

Iran aiming to reclaim superheavyweight territory, weightlifting chief Anoushiravani says

Sports Desk

must build on the latest success at the Asian Weightlifting Championships to reassume dominance in the superheavyweight class for the years to come, Sajjad Anoushiravani, the chairman of the Iranian Weightlifting Federation, insists.

Young Iranian Alireza Yousefi marked his return to the global stage in style by setting a new world record of to win the Asian clean & jerk gold in the men's +110kg event in Gandhinagar, India, on Sunday.

Following last year's weight class adjustments, new standard records were set by the International Weightlifting Federation, including 260kg for the clean & jerk in the men's superheavyweight division. Yousefi exceeded the mark by one kilogram with his final lift in Gandhinagar. Making his first international appearance in 18 months after recovering from knee surgery, the 22-year-old prodigy added the snatch bronze and total silver to his haul as the Iranian depleted two-man squad finished fifth in the overall medals table – which also featured the

women's competition – with two golds as well as one silver and one bronze apiece.

Two-time world junior champion Alireza Nasiri had to recover from three failed snatch attempts in his 110kg campaign on Saturday to bag the clean & jerk gold.

Speaking to ISNA upon the team's return, Anoushiravani said the primary goal in India was to assess Yousefi's condition after a year and a half away from major competition. "Thank God, he performed exceptionally well and set the world record in the superheavyweight category," the federation chief said. "He has a chance to compete in the Asian Games and Olympic qualifiers, and he is still young."

Anoushiravani, however, acknowledged that Yousefi still has room for improvement in the snatch. "The technical staff of the national team must address the issue, and Alireza is fully aware of it," he added, while also praising Dr. Reza Shirvani, head of the federation's medical committee, for orchestrating Yousefi's powerful comeback from knee surgery.

Yousefi – also a winner of two



Iran's Alireza Yousefi makes a lift during the men's +110kg event at the Asian Weightlifting Championships in Gandhinagar, India, on May 17, 2026.
● PTI

world junior titles – made his senior international debut at the 2024 World Championships in impressive fashion, stunning fellow Iranian Alireza Davoudi and Armenian Olympic silver medalist Varazdat Lalayan to claim the C&J gold with a then-continental record lift of 262kg, before winning bronze in the total with 456kg.

Iran dominated the superheavy-

weight division for the best part of the early years of the century, with legendary Hossein Rezazadeh and Behdad Salimi – the head coach of the national team – sharing three Olympic golds and dozens of world medals between them.

However, Iran was dethroned by Georgian Lasha Talakhadze, who made the class his own territory for more than a decade, col-

lecting triple Olympic titles and seven successive world crowns.

Anoushiravani was adamant about Iran's long-term ambitions in the weight division. "Sooner or later, we must reclaim the superheavyweight titles both in Asia and the world. That is our plan," stressed the Iranian, who has an Olympic and world silver in the category under his belt. "God willing, this

will happen at the Asian Games and also at the World Championships in China."

Regarding 21-year-old Nasiri, who recently moved up from the junior national team, Anoushiravani noted that the young lifter was dispatched to gain experience in a more professional setting ahead of the Asian Games. "Nasiri is one of the talents we have invested heavily in over the past few years," he said. "He started with a heavy weight in the snatch, and the technical staff wanted to see how he would handle intense competition. Now his weaknesses have been identified, and we will address them."

He concluded that overall, both lifters' performances were decent given the heavy opening weights they faced. "We have several weight categories where we are capable of breaking world records," Anoushiravani said. "This will happen in the near future." He added that both athletes would return far stronger for September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games and the World Championships in Ningbo, China, in October, with a clear goal of qualifying for the Olympics.

Iran set to dispatch 27 athletes to Youth Olympics

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Iran is set to be represented by 27 male and female athletes at the upcoming Dakar Summer Youth Olympics, Hamid Azizi, the country's chef de mission at the multi-sport event, has confirmed.

The fourth edition of the Games, set to be staged in Africa for the first time, will resume after an eight-year hiatus with the opening ceremony in the Senegalese capital's Dakar Arena on October 31, with young athletes from across the globe vying for glory in 25 sporting events over 13 days of action.

The Iranian delegation in Dakar will be named after seven-year-old schoolboy Makan Nassiri, whose remains were never identified after the U.S. airstrikes on the Shajareh Tayyebah Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28.

Azizi said that the Iranian contingent's lineup is all but finalized with five months remaining until the Games. "We will continue trying to add quotas if withdrawals occur in other countries, but no quotas will be deducted," he told local media.

