

Three African titles. One more chapter written in the gravel

Kenyan rally ace Karan Patel has secured his third FIA African Rally Championship (ARC) title, with co-driver Tauseef Khan also confirmed as the 2026 navigators' champion, even as the final round continues to throw up the usual challenges of a Tanzanian rally.

Patel and Khan sealed the continental titles after their only remaining title rivals, fellow Kenyans Aakif Virani and Zahir Shah, withdrew from the season-ending Serengeti Rally in Morogoro.

Arrow Racing Team announced the decision on Thursday night, saying it had chosen to protect Virani's second position in the championship standings rather than contest the final round.

"After a hard-fought season, Arrow Racing Team has taken the strategic decision to consolidate second position in the overall ARC standings," the team said.

The team also congratulated Patel and Khan on becoming the 2026 African Rally champions.

That decision effectively ended the title fight before the crews headed into the competitive stages.

But there is no shortage of action on the roads of Morogoro.

The Serengeti Rally itself is still very much alive, with crews facing a weekend of loose gravel, rough sections, dust and fesh-fesh, the fine, powdery surface that can hang in the air and leave a following car fighting for visibility.

For the drivers, it is about keeping the right balance between pushing the car flat-out and protecting tyres, suspension and the machinery for the kilometres still to come.

Patel had already shown his intent by winning Friday's 2.40-kilometre SS00 Mkwawa Qualifying Stage in his Škoda Fabia.

The Kenyan and Khan stopped the clock at 1:58.1, beating Tanzania's Ahmed Huwel in a Toyota Yaris GR Rally2 by 0.6 seconds. Manveer Birdi was third in 1:59.8.

It was a short stage, but every tenth mattered.

As qualifying-stage winner, Patel earned the right to choose his starting position for the opening competitive stages. He opted for fifth on the road, starting at 09:12, directly behind Huwel.

In gravel rallying, road position can become part of the strategy. A car running too far forward can sweep loose gravel from the racing line, while those behind may find a cleaner surface, but can also face dust from cars ahead.

With the championship already secured, Patel can now approach the remaining stages with less pressure, but there is still a rally to finish.

The 2026 crown adds to Patel's previous African titles in 2023 and 2024.

FIA records show Patel and Khan won their first continental championship in 2023 before successfully defending it in 2024.

The third title now puts Patel among a small group of drivers to have won the ARC at least three times.

Zambian legend Satwant Singh leads the all-time list with eight African titles. Ivory Coast's Alain Ambrosino has three, while Kenya's Manvir Baryan also has three.

Patel therefore joins an elite group of four drivers with three or more ARC championships.

According to the FIA report, Saudi Arabia because of insecurity in the middle East.

The 2026 FIA Awards are officially scheduled for Saturday, 12 December 2026, in Shanghai, China, at the West Bund International Convention Center. The FIA announced Shanghai as the host in March and confirmed the venue in July.

His rise to that group has been built through years of competition across some of Africa's toughest rally roads, where speed alone is rarely enough. Drivers have to

read the road, trust their pace notes, manage tyres and keep the car together when the surface turns rough.

The championship may be settled, but the big-foot action in Tanzania is not.

The Serengeti Rally runs through Sunday, with crews still having to negotiate the rough gravel, loose surfaces and sections where the fesh-fesh can make visibility difficult.

For Patel and Khan, the objective is now different.

The pressure of fighting for the continental crown has gone. But once the helmet goes on, the competitive instinct remains.

They will still have to attack the special stages, manage the Škoda and negotiate every corner, crest and rough section before the final chequered flag falls on Sunday.

Virani, meanwhile, has secured second place in the overall championship and will also finish the season as ARC Masters champion after sealing that title at the previous round in Rwanda.

Uganda's Oscar Ntambi has secured the ARC2 title, while the remaining crews continue to fight for their positions in the final rally of the 2026 season.

For Patel and Khan, however, the biggest prize is already secured, and according to reports, he won lift his big prize in Asia.