

Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad Says Iran Has Been Planning for a Potential Scenario in Which the United Nations Sanctions Are Re-Imposed on the Country as Part of Efforts by European Powers to Force Tehran to Change Its Nuclear Policy

Iran's Iron and Steel Exports Fell by 4.7% in the First Quarter of the Year as Figures by the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) Shows That Iran Had Earned a Total of \$1.602b From Its Iron and Steel Exports in the Three Months to June 21

2 DOMESTIC



Mistakes by Officials Should Be Corrected, Not Criminalized

> SEE PAGE 2

3 INTERNATIONAL

U.S., EU Avert Trade War With 15% Tariff Deal

> SEE PAGE 3



One Million Undocumented Afghan Migrants Have Returned Home



TEHRAN - Interior Minister, Eskandar Momeni, announced that one million undocumented Afghan migrants have returned to Afghanistan, stating that approximately six million Afghans currently reside in Iran, two million of whom are undocumented and subject to repatriation under a national regulation plan.

Speaking on Sunday evening on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, Momeni addressed estimates that Iran is hosting between six to eight million foreign nationals. "So far, one million Afghans have returned to their country, more than 70 percent of them voluntarily," he said.

Momeni emphasized that Iran cannot accommodate more migrants, adding, "The UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited Iran a few days ago and expressed special appreciation for Iran's efforts. Afghan officials, especially governors of neighboring provinces, also visited and saw firsthand that repatriation is carried out with full respect."

He noted that despite shared history and cultural ties with Afghanistan, and respect for those who are legally residing, working, and living in Iran, "Every country has its own laws. Those without legal status must return."

Regarding potential government shutdowns due to water shortages in Tehran, Momeni said any such decisions would be announced in advance. "Overall, water conditions—particularly in Tehran—are not favorable. Everyone must conserve water, starting with government agencies, before asking the public to do the same."

He also praised the public's cooperation, stating, "Today, Energy Ministry officials reported that, despite temperatures being two degrees higher than the same week last year, water usage has improved thanks to public savings."

Europe Has No Legal Standing to Trigger Snapback Mechanism

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmail Baghaei stated that European countries lack the legal authority to invoke the so-called "snapback" mechanism under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, warning of serious repercussions should they attempt to do so.

In his weekly press briefing, Baghaei emphasized that Iran has formally communicated its position to the European signatories of the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA), asserting that they do not have the right to reimpose UN sanctions on Iran through the snapback clause. "Such a right does not exist, and we oppose the very basis of this move," he said.

Baghaei opened the session by condemning Israel's ongoing military actions in Gaza, calling them acts of genocide. He accused Tel Aviv of using starvation and thirst as weapons against the Palestinian people, adding that the Iranian Foreign Ministry has held extensive consultations with regional and international partners to organize emergency action through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). "The use of food and water as weapons is unprecedented," he said.

Addressing recent speculation about Iran's position on developments in the South Caucasus, Baghaei said Iran's stance remains unchanged. He reaffirmed Tehran's support for a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, while also stressing that the expansion of transit routes must not alter the region's geopolitical balance. "We welcome economic development, but not at the cost of regional stability," he added.

Speaking on recent nuclear negotiations with three European countries, Baghaei said discussions focused solely on nuclear issues and sanctions relief. "It is not unusual for European parties to present their own version of the talks, but that version does not represent our position," he clarified.

On the issue of the snapback mechanism, Baghaei warned that if Europe misuses it, Iran will respond decisively. "This will complicate the situation and provoke strong reactions across Iranian society, including from the parliament," he said, referencing ongoing discussions within Iran's



legislature about withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Baghaei questioned the legitimacy of the European position, stating that their support for U.S. and Israeli actions against Iran undermines their claim to being a party to the JCPOA. "Their violations of the deal raise the question: can they still be considered committed participants?" he said. He reiterated that invoking snapback would severely damage the global non-proliferation regime and Europe's credibility.

Regarding a recent terrorist attack in Zahedan, southeastern Iran, Baghaei condemned the incident and blamed the Israeli regime for supporting anti-Iranian terrorist groups like Jaish al-Adl. "There's no doubt Israel backs such groups with the aim of destabilizing Iran," he asserted, adding that Iranian security forces will pursue those responsible.

Reacting to the dismissal of a lawsuit by two Yemeni plaintiffs against Germany over the use of Ramstein Air Base, Baghaei criticized the ruling, calling it flawed under international law. He argued that any country knowingly allowing its territory to be used for attacks against a third party cannot escape legal responsibility and is complicit in the aggression.

