

2026 Chuncheon Korea Open:

Zarrinkamar strikes gold, leads Iran women's medal haul

Sports Desk

Iran's women's taekwondo team collected five medals, including one gold, at the 2026 Chuncheon Korea Open, as the country concluded the two-day event with 12 medals across the men's and women's competitions.

Reigning two-time world junior champion Hana Zarrinkamar headlined Iran's medal haul by claiming gold in the +73kg category on Tuesday. After receiving a first-round bye, the Iranian prodigy defeated Chinese Taipei's Chen Nai-Cih in straight rounds to reach the semifinals before comfortably overcoming South Korea's Song Da-bin.

Zarrinkamar then rallied from one round down to beat China's Gyu Li in the final, winning the next two rounds to secure the title.

Fatemeh Ahmadi, Iran's other entrant in the division, defeated an opponent from Uzbekistan before losing to South Korea's Song. Olympic silver medalist Nahid Kiani earned silver in the -57kg category. Kiani defeated opponents from India, Australia, Uzbekistan and China before suffering a 2-0 defeat to Morocco's U21 world champion Amina Dehhaoui in the final.

Hasti Mohammadi also competed

in the -57kg category, defeating athletes from the United States and China before losing to Dehhaoui.

Teenage sensation Saina Karimi, who won gold at last year's Islamic Solidarity Games, secured bronze in the -46kg division. She opened with a victory over Britain's Lauren Dunsmore before defeating opponents from Russia and China to reach the semifinals, where she lost in straight rounds to another Chinese competitor.

Rozhan Goudarzi exited in the -53kg category after defeating Australia's Christoffel Tamzin in her opening bout before losing to another Australian, Bianca Motta. Farzaneh Fathi was eliminated in the -67kg division after defeating Australia's Paige Cover before falling to China's Xing Jiani.

Iran's other representative in the weight class, Saghar Moradi, claimed bronze after losing to a South Korean opponent in the semifinals.

Baran Nemati added another bronze in the -73kg category. She defeated opponents from Chinese Taipei and China before losing in straight rounds to China's Song Jie in the last four.

Men's dominance

The women's medal tally followed

a successful outing by Iran's men's team, which won five gold medals and two bronzes on the opening day.

Asian silver medalist Yasin Valizadeh opened Iran's gold-medal haul in the -54kg division. After defeating a South Korean opponent to reach the semifinals, he overcame an Uzbek rival to book his place in the final. Valizadeh then defeated another South Korean in straight rounds, 7-1 and 3-2, to secure the title.

Reigning world and Asian champion Abolfazl Zandi continued his impressive run of form by claiming gold in the -58kg category. One of Iran's standout performers over the past year, Zandi advanced confidently to the final before defeating his opponent in two rounds, 10-8 and 12-11.

Asian champion Mahdi Haji Mousaei added another gold for Iran in the -63kg event, producing an assured display to beat a South Korean opponent in the final.

Iran also celebrated victory in the -87kg division through Mohammad Hossein Yazdani. After defeating a South Korean athlete in the semifinals, Yazdani overcame Thailand's representative in straight rounds in the final to capture the title.

Olympic champion Arian Salimi

completed Iran's golden campaign in the +87kg category. Salimi advanced to the final after his scheduled semifinal against fellow Iranian Ali Najafi was cancelled because of Najafi's injury. He then defeated a South Korean opponent 2-1 in the final to claim the gold medal, while Najafi was awarded bronze.

In the -74kg division, Amir Sina Bakhtiari settled for bronze after losing to a South Korean competitor in the semifinals. Bakhtiari, who recently secured a place in Iran's squad for the 2026 Asian Games, had defeated two South Korean opponents as well as a Russian athlete en route to the last four.

Iran, however, failed to reach the podium in the -80kg category after both team captain Mehran Barkhordari and Amirreza Sadeqian suffered early exits.

The five gold medals and two bronzes underlined Iran's strength as the team continued its preparations for the Asian Games later this year.

The two-day event marked another impressive showing for Iranian taekwondo in Chuncheon after the country won the mixed team title and women's bronze at the WT World Cup Team Championships there last week.