The 27 qualified athletes span both team and individual events. The breakdown includes two taekwondo athletes (one boy in the +73kg category and one girl in the -63kg class), one cyclist competing in both the individual time trial and road race, and four beach wrestlers across the 60kg, 70kg, 80kg, and 90kg weight classes. Track and field will see one boy in the 2,000m steeplechase, while badminton has secured two boys' quotas. Boxing contributes one girl in the 57kg division, and table tennis, triathlon, and swim-



Photo taken on May 17, 2026, shows an external view of Dakar Arena, which will host badminton and futsal event during the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games, in Diamniadio, Senegal.
● XIE JIANFEI/XINHUA

ming each send one boy – the latter in the 200m event. Wushu is represented by one athlete in the taolu discipline, beach volleyball by a boys' pair, and women's futsal by a full squad of 10 players.

Azizi noted that Iran's quota situation has been finalized in coordination with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and relevant international bodies. While the overall environment regarding training camps and finances is favorable, he remained cautious about medal predictions. "It is difficult to predict medals in youth age groups because we know our own athletes' conditions but not those of other countries," he said.

Reflecting on Iran's Youth Olympic history, Azizi recalled a steady upward trajectory: at Singapore 2010, Iran secured two gold, two silver, and one bronze medal; at Nanjing 2014, the tally improved to three gold and three bronze; and at Buenos Aires 2018, the delegation achieved its best performance to date with seven gold, three silver, and four bronze medals.

"Iran's best performance

was in Argentina. Iranian sports have made good progress since then," he said, citing a strong showing at last year's Asian Youth Games in Manama, where the country bagged an impressive 76 medals, including 22 golds.

Azizi expressed high hopes for wrestling as "always the first hope" of the delegation, along with table tennis prodigy Benyamin Faraji, who has excelled at the senior level, and taekwondo, where recent federation stability has boosted confidence. "We are not without expectations in any sport, and we hope our athletes will surprise everyone," he stated.

However, he acknowledged that the African hosting context has reduced the number of sports and participants compared to previous editions. "Senegal does not have a weightlifting federation, so that sport was removed from the program, even though Iran has always been a medalist in weightlifting at the Youth Olympics," Azizi explained. "Overall, the opportunity to win medals in Dakar is lower than in Argentina."

Asian Taekwondo Championships: Iran suffers team setbacks in poomsae

Sports Desk

Iranians suffered further setbacks in the poomsae competition on Day 2 of the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, finishing empty-handed in the mixed pair events on Wednesday.

Given a bye in the first round, Yassin Zandi and Marjan Salahshouri crashed out in the mixed pair under-30 quarterfinals after scoring 8.62 points against the Filipino duo's 8.70.

Zandi had fallen to Muhammad Riza of Indonesia in the round of 16 of the men's individual event on the opening day, while the women's competition was one to forget for two-time world silver medalist Salahshouri, who de-

feated Hong Kong's Tsz Ki Liu in her opener but was undone by South Korea's Jooyeong Lee.

Meanwhile, Yassin Akbari and Yasaman Limouchi teamed up to progress from the freestyle mixed pair preliminaries, but eventually settled for a fifth-place finish after an 8.20-point performance in the final showdown.

Akbari had also made it to the men's individual final on Tuesday, finishing sixth, which proved enough for him to secure qualification for the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in September.

Limouchi represented the country in the women's freestyle event, finishing ninth in the preliminaries with 7.40 points to miss out on the

final showdown.

The Asian Championships will continue with the opening day of the kyorugi contests at the M Bank Arena today.

Yassin Valizadeh will get the country's men's team title defense underway in the -54kg division, while reigning Olympic champion Arjan Salimi will look to make up for a below-par World Championships campaign last year – where he suffered a round-of-16 exit – by defending his continental title in the +87kg class.

In the women's event, Masoumeh Ranjbar will compete in the -46kg class, while Fatemeh Ahmadi will be part of the +73kg draw.

Two-time world silver medalist Marjan Salahshouri was part of the Iranian poomsae mixed pair at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.
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Akbari returns to lead Paykan volleyball team

Sports Desk

Peyman Akbari has once again taken over as head coach of the Paykan men's volleyball team, succeeding Mohammadreza Tondran ahead

of the upcoming Iranian Super League season.

The most decorated team in the history of the Asian Club Championship with eight titles, Paykan confirmed Akbari's appointment as

part of its long-term vision to restore its glory days in Iran's top-flight volleyball.

The former Iranian international outside hitter and team captain returns to a club where he previously achieved legendary status both on the court and on the bench.

Akbari is no stranger to success with Paykan. During his previous stints with the club – as both player and coach – he secured two Iranian Super League championships, multiple run-

ner-up finishes, two Asian Club Championships titles, as well as third- and fourth-place finishes at the FIVB Club World Championship. He also brings experience from serving on Iran's national team coaching staff in recent years.

Akbari was also in charge when the Iranian national team completed a clean sweep of six victories – including a 3-1 win against Türkiye in the final – to claim the men's gold medal at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh last November.



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