Commenting on the U.S. decision to exit UNESCO for the third time, Baghaei condemned the move, saying it was prompted by the organization's support for Palestine. He warned that the U.S. action sends a dangerous message that emboldens Israel to continue its attacks on Palestinians.

When asked about possible future nuclear talks, Baghaei said Iran currently has no new plans for negotiations. "We will act when it aligns with our national interests," he stated.

Responding to reports that France may recognize a Palestinian state, Baghaei criticized what he called Europe's double standards. "You destroy the conditions for a viable Palestinian state and then claim to recognize it. That's hypocrisy," he said. He accused European countries of enabling genocide by treating Israel as the victim rather than the aggressor.

Baghaei concluded by warning European states not to misuse Resolution 2231 or escalate the situation further. "We hope they understand the consequences of such actions and avoid complicating an already delicate issue."

Moving the Capital to Southern Coasts Poses No Security Risk



TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that relocating Iran's capital to the southern coastal regions poses no security threat, stating that "the definition and provision of security in today's world is different from the past — something we witnessed in the recent war."

During a visit to the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, President Pezeshkian met with the minister and top officials, where he discussed national infrastructure priorities and the country's strategic development needs.

Pezeshkian praised the ministry's efforts during the recent 12-day war, particularly in managing the transport of pilgrims and port operations. He stressed the long-term need to expand the national railway network alongside ongoing efforts to enhance highways and road infrastructure.

Referring to international transit corridors crossing Iran, he urged authorities to secure a one-kilometer-wide land corridor along highway routes to allow for future railway development. He also emphasized decentralization, calling for more decision-making power to be delegated to provincial governors and local officials to ease the implementation of such major infrastructure projects.

"If we can connect our transit routes in a way that allows Central Asian countries to easily move their goods through Iran, it will bring significant economic benefits. Sanctions alone cannot overpower our national capabilities — we have caused many of our own challenges," he noted.

Iranian Oil Customers Express Concern Over Snapback Mechanism



TEHRAN - Amid growing international tensions surrounding the potential activation of the UN's "snapback" sanctions mechanism against Iran, a key Iranian energy official has said that China does not recognize U.S. unilateral sanctions, but the concerns of Iran's oil customers—especially regarding possible UN actions—are mounting.

Seyed Hamid Hosseini, spokesperson for Iran's Union of Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Exporters, told ILNA that although the snapback mechanism under UN Security Council Resolution 1929 may not directly target oil exports, there is concern that buyers may reduce cooperation or demand further discounts out of caution.

"The sanctions under the snapback are not about oil—that's under U.S. jurisdiction. Since oil exports aren't officially in Iran's name, this trade, which already bypasses formal sanctions, shouldn't be significantly impacted," Hosseini explained.

However, he warned that how China, Iran's largest oil customer, reacts will be critical. If Beijing comes under pressure or decides to comply with UN sanctions, they could expose the origin and destination of shipments, leading to added pressure on firms buying Iranian oil.

"It's not just about exports. The oil sector also relies on imports of equipment and investment. Sanctions could hinder the procurement of necessary items, and ships heading to Iran could face inspections, especially if suspected of carrying prohibited goods," he noted.

Though the focus of such inspections would likely remain on chemical and military materials, they could expose the origin and destination of shipments, leading to added pressure on firms buying Iranian oil.

On financial matters, Hosseini stressed that since oil revenues are not transferred through Iran's formal banking system, monetary transactions are unlikely to be directly affected. However, this would depend on how strict other countries choose to be in enforcing the measures.

Islamic Unity Is a Strategic Pillar of the Islamic Republic



TEHRAN - First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref has stated that unity and Islamic solidarity are key strategic principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Speaking at a meeting of the committee organizing the 1500th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he emphasized the importance of promoting the Prophet's view of humanity and highlighting his character, mission, and conduct.

Aref praised the committee's work and stressed that if Islamic countries had even relative unity, oppressive regimes and the Zionist regime would not dare commit such brutal acts against the innocent people of Gaza. "Commemorating the 1500th anniversary of the Prophet of Mercy is an important opportunity, especially in today's world where there is a growing need to understand the teachings and character of the Prophet," he said.

He pointed out that many moral and ethical concepts have become critical questions in Western societies, increasing the potential for people there to embrace Islamic values. Citing rising global sales of religious books and the Quran, Aref noted that the world seems increasingly open to spiritual and ethical teachings, especially as it faces violence and a decline in moral values.

