

Asian Taekwondo Championships:

Salimi leaves it late as Iranians dominate men's competition with three golds

Sports Desk

Iranians stole the show on the first two days of the men's kyorugi contests at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, collecting three gold medals and a silver across four weight classes.

Abolfazl Zandi picked up where he left off in his gold-winning campaign at last October's World Championships, defeating former world cadet champion Yang Hui-Chan of South Korea in successive rounds to win the top prize in the men's 58kg category on Friday. This was the second Asian medal of Zandi's career, following his bronze in the previous edition. A second men's gold for the country came in the -74kg event, where world bronze medalist Amir-Sina Bakhtiari, who was given a shot at glory through an Asian Taekwondo Union invitation, defeated China's Zhao Shan in two rounds of the final.

Friday's triumphs came after Arian Salimi had grabbed the +87kg gold in spectacular fashion on the preceding day in the Mongolian capital.

Having suffered a last-16 exit at last year's World Championships, Olympic champion Salimi was back to his ruthless form at the M-Bank Arena, marching into the final without conceding a single round in three bouts – including a semifinal victory over his familiar foe and reigning world champion Kang Sang-hyun of South Korea.

The 22-year-old sensation got off to a

slow start in the final against Uzbekistan's Marat Mavlonov, losing 7-7 on criteria in the first round, before bouncing back to win 6-3 in the second.

Mavlonov still thought he had done enough to bag the top prize when he took a 10-9 lead with three seconds left in a thrilling decisive round, but Salimi had other ideas, delivering a trademark three-point head kick in the final second to secure back-to-back Asian golds.

"This year's event also serves as the qualification pathway for [September's] Asian Games, which is why all leading taekwondo nations on the continent have come here with full-strength squads," Salimi said of the high level of competition in Ulaanbaatar.

"The South Korean and Uzbek opponents were particularly tough. The South Korean is a two-time consecutive world champion, and my opponent in the final has numerous titles from Asian competitions. We had a very intense match," added Salimi.

"This was only my second international tournament after the Paris Olympics, while the team entered the event off the back of difficult conditions amid the wartime circumstances in the country, so I still have room for improvement to reach the level I showed at the Olympics.

"My hometown training facilities were heavily damaged in the early days of the war and I had no place to train. I still managed to take part in the selection trials regardless, and thank God, in the end I achieved a good result for my dear



Iran's Arian Salimi poses with his men's +87kg gold medal at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on May 21, 2026.
● ATU

people and brought smiles to their lips under these tough circumstances." Earlier on Thursday, Yasin Valizadeh opened Iran's medal account with a silver in the -54kg weight class.

Valizadeh enjoyed an impressive run to the final on his senior debut at the Asian Championships, claiming three victories – including a straight-rounds win against Mahdi Razmian in an all-Iranian quar-

terfinal – before defeating Uzbekistan's Jakhongir Khudayberdiev in the last four. However, the Iranian fell in successive rounds against Jaafar Aldaoud – a second setback against the Jordanian following last year's semifinal loss at the Fujairah Open – adding to his 2022 Asian junior bronze.

Elsewhere, Thursday's results were one to forget for the Iranian women's squad as the two contestants in action finished empty-handed in their respective events. Masoumeh Ranjbar began her -46kg campaign with a 2-0 win against her South Korean opponent, but fell to prominent Chinese athlete Wang Shiyi – a world bronze medalist last year – in two rounds.

Teenage prodigy Wang Chieh-ling – a two-time world junior champion – defeated Thailand's Patcharakon Poolkerd in the final to secure Taiwan's first women's title at the event in a decade.

In the +73kg event, Iran's Baran Ahmadi had her run ended after two bouts, following a 2-0 defeat against Olympic silver medalist Svetlana Osipova of Uzbekistan, who went on to win the gold thanks to a final victory over South Korea's Song Da-bin.

Featuring 338 contestants from 31 countries, the 27th edition of the Asian Championships will run until Sunday.

The dreadful campaign for the Iranian women's squad continued on Friday with Mahla Momenzadeh and Baran Nemati crashing out in the -49kg and -73kg competitions, respectively.

CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship:

Iran off to flyer with Bangladesh rout

Sports Desk

Iran got off to an emphatic start to its CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship title defense on Friday, hammering Bangladesh in straight sets (25-6, 25-9, 25-10) in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Iranian opposite Sepinood Dastbarjan was named Player of the Match following a standout display that excelled in every department of the game.

Iran will resume action against Sri Lanka in Pool B on Sunday, before facing Kazakhstan in its final group game the following day.

The host team, Nepal, is joined by India, Maldives and Kyrgyzstan in Pool A.

Iran celebrated a historic feat in last year's CAVA event in Tashkent, capturing its maiden international women's volleyball gold since the first national team was established in 1963, thanks to a straight-set victory over host Uzbekistan in the final.

This year's event is the first in a congested international calendar for Iranian women, who took



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part in a 20-day training camp at the FIVB facilities in Bangkok before the CAVA tournament amid the wartime circumstances in their home country.

Iran is also set to feature at the AVC Women's Nations Cup – starting June 6 in Candon, Philippines – where South Korean head coach Lee Do-hee's side has been drawn against defending champion Vietnam, Kazakh-

stan, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Lebanon in Pool B.

The major showpiece for the Iranian women will come at September's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in Japan, where the country will make its first women's volleyball appearance at the multi-sport event since the 1974 edition on home soil.

2026 African Open Championships:

Iranian para powerlifters grab four medals in Oran

Sports Desk

Iranian para powerlifters Alireza Izadi and Mahdiyeh Mohammadian grabbed four medals between them at the latest regional Open Championships event of the season in Oran, Algeria.

Competing in the men's -59kg weight class, Izadi posted three successful efforts, with his final lift of 183kg securing the bronze medal for the Iranian.

Egypt's Mohamed Elmenyawy claimed the gold medal with a best lift of 209kg – one kilogram clear of Iraqi silver medalist Mustafa Radhi.

However, an overall tally of 542kg saw Izadi win the total gold medal, with Nigeria's Ibrahim Dauda (522kg) and Egypt's Mohamed Abdalla Elhout (512kg) settling for silver and bronze, respectively. In the women's -55kg competition, meanwhile, Mohammadian also registered three successful lifts (95-102-105) to finish with bronze – behind Egypt's Nawal Ramadan (123kg) and Nigeria's Esther Oyema (122kg).

Mohammadian then secured the total silver with 302kg, finishing behind Ramadan, who tallied 359kg, with Morocco's Meryem Hamouich fin-



Iran para powerlifter Mahdiyeh Mohammadian won two medals at the 2026 African Open Championships in Oran, Algeria.
● IRNA

ishing third on 177kg.

Featuring more than 150 contestants from 20 countries, the event marks the third regional championships in this year's four-event series, following the European Open Championships in Tbilisi, Georgia, and the Asia-Oceania Open Championships in Bangkok, Thailand, held over the past two months. The Pan American Championships are scheduled to take place later this year.

With the regional championships forming a mandatory part of the LA28 Paralympic qualification pathway, athletes will be aiming to secure valuable ranking points and set new continental benchmarks ahead of other major events in 2026, including the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Great Britain.

Iran misses Saber World Cup over Egyptian visa denial

Sports Desk

Iranian fencers were ruled out of the Saber World Cup event, which began Friday in Cairo, Egypt, after being denied entry visas by the African country. The Iranian sabreurs had been

training under intense conditions for more than 45 days at the Christian Bauer training camp in Italy but will now return to Iran in the coming days. They are expected to continue their preparations in Tehran as they shift focus to upcoming

competitions – including September's Asian Games in Japan. This was the second Egyptian visa saga for Iranian athletes in less than a month.

Earlier in May, the Iranian weightlifting squad had to make a late arrival in Ismailia for the

World Junior Championships after a visa delay threatened to derail their men's title defense. The Iranian eight-man team still beat the odds to win the team crown with an impressive haul of six golds, seven silvers, and one bronze.



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