Iran's Hana Zarrinkamar (blue) won the gold medal in the women's +73kg division at the Chuncheon Korea Open.
● WORLD TAEKWONDO



● IRIHF

Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship:

Iran crushes India to seal quarterfinal berth

Sports Desk

Iran secured its place in the quarterfinals of the Asian Men's Junior Handball Championship with a commanding 63-14 victory over India in Chuzhou, China, on Tuesday.

Iran dominated from the opening whistle, racing to a remarkable 32-6 half-time lead before maintaining its relentless pace after the break to claim its third victory in six Group B matches.

Mohammad Babaladi was

named the match's Most Valuable Player after starring in the one-sided contest.

The victory lifted Iran to seven points, guaranteeing a top-four finish in the group regardless of the results of Wednesday's final round of group-stage matches.

Iran emerged from one of the tournament's toughest groups, which also featured two-time defending champion Japan, 2024 runner-up South Korea, five-time champions Kuwait

and Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Several of Iran's rivals fielded naturalized players, making the qualification all the more impressive.

Iran got off to a flying start by defeating Kuwait 29-27 before suffering a narrow 29-28 defeat to South Korea and sharing the spoils with the United Arab Emirates in a 25-25 draw.

Iran then returned to winning ways with a 26-25 victory over Qatar on Sunday but suffered a heart-

breaking 28-27 defeat to Japan the following day at the Chuzhou International Handball Hall.

The Iranian side will return to action in the quarterfinals on Friday, with its opponent to be determined after the remaining group-stage matches conclude on Wednesday.

Iran finished fifth in the 2024 edition, while its best-ever result came in 2008, when it claimed the silver medal after losing to Kuwait in the final.

The championship also serves as Asia's qualifier for the 2027 IHF Men's Junior (U21) World Championship in North Macedonia, with the four semifinalists securing places at the global showpiece.

Asian U18 Hockey5s Championship:

Iran off to flying start with successive wins on Day 1

Sports Desk

Iran's under-18 Hockey5s team got off to a flying start at the Asian Hockey5s Championship, securing back-to-back victories over Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the opening day of the competition in Muscat, Oman. Competing in its first international tournament, Iran opened its Men's Challenger campaign with a 5-0 victory over Iraq before delivering the biggest win of the day with a commanding 9-0 triumph over Saudi Arabia, underlining its title ambitions.

Mohammad Pouya starred against the Saudis with a hat-trick, while Kamyar Mohammadnejad and Parsa Rajabi each scored twice. Mohammad Taha Abbasi and Ashkan Zolfaqarkhanian added one goal apiece to complete the rout. Abbasi was named Player of the Match after an impressive all-round performance.

In the Men's Elite event, Pakistan defeated host Oman 5-0 victory before maintaining its winning momentum with a 5-2 defeat of Bangladesh, making it two wins from two matches.

India also enjoyed a successful start, overcoming Bangladesh 7-3 in an entertaining contest featuring free-flowing attacking hockey and spectacular goals.

The tournament serves as a qualification pathway for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup.



● AHF

Iranian keeper Khalifeh joins Esteghlal

Sports Desk

Iranian international goalkeeper Mohammad Khalifeh has signed for Persian Gulf Pro League powerhouse Esteghlal.

Khalifeh, 21, joins from Iralco after keeping 19 clean sheets in 56 appearances across all competitions over two seasons for the Iranian top-flight club. The young goalkeeper is expected to replace Spanish veteran Antonio Adán at the Tehran-based side. He was included in Iran's provisional squad for the 2026 FIFA World Cup but did not make the final roster.

Khalifeh has also earned

10 caps for Iran's under-23 team, keeping two clean sheets in three group-stage matches at January's AFC U23 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia, where Iran failed to reach the knockout stage. Esteghlal was top of the Persian Gulf Pro League

when the season was declared null and void because of wartime conditions in the country in March. The Tehran Blues, along with Tractor SC, will represent Iran in the upcoming AFC Champions League Elite.



● FFIRI