

Iranian women aiming for clean sweep of karate golds at Asian Games

Sports Desk

Iran will be looking to build on a stellar international season last year to chase an ambitious goal of a clean sweep of three women's karate golds at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan, Fatemeh Pourzamani, the vice-president of the Iranian Karate Federation, said. "Thank God, Iranian women achieved brilliant results last year," Pourzamani said of the country's 10-medal haul across different competitions on the sidelines of a national team training camp in Rasht this week. "We hope this upward trend continues this year." Atousa Golshadnejad headlined Iranian girls' medal hunt, starting with her second Asian title in May, before the 22-year-old was one of three Iranian female gold medalists – alongside Sara Bahmanyar and kata practitioner Fatemeh Sadeqi – at November's Islamic

Solidarity Games in Riyadh. Golshadnejad then capped off a glorious run of results with a historic feat in Cairo, grabbing the country's maiden women's gold at the World Championships, since the showpiece was first introduced in 1970.

For Bahmanyar, meanwhile, the international season was also one to remember as she added a second world bronze, as well as Asian individual and team bronzes to her ISG triumph, while walking away with the top prize at the Chengdu 2025 World Games in August.

"We have three major events ahead of us this year. One of our main objectives for the upcoming season is to win three women's golds at the Asian Games in September," Pourzamani added.

Before the Asian Games, however, Iranian women must compete at the Asian Karate Championships, which will kick off on June 19 in

Bali, Indonesia.

"The event in Bali will be of huge importance for us, as it serves as a qualification path for the World Team Championships," Iran head coach Pegah Zanganeh said on the penultimate day of the training camp on Sunday.

"The women's national team is enjoying a golden era. I hope it inspires all three Iranian girls to win gold medals at the Asian Games," Zanganeh added.

"Unfortunately, our preparation program was massively disrupted by the war, but my coaching staff and I have been designing proper training sessions to make sure the athletes enter the upcoming tournaments in peak physical and mental form," said Zanganeh, a five-time medalist at the Asian Championships.

The newly concluded camp was the first of four set to be held until the Asian showpiece in Bali.



Atousa Golshadnejad (L) won Iran's maiden women's gold at the World Karate Championships in Cairo last November. **WKF**

Iran calls up 30-man squad for World Cup training camp



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Iran head coach Amir Qaleneo named a 30-man squad, comprising domestic league players, for an upcoming training camp ahead of the FIFA World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada from June 11.

The players reported for a first training session of the camp on Monday, which is expected to continue for three to four weeks.

The decision to hold the camp with 50 days remaining until the global showpiece came after the League Organization of the Iranian Football Federation confirmed on Friday that the remainder of the Persian Gulf Pro League will resume after the conclusion of Team Melli's World Cup campaign.

The Iranian top flight has been postponed since February 28, when the United States and Israel initiated a war campaign against Iran, and Qaleneo is desperate to ensure his domestic players remain in proper condition despite a lack of competitive action until the World Cup.

Iran will kick off its Group G campaign in the United States against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, on June

15, before facing European heavyweight Belgium at the same venue six days later. The team will then travel to Seattle, Washington, to face Egypt in its final group game at Lumen Field on June 26.

With eight third-placed teams across the 12 groups advancing to the round of 32, Iran will fancy its chances of securing its first-ever knockout spot at the seventh attempt.

Team Melli was last in action in a friendly double-header in Antalya, Türkiye, during March's international break, falling to a 2-1 loss to Nigeria before bouncing back to hammer Costa Rica 5-0.

However, Mahdi Taj, the chairman of the sport's national governing body, cast further doubt on Iran's World Cup participation on Sunday, saying "high-ranking authorities in the country will have the final say on the issue."

His remarks came after U.S. President Donald Trump said in the early stages of the ongoing military conflict that he considers it not "appropriate" for Iran to take part in the tournament "for their own life and safety."

FIFA chief Gianni Infantino, however, said last week that Iran will play "for sure"

at the World Cup, insisting that "sports should be outside of politics."

