

Demanding matchups awaiting Iran at Freestyle World Cup



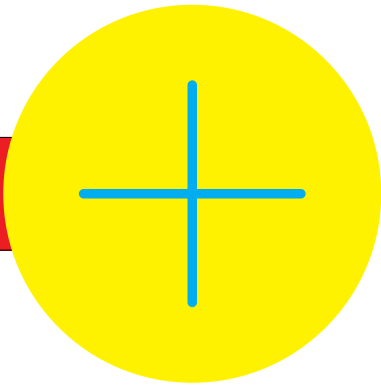
Kamran Qasempour, pictured in a training session, headlines Iranian team in Coralville, US.

USA, Iran, Japan, Mongolia, and Georgia – the top five from September’s World Championships in Belgrade, Serbia – will be joined by an All-World Team at the two-day Freestyle World Cup, starting today in the state of Iowa.

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Thus spoke the artist:
There’s nothing I like better than cursive nastaliq



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A guy went to see his doctor one morning. “Someone decided to graffiti my house last night,” he told his doctor. “I was furious.” “So why are you telling me,” the doctor asked. “I can’t understand the writing,” he replied. “Was it you?”

Although he would laugh at this joke, Behrouz Khandabi, the 49-year-old calligraphy artist, would quickly add a remark in defense of the doctor’s penmanship. “Every handwriting is beautiful in its own way. Even that of doctors and first-graders,” he said with a glint in his eyes and went on to suggest, “But I genuinely think that the authentic art of calligraphy should be taken more seriously by everyone.” Despite a diploma in humanities, Behrouz was drawn to graphics after his education was over. It was due to his school days interest in painting. “Once when I was in fourth grade, my science teacher Mr. Naderi saw one of my paintings. He was impressed, and told me that he would pay for my painting classes if I decide to take them.”

What steered the interest of the young artist towards calligraphy, however, was a momentous class visit to Tehran’s famous Reza Abbasi Museum, wherein numerous calligraphy masterpieces awaited him. “It sparked an interest in me, and prompted me to go and start to calligraph with the most basic necessities. I even used regular ink back then, which was used for pens.” After a while, he began to calligraph cursive nastaliq using a pencil. One day, his sister-in-law saw a piece of paper filled with his practices and asked him, “Whose writing is this?” “It’s mine,” he replied, and immediately received a sincere, heartwarming encouragement to pursue calligraphy more seriously. Thus, he bought a few calligraphy books to use for his long practice hours, which usually began at midnight and ended at dawn. “I learned cursive using Esrafil Shirchi’s books. Now, there’s nothing I like better than cursive nastaliq.” Behrouz then opened a small shop to make a living through his chosen craft, calligraphing on walls, banners, and, of course, coated papers. He kept practicing

on his own using model books before going to the Society of Iranian Calligraphists, an authoritative body which rates and ranks the artists. “During all those years, so many people told me that I should go there, but I procrastinated. Eventually, though, I went to the Society and started to take a course there.” Unsurprisingly, he impressed his instructor on the very first day by writing the model calligraphy right after the class was over; it was supposed to take the learners a whole week to master. After a while, though, he had to stop taking those courses due to some work affairs. Still, he aspires to someday go back and receive his Certificate of Excellence from the Society of Iranian Calligraphists. “Then I think I will have enough motivation to showcase my works in a gallery. It’s everybody’s wish to be able to show his life’s work.” However, even if that day does not come to pass, Behrouz is quite content with what he does so passionately. He gets his kick when family, friends, and in many cases, strangers, take a look at his beautiful calligraphies.



Iranian woman serving as a mosque and church custodian in Orumieh

Mohammad Motlagh
Staff writer

EXCLUSIVE

On a cold evening in late autumn, I travelled to a beautiful village located a few kilometers from Orumieh on a mountain slope. The Sir village, with its stone houses, snow-covered alleys and blue sky was full of peace and quiet like all other villages. However, it has many secrets, one of which is the life story of an old woman, known as “Iran Khanum” (Lady Iran). She is the custodian of both the church and the mosque of the village. She has three daughters and a son, all of whom live in the village. Like the rest of the Kurdish inhabitants of the village, Lady Iran belongs to the Harki (Herki) Tribe. A number of Assyrian and Azari people live in the village as well. Kurdish, Azari and Assyrian residents of the village are Sunni, Shia and Christian, respectively. I met “Iran Khanum” next to the storeroom of her house talking to her chickens. Her husband, Esmat, joined us with



their two beautiful little grandchildren. The church is in front of her house and the newly-built mosque is located on a hill at the end of the alley. The assembly hall of the church is situated on one side of its courtyard while the old building of the church with an iron door, decorated with a cross, and two tall crescent-shaped windows is on the other side. Like all houses of the village, the church has an old stone wall and a wall made of red brick that was rebuilt a few

years ago. The church has a simple altar, with several images of Jesus Christ (PBUH) and Saint Mary (PBUH) as well as two rows of wooden benches. In the corner of its hall and in front of its entrance, there is a decorated pine tree. The church was built in 1874 by the first generation of American missionaries who lived in the area. Joseph Kakran, born in Orumieh in 1854, was the child of one of them. He was 13 years old when he moved to New York to study

medicine. He returned to Orumieh after marriage and established Iran’s first medical university and two hospitals in Orumieh in 1878. In the past, all villagers were Assyrians, many of whom left the village later. Kurdish and Azari people also settled in the village afterwards. Presently, two members of the village’s council are Kurdish and one is Assyrian. All villagers trust Iran Khanum. Thirteen years ago, when the church was repaired, its key was given to her. The key of the village’s mosque, built five years ago, was handed over to her as well. I walked with Iran Khanum in the beautiful alleys of the village and talked to some rural people. One of them told me an interesting story. “Several years ago, every rural woman who became pregnant dreamed that Saint Mary (PBUH) was sitting on a rock located at the end of an alley, breastfeeding Jesus Christ (PBUH). This dream was repeated so many times that it caused my son to build a small room on the rock. Now, people go there to light candles and

pray.” The room, located next to a garden, is actually a small church in which one or two persons can sit. A few images of Jesus Christ (PBUH) and Saint Mary (PBUH) and a place to light a candle are in the room, having a blue door. Moreover, the old cemetery of the American missionaries and Assyrians is also located in the village. Each grave of the cemetery has a rectangular stone with English words and patterns. The date 1855 is engraved on a stone plaque located next to its door. I found out that there are two villages called Sir in the region: Sir-e Bala (Upper Sir) and Sir-e Paein (Lower Sir). Sir-e Paein is located on the other side of the mountain. It is one of the popular tourist destinations of Orumieh. Maar Sargiz Church, dating back to the Sassanid Era, is located in the village, the residents of which are all Assyrians. Made of sedimentary stones, the church consists of two interconnected buildings, the first of which has a small entrance, a prayer room and an altar, and the second has a hall.

