," he added.

His statement followed Iran's decision to punish a string of prominent Iranians who had publicly supported protests sparked by the death of 22-year-old [Mahsa Amini](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/protests-iran-mahsa-amini-woman-dies-morality-police-custody-rcna46807%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) in September, days after she was detained by police for allegedly breaking the country's strict dress codes.

The well-known Iranian actors Hengameh Ghaziani and Katayoun Riahi were both arrested, official news agency IRNA and government-aligned Tasnim reported on Sunday.

Ghaziani posted a video to her Instagram account showing her without a head covering — [an act of defiance](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iran-protests-mahsa-amini-actor-taraneh-alidoosti-headscarf-removed-rcna56556) often repeated by protesters and their supporters in recent weeks.

“Maybe this will be my last post. From this moment on, whatever happens to me, know that as always, I am with Iranian people until my last breath,” Ghaziani wrote on Instagram on Saturday.