The following is Iran's 30-man squad for the World Cup training camp:

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Tractor), Payam Niazmand (Persepolis), Seyyed Hossein Hosseini (Sepahan), Mohammad Khalifeh (Iranco)
Defenders: Shoja Khalilzadeh (Tractor), Ali Ne'mati (Foolad Khuzestan), Aref Aqasi (Esteghlal), Hossein Kar'anizadegan (Persepolis), Hossein Abarquei (Persepolis), Danial Eiri (Malavan FC), Masoud Mohebbi (Khaybar Khorramabad), Ramin Rezaeian (Foolad Khuzestan), Danial Esmailifar (Tractor), Saleh Hardani (Esteghlal), Arya Yousefi (Sepahan), Milad Mohammadi (Persepolis), Ehsan Hajsafi (Sepahan)
Midfielders: Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Amirmohammad Razaqinia (Esteghlal), Omid Nourafkan (Sepahan), Aref Haji-Eidi (Sepahan), Hadi Habibinejad (Chador-malou), Mahdi Hashemnejad (Tractor), Mahdi Torabi (Tractor), Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi (Sepahan)
Strikers: Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (Tractor), Ali Alipour (Persepolis), Ehsan Mahrouqi (Foolad Khuzestan), Amirhossein Mahmoudi (Persepolis), Kasra Taheri (Zob Ahan).

Iran finishes FS runner-up in Champions wrestling tournament

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Iran bagged 13 medals, including three golds, at the Champions international wrestling tournament in Antalya, Türkiye, claiming the runner-up spot behind Russia in the freestyle competitions.

The three-day showpiece featured under-20 wrestlers from global powerhouses of the sport, including Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia. Reigning world under-23 champion Abolfazl Mohammadnejad – also a

silver medalist at the U20 Worlds last year – added a second freestyle gold to Iran's medal haul when he triumphed in the 125kg final on Sunday. Abolfazl Shamsipour, meanwhile, settled for silver in the freestyle 86kg class on the final day.

Former world cadet champion Ahoura Khateri had walked away with the top prize in the freestyle 61kg weight class thanks to a 7-5 victory over Ali-Asghar Soltani in a thrilling all-Iranian showdown on Saturday.

Mohammad-Mahdi Mamiwand (74kg) was the other Iranian silver medalist in the freestyle division, with Amirhossein Khakpa (92kg) and Danial Tavakkoli (97kg) finishing with consolation bronze medals in their respective events.

In the Greco-Roman category, world cadet champion Amir Sam Mohammadi claimed the 97kg gold on Friday, while Ali Gharibi (63kg) and Mohammadreza Gholami (67kg) bagged two silver medals.

Alireza Amiri (55kg), former world under-17 gold medalist Amir-Mahdi Saeidi-Nava (77kg), and Alireza Mohammadhosseini (82kg) added three bronzes to the medal count for Iran, which was represented by 26 wrestlers at the tournament.



Iranian freestyle wrestler Abolfazl Mohammadnejad (red), pictured in last October's U23 World Championships, won the 125kg gold medal at the Champions international tournament in Antalya, Türkiye. **UWW**

Iranian men's saber sinks to 30th in FIE World Rankings

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Iran dropped by six spots to sit 30th in the latest men's saber world rankings, released by the international fencing governing body, the FIE, on Sunday.

The Iranian team – comprising Taha Kargarpour, Ahmadreza Shammiri, and Nima Aqaei – suffered a first-round exit in the fourth Saber World Cup event of the season in Padova, Italy, on Sunday, after a 45-30 setback against Poland.

The Iranian trio also finished empty-handed in the individual event as they all failed to progress beyond the preliminary stage. France overtook Hungary to move atop the team

ranking, while Italy retained the third spot, with South Korea and Romania completing the top five.

Ali Pakdaman, who was ab-

sent in Padova, is the highest-ranked Iranian in the individual rankings, standing 30th with 51,000 points.

Nima Zahedi is 137th on

9,875 points, followed by Mohammad Fotouhi (141st), Farzad Baher (168th), and Kargarpour, who is in 207th place.



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