Iran Bans Weightlifter For Life Over Handshake With Israeli

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By AFP

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An Iranian weightlifter has been given a lifetime ban by authorities in the Islamic republic after shaking hands with an Israeli competitor at an event in Poland, state media reported.

Mostafa Rajaei, aged in his 40s, shook hands with Israeli weightlifter Maksim Svirsky on Saturday after they both stood on the podium at a World Masters championship in Wieliczka, Poland.

"The weightlifting federation bans athlete Mostafa Rajaei for life from entering all sports facilities in the country and dismisses the head of the delegation for the competition, Hamid Salehinia," the body announced in a statement cited by state news agency IRNA.

Iran does not recognise Israel, its sworn enemy, and prohibits all contact between Iranian and Israeli athletes.

According to the IRNA report, Rajaei "crossed the red lines of the Islamic republic" at the event where the Iranian delegation had been "sent with the support of the federation".

Rajaei is a former member of the Iranian national team and represented his country at the Asian Weightlifting Championships in 2015 in Thailand.

In 2021, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged athletes "not to shake hands with a representative of the (Israeli) criminal regime to obtain a medal".

For years, Iranian athletes have managed to avoid meeting Israelis in competitions, often by getting disqualified or providing medical certificates testifying that they were unwell.

Young chess prodigy Alireza Firouzja left Iran after the sport's federation banned him from playing in the 2019 world championship for fear he would face an Israeli player. He is now a naturalised French citizen.