Iran Slams U.S. Military Spending, Warns of Crushing Response to Enemies

TEHRAN - Senior Iranian officials used a high-profile military memorial to sharply criticize the United States' defense policies, denouncing its \$1 trillion annual military budget as a symbol of global militarism and Zionist influence. The remarks were made during a ceremony in Tehran honoring Brigadier General Gholamhossein Ghaib-Parvar, a senior Revolutionary Guard commander who died earlier this month from complications linked to a chemical injury sustained during the Iran-Iraq War.

Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani, head of Iran's Basij Organization, condemned Washington's defense spending as both excessive and dangerous.

"The United States spends more on its military than all other countries combined," Soleimani said. "This isn't just defense—it's a terrifying war machine, driven by Zionist-owned weapons manufacturers and fueled by cutting-edge technologies."

Soleimani praised the Iranian people's unity during recent conflicts, saying the country's collective response to external threats surprised the world. He referred to the recent 12-day confrontation with Israel as a historic moment, describing it as "unprecedented" in Iran's modern history.

"The enemy expected chaos, but what they got was national unity," he said. "Iranians from every walk of life, including those abroad, stood behind the Supreme Leader. It was nothing short of a miracle."

He added that the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic and the leadership's long-term strategy have prepared the country to resist global powers.

IRGC Intelligence Chief Brigadier General Majid Khodami said Iran is currently in a stable security position, crediting public alertness and national unity.

"Even when the enemy tried to create division, the people's unity and the strength of our armed forces forced them to back down," he stated.

Khodami confirmed that General Ghaib-Parvar's death was due to complications from a chemical injury, which resurfaced after he attended the funeral of another high-ranking IRGC officer, Martyr Salami.

He also warned European nations against invoking the JCPOA's "snapback" sanctions mechanism, claiming Iran has strategic countermeasures in place.

"If they act, Europe will be the one to lose," Khodami said. Ruhollah Najabat, a member of Iran's Parliament and National Security Commission, stated that



Iran might exit the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if Western countries reimpose UN sanctions.

"National interest comes first. We have never compromised on our nuclear rights," Najabat emphasized, noting that current Iranian law already mandates a suspension of cooperation with the IAEA unless otherwise approved by the Supreme National Security Council.

Deputy Commander of the Basij Organization, Qassem Ghorayshi, highlighted the group's reconstruction efforts in disaster-hit regions. He said the Basij is working with the government through its "Rescue and Relief Command Center" to help rebuild damaged infrastructure and deliver humanitarian aid.

IRGC senior adviser Ayatollah Hossein Taeb issued a stern warning to Israel, declaring that future military provocations would receive an even harsher response.

"The Zionists have now realized the cost of their reckless actions," Taeb said. "Our military is more prepared than ever, and they will make the enemy regret its decisions."

He described the ongoing confrontation as a "war of intelligence and security," stressing that Iran's internal solidarity and religious faith remain the cornerstones of national resilience.

The memorial ceremony was held Sunday evening at Hosseiniyeh Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra in central Tehran and was attended by military and government officials, families of martyrs, and war veterans.

General Ghaib-Parvar, born in Shiraz in 1962, was a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War and held multiple leadership roles within the Revolutionary Guard and Basij. He was known for his focus on ideological training, engineering units, and post-war reconstruction in deprived areas like Hengam Island.

He led several national initiatives, including the organization of major veteran congresses and a 2018 rally of Basij members in Tehran's Azadi Stadium attended by the Supreme Leader. In 2015, following the death of General Hossein Hamdani, he was appointed head of the Basij by the Supreme Leader and later served as deputy commander of the IRGC's central security headquarters until his passing.

Praised for his humility and dedication to public service, Ghaib-Parvar is remembered as a steadfast revolutionary figure who remained close to the people and devoted to addressing their cultural and economic challenges.

IRAN NEWS



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

No Plans to Transfer Water Abroad

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesperson for Iran's water industry has firmly denied any plans to transfer water from Khuzestan Province to neighboring countries, declaring such claims as entirely baseless.

According to a report from the Iran Water Resources Management Company, Isa Bozorgzadeh dismissed recent social media rumors suggesting that water is being transferred from Khuzestan to other countries in the region. "In recent days, videos have circulated online claiming that water from Khuzestan is being redirected to nearby nations. These claims are completely false and lack any technical foundation," Bozorgzadeh said.

He explained that while a vague concept for such a project was proposed many years ago, it was quickly abandoned during the early stages following technical evaluations.

Iran Has Long Been a Victim of Blind Terrorism



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In response to Saturday's deadly terrorist attack in Zahedan, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Zahra Behrouz Azar, condemned the violence and emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran has for years suffered at the hands of blind terrorism. She stated that the country continues to pay the price for its resistance, independence, and dignity with the blood of its purest citizens.

According to a statement released Sunday by the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs, Behrouz Azar issued a message following the tragic attack on the Zahedan courthouse. She described the incident as a horrific and criminal act that led to the martyrdom of several innocent Iranian citizens, including a woman and a child. "This act has left a deep wound on the conscience of society and the hearts of all Iranians," she said. "Women and children represent life, hope, the future, and compassion. To see them killed is not only a sign of utter cruelty, but also a stark warning to anyone who still believes silence in the face of terrorism is an option."

"We cannot remain silent when the blood of a defenseless child is spilled," she continued. "We cannot stand indifferent when a mother is martyred alongside her child. Such silence would be a betrayal of humanity and a disregard for all moral values."

Behrouz Azar reiterated that Iran has long endured blind acts of terrorism and continues to pay the price of sovereignty and honor. "What happened in Zahedan was not just a terrorist attack—it was an attempt to strike at the foundations of life and hope in this land."

She extended her condolences to the Iranian people and the grieving families of the victims, expressing hope for divine mercy upon the martyrs and patience and peace for the survivors.

According to IRNA, on Saturday morning, unidentified gunmen attacked the Justice Department in Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, resulting in multiple casualties.

Mistakes by Officials Should Be Corrected, Not Criminalized



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian emphasized that officials who make mistakes should be supported in correcting them, rather than being subjected to criminal investigations. "For 47 years, we have focused on finding culprits for every issue," he said. "Naturally, anyone doing real work may make mistakes, but instead of helping them correct those mistakes, we build cases against them and condemn them."

Speaking at a meeting with officials from the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (MIMT), President Pezeshkian urged a shift in attitude toward governance. "During the early years of the Revolution, we had honest managers who were inevitably imperfect. But instead of correcting their errors, we removed them and fabricated cases. What we truly need is vigilant oversight aimed at improvement, not immediate dismissal."

Earlier in the day, Pezeshkian had also visited the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development before heading to the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, where he met with the minister and senior officials.

"I came here first to thank you for your efforts and to help solve any existing problems," Pezeshkian said. Referring to the recent wartime conditions, he noted, "The country was managed effectively during the recent crisis. This would not have been possible without the cooperation of institutions and the people. The unity and defense we saw disheartened our enemies. I must thank all those involved—officials, staff, tradespeople, and business owners—for maintaining public satisfaction during difficult times."

The President added that this collective solidarity increases the responsibility of officials to engage the public even more. "If we stand together and help one another, foreigners will not dare covet our land. It's our internal divisions and problems that create opportunities for foreign interference."

Reflecting on national security threats, Pezeshkian said, "In times of crisis, we've learned that if power is centralized around individuals and something happens to them, enemies can paralyze the system. When top officials and commanders were

targeted for assassination, their goal was to disrupt our governance. But thanks to the swift decisions and leadership of the Supreme Leader, we thwarted that plan."

Turning to the capital's resource issues, the president warned about Tehran's growing water crisis. "Tehran has grown unsustainably, and we now struggle to meet its water needs. Reservoir levels are alarmingly low, and wells are being drilled deeper. If people don't cooperate, we will face a dire crisis," he said.

He cautioned that Tehran is no longer in a position to expand. "Despite warnings, the city continues to grow. My colleagues are working day and night to bring water from Taleghan to Tehran, but this is not a long-term solution. If that water source runs dry, what then? Our first step must be to stop increasing the city's population load, and then work to reduce it."

Highlighting the seriousness of the water crisis, he added, "We cannot supply a city like Tehran with water tankers. We must act now, or our children won't be able to live here. Addressing this issue requires real determination and public cooperation."

Pezeshkian stressed that no new water-intensive industries should be permitted in Tehran or across Iran's central plateau. "The public must be thoroughly informed about the water crisis to encourage their cooperation."

He also reiterated the government's intention to decentralize authority, stating that empowering provincial governors could drive regional development and reduce overreliance on Tehran. "If governors have the authority, they can activate local resources and even establish economic relations with neighboring countries. This would also encourage producers to relocate from Tehran."

In conclusion, President Pezeshkian urged Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade officials to adopt a more collaborative and mindful approach in dealing with business associations, especially given the country's current economic situation.

Before the President's remarks, the Minister of Industry presented a report on the ministry's efforts to keep industries running during the recent 12-day conflict. He also raised concerns about power outages and criticized the current pricing model for industrial electricity and gas.

ECO Secretary-General Calls for Easier Cross-Border Vehicle Travel Among Member States



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Secretary-General of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) has called for greater facilitation of cross-border travel for tourists and vehicles among ECO member states, highlighting the importance of regional tourism and transport integration.

In a meeting held at ECO headquarters in Tehran, Dr. Asad Majeed Khan, Secretary-General of ECO, met with Mohammad-Hossein Soufi, President of the Touring and Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two discussed ways to strengthen regional cooperation in tourism, transportation, and trade.

According to a statement released by the ECO Secretariat on Sunday, both officials exchanged views on new initiatives aimed at boosting tourism and travel across ECO countries. A key focus of the talks was simplifying cross-border movement for tourists and private vehicles by utilizing existing mechanisms within the ECO framework.

Dr. Khan welcomed proposals put forward by the Iranian Touring and Automobile Club and stressed the importance of joint efforts to enhance intra-regional tourism. He noted that easing travel procedures and improving transportation links could significantly contribute to economic development and people-to-people exchanges among member nations.

Both sides agreed to explore additional opportunities for collaboration and to involve relevant stakeholders in advancing these goals under the ECO platform. The Iranian Touring and Automobile Club plays a vital role in facilitating travel for tourists and vehicle owners within Iran and beyond, supporting smoother transit and tourism operations in the region.

This meeting comes amid broader efforts by ECO to enhance connectivity and integration across its member states, which include Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

The call for easier vehicle and tourist movement aligns with ECO's broader agenda to promote economic, social, and cultural cooperation in the region.

Iran, Iraq Reach Agreement to Provide High-Quality Communication Services



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Following negotiations between telecommunications delegations from Iran and Iraq, the two sides have reached an agreement to ensure high-quality and affordable mobile services, establish high-capacity direct communication links between the two countries, and provide free internet access (WiFi) at selected service stations (Mawkibs) along the Najaf to Karbala pilgrimage route during the Arbaeen period.

According to the Iranian Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), a delegation led by Hamid Fattahi, Deputy Minister and Head of the Communications Regulatory Authority, along with representatives from the Telecommunications Infrastructure Company and major Iranian mobile operators—Hamrah-e-Aval (MCI), Irancell, and RighTel—traveled to Baghdad for the talks.

On the Iraqi side, the delegation was headed by Noufal Hilal Abu Ragheef, Chairman of Iraq's Media and Communications Commission, with participation from officials representing IT and telecom companies, the police, and mobile operators Zain, Korek, and Asiacell.

Over the course of the negotiations, the two delegations held one official plenary session and six technical meetings involving experts and executives from both nations.

The discussions focused on resolving technical issues, improving network coverage, and ensuring pilgrims have easier access to telecommunication services. The main goal of the negotiations was to coordinate efforts between regulatory bodies, operators, and infrastructure companies from both countries to support the massive communication demands during the Arbaeen pilgrimage.

As a result of the intensive two-day talks, both delegations signed an agreement outlining the following commitments: Provision of high-quality and cost-effective mobile services to pilgrims by operators from both countries.

Ensuring Stable Communication from Iran to Karbala

TEHRAN - The Minister of Information and Communications Technology emphasized that providing high-quality communication services to Arbaeen pilgrims is the primary responsibility of the country's communication institutions. He announced that following recent negotiations between the Ministry's delegation and Iraqi officials, significant agreements have been reached to enhance the level of services.

According to the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, the fifth meeting of the Arbaeen Coordination Headquarters was held via video conference to assess the state of communications and plan for delivering diverse and reliable services to Arbaeen pilgrims. The session connected simultaneously with Iran's border provinces.

Attending the session were Minister Seyed Sattar Hashemi; governors and deputy governors of provinces bordering Iraq; senior officials from affiliated organizations; and managers of telecommunications operators. The discussions focused on ensuring high-speed internet and stable communication along routes leading to border crossings, high-traffic areas, and all the way to Karbala.

Key priorities highlighted included completing road coverage, expanding communication infrastructure in border regions, and ensuring network stability during the Arbaeen pilgrimage.

Speaking at the meeting, Minister Hashemi stressed the particular importance of this year's Arbaeen: "At a time when the Iranian nation stands at the forefront of resistance, we must adopt a spirit of unity and resilience to convey a message of solidarity to the world and deliver exemplary services to the pilgrims."

Hashemi described the recent negotiations between the Iranian delegation and Iraqi counterparts as positive and productive, stating that valuable agreements had been reached to improve service quality. He also called the cooperation with Iraqi telecom operators "satisfactory" and urged that secure and high-quality communications be ensured not only in border areas but throughout the entire route to Karbala.

"These communication capabilities," he noted, "can play a significant role in sharing the pilgrims' spiritual moments."

He also thanked the border province governors for their active participation and called for stronger coordination among all



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

involved entities to organize the event more successfully. Hashemi emphasized that coordinated efforts between the ministry's central headquarters and the provinces hosting pilgrims are key to delivering efficient communication services.

Acknowledging the unusually hot weather conditions this year, the minister underscored the importance of ensuring the safety and health of pilgrims and called for adequate infrastructure to enable access to medical services.

At the start of the session, governors from the border provinces of Ilam, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, and West Azerbaijan—present via video link—provided updates on their efforts to improve communications. They also requested increased bandwidth, free Wi-Fi services, expanded road coverage through mobile communication sites, and electricity supply to communications centers.

In response, the Minister called on telecom operators and the Telecommunications Company of Iran to take immediate action on these requests before the start of the Arbaeen pilgrimage.

Deputy ministers and telecom company directors also presented plans to improve service quality. Hamid Fattahi, Deputy Minister and Head of the Communications Regulatory Authority, announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding with Iraqi counterparts to eliminate coverage blackspots and ensure stable connections. He called for fast implementation of these initiatives, with a revised division of tasks among the operators.

The Deputy Head of the Telecommunications Infrastructure Company reported that steps are underway to strengthen the communication network and provide the necessary bandwidth to operators in border areas.

Behzad Shiri, CEO of Post Bank of Iran, announced that around 3,000 branches and banking kiosks will provide services to Arbaeen pilgrims.

In conclusion, the ministry confirmed that, in coordination with telecom operators and the national telecom company, infrastructure and communication antennas along the routes to the border and within Iraqi territory have been reinforced. This will enable more diverse and improved services this year, covering the full journey from Iran to Najaf and Karbala.

Iran's Aviation Sector Needs 200 Planes



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) has announced that McDonnell Douglas (MD) aircraft will be used for transporting pilgrims during the Arbaeen 1404 (2025) ceremonies, following the resolution of technical concerns raised by Iraqi authorities.

Speaking during a ceremony honoring Hajj 1404 service workers, CAO head Hussein Pourfarzaneh stated that Iraq had previously raised technical objections regarding the use of MD aircraft. However, following multiple technical meetings between the two countries, he confirmed that those issues have now been resolved and the aircraft will be cleared for use during Arbaeen operations. "Previously, we hadn't planned to rely on the MD fleet due to those objections. But with the Iraqi side now assured of the aircrafts' safety, we'll be incorporating them into our transportation plans for Arbaeen pilgrims," Pourfarzaneh said.

Addressing broader concerns about the aviation sector, Pourfarzaneh said Iran's actual demand for passenger aircraft is under 200, far lower than the previously cited figure of 550, which he said lacked scientific basis.

He explained that since 2022, the organization has analyzed domestic demand based on flight routes and hours across provinces, identifying what he called "normal flight demand." While peak travel periods like Nowruz, Hajj, and Arbaeen require additional capacity, Iran typically does not need more than 200 operational aircraft under normal conditions.

Currently, about 180 aircraft are officially registered in Iran's fleet, of which 134 to 135 are actively providing service. He emphasized that aircraft need to perform at least six flight legs per day to be considered efficient; otherwise, the country would effectively require more aircraft to meet demand.

Regarding ticketing for the Arbaeen pilgrimage, Pourfarzaneh said Iran Air has already begun early sales, with general ticket availability beginning August 8. He assured the public that with additional fleet capacity, there would be no shortage of tickets this year.

Thai and Cambodian Leaders Head to Malaysia for Peace Talks

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - The leaders of Thailand and Cambodia were set to hold talks in Malaysia yesterday to reach a ceasefire in their deadly border dispute, with the United States saying its officials would be assisting in the peace process. Thailand's government said it was attending talks arranged by Malaysia in its role as chair of the regional ASEAN bloc, while Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said the talks were co-organised by the United States with the participation of China. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said State Department officials were in Malaysia to assist peace efforts, after President Donald Trump had earlier said that he thought both leaders wanted to settle the conflict. "We want this conflict to end as soon as possible," Rubio said in statement released late on Sunday in the U.S. and early Monday in Asia.



Sudanese Coalition Led by Paramilitary RSF Announces Parallel Gov't



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - A Sudanese coalition led by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces announced the members of a parallel government, a move opposed by the army, its rival in a 27-month war that could drive the country further towards partition.

RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo was announced head of the presidential council, while Abdel Aziz al-Hilu, head of the SPLM-N, one of the country's largest rebel groups, was made his deputy on a 15-member council.

Mohamed Hassan al-Taishi, a civilian politician, was named prime minister, and regional governors were announced in a press conference from Nyala, the largest city in the Darfur region which the RSF controls most of.

The Sudanese army has pushed the paramilitaries out of the center of the country, while deadly fighting rages over the center-west Kordofan region and Darfur's traditional capital of al-Fashir.

In February, the RSF and its allied politicians and rebel groups agreed to form a government for a secular "New Sudan," aiming to challenge the army-led administration's legitimacy and secure advanced arms imports. The government announced on Saturday includes governors for regions of the country firmly controlled by the army.

The military led by career army officer General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan had condemned the idea of the RSF creating a parallel government and promised to keep fighting until it controls all of Sudan, which has for years been plagued by conflicts, coups, poverty and hunger.

Dagalo, a former militia leader and one of Sudan's wealthiest people, known as Hemedti, was hit with sanctions by the U.S., which accused him of genocide earlier this year.

Burhan was sanctioned in January by the U.S., which accused him of choosing war over negotiations to bring an end to the conflict that has killed tens of thousands of people.

North Korea Rejects Dialogue With Seoul



PYONGYANG (Dispatches) - North Korea has no interest in pursuing dialogue with the South, leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister said Monday, dismissing a new president in Seoul who has vowed to mend ties.

Since his election in June, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has broken with his predecessor's hawkish tone on the North and halted loudspeaker propaganda broadcasts along the border -- begun in response to a barrage of trash-filled North Korean balloons.

Shortly thereafter, North Korea ended its own propaganda broadcasts, which had boomed strange and eerie noises into the South.

But such gestures do not mean Seoul should expect a thawing of icy ties, Kim Yo Jong said in an English dispatch carried by the North's official Korean Central News Agency on Monday.

"If the ROK... expected that it could reverse all the results it had made with a few sentimental words, nothing is more serious miscalculation than that," she said, referring to South Korea by its official name.

"We clarify once again the official stand that no matter what policy is adopted and whatever proposal is made in Seoul, we have no interest in it and there is neither the reason to meet nor the issue to be discussed with the ROK," she added.

"The DPRK-ROK relations have irreversibly gone beyond the time zone of the concept of homogeneous," she said, using the North's official acronym.

The two countries technically remain at war because the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.



TURNBERRY (Dispatches) - The U.S. struck a framework trade agreement with the European Union on Sunday, imposing a 15% import tariff on most EU goods - half the threatened rate - and averting a bigger trade war between the two allies that account for almost a third of global trade.

U.S. President Donald Trump and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the deal at Trump's luxury golf course in western Scotland after an hour-long meeting that pushed the hard-fought deal over the line, following months of negotiations.

"I think this is the biggest deal ever made," Trump told reporters, lauding EU plans to invest some \$600 billion in the United States and dramatically increase its purchases of U.S. energy and military equipment.

Trump said the deal, which tops a \$550 billion deal signed with Japan last week, would expand ties between the trans-Atlantic powers after years of what he called unfair treatment of U.S. exporters.

Von der Leyen, describing Trump as a tough negotiator, said the 15% tariff applied "across the board," later telling reporters it was "the best we could get."

"We have a trade deal between the two largest economies in the world, and it's a big deal. It's a huge deal. It will bring stability. It will bring predictability," she said.

The agreement mirrors key parts of the framework accord reached by the U.S. with Japan, but like that deal, it leaves many questions open, including tariff rates on spirits, a highly charged topic for many on both sides of the Atlantic.

The deal, which Trump said calls for \$750 billion of EU purchases of U.S. energy in coming years and "hundreds of billions of dollars" of arms purchases, likely spells good news for a host of EU companies, including Airbus, Mercedes-Benz and Novo Nordisk, if all the details hold.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomed the deal, saying it averted a trade conflict that would have hit Germany's export-driven economy and its large auto sector hard. German carmakers, VW, Mercedes and BMW were some of the hardest hit by the 27.5% U.S. tariff on car and parts imports now in place.

The baseline 15% tariff will still be seen by many in Europe as too high, compared with Europe's initial hopes to secure a zero-for-zero tariff deal.

Bernd Lange, the German Social Democrat who heads the European Parliament's trade committee, said the tariffs were imbalanced and the hefty EU investment earmarked for the U.S. would likely come at the bloc's own expense.

Trump retains the ability to increase the tariffs in the future if European countries do not live up to their investment commitments, a senior U.S. administration official told reporters on Sunday evening.

The euro rose around 0.2% against the dollar, sterling and yen within an hour of the deal's being announced.

Carsten Nickel, deputy director of research at Teneo, said Sunday's accord was "merely a high-level, political agreement" that could not replace a carefully hammered out trade deal: "This, in turn, creates the risk of different interpretations along the way, as seen immediately after the conclusion of the U.S.-Japan deal."

While the tariff applies to most goods, including semiconductors and pharmaceuticals, there are exceptions.

The U.S. will keep in place a 50% tariff on steel and aluminum. Von der Leyen suggested the tariff could be replaced with a quota system; a senior administration official said EU leaders had asked that the two sides continue to talk about the issue.

Von der Leyen said there would be no tariffs from either side on aircraft and aircraft parts, certain chemicals, certain generic drugs, semiconductor equipment, some agricultural products, natural resources and critical raw materials.

"We will keep working to add more products to this list," von der Leyen said, adding that spirits were still under discussion.

A U.S. official said the tariff rate on commercial aircraft would remain at zero for now, and the parties would decide together what to do after a U.S. review is completed, adding there is a "reasonably good chance" they could agree to a lower tariff than 15%. No timing was given for when that probe would be completed.

The deal will be sold as a triumph for Trump, who is seeking to reorder the global economy and reduce decades-old U.S. trade deficits, and has already reached similar framework accords with Britain, Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam, although his administration has not hit its goal of "90 deals in 90 days."

U.S. officials said the EU had agreed to lower non-tariff barriers for automobiles and some agricultural products, though EU officials suggested the details of those standards were still under discussion.

"Remember, their economy is \$20 trillion... they are five times bigger than Japan," a senior U.S. official told reporters during a briefing. "So the opportunity of opening their market is enormous for our farmers, our fishermen, our ranchers, all our industrial products, all our businesses."

Trump has periodically railed against the EU, saying it was "formed to screw the United States" on trade. He has fumed for years about the U.S. merchandise trade deficit with the EU, which in 2024 reached \$235 billion, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

The EU points to the U.S. surplus in services, which it says partially redresses the balance.

Trump has argued that his tariffs are bringing in "hundreds of billions of dollars" in revenues for the U.S. while dismissing warnings from economists about the risk of inflation.

France, Saudi Arabia to Lead UN Push for Two-State Solution

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - France and Saudi Arabia were to lead the charge starting Monday to revive the moribund push for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians at a UN conference in New York.

Days before the July 28-30 conference, to be co-chaired by Riyadh and Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron announced that he would formally recognise the State of Palestine in September.

Paris's decision "will breathe new life into a conference that seemed destined to irrelevance," said Richard Gowan, an analyst at the International Crisis Group.

"Macron's announcement changes the game. Other participants will be scrambling to decide if they should also declare an intent to recognize Palestine."

In an interview with French weekly La Tribune Dimanche, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said that other European countries will confirm "their intention to recognise the State of Palestine" during the conference, without detailing which ones.

France is hoping that Britain will take this step, and more than 200 British MPs on Friday pushed British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to do so, but he reiterated that recognition of a Palestinian state "must be part of a wider plan." According to an AFP database, at least 142 of the 193 UN member states -- including France -- now recognise the Palestinian state proclaimed by the Palestinian leadership in exile in 1988.

In 1947, a resolution of the UN General Assembly decided on the partition of Palestine, then under a British mandate, into two independent states -- one Jewish and the other Arab. The following year, the state of Israel was



proclaimed.

For several decades, the vast majority of UN member states have supported the idea of a two-state solution, Israelis and Palestinians living side-by-side peacefully and securely.

But after more than 21 months of war in Gaza, the ongoing expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and Israeli officials declaring designs to annex occupied territory, it is feared a Palestinian state could be geographically impossible.

The war in Gaza started following a deadly attack by Hamas on Israel, which

responded with a large-scale military response that has claimed tens of thousands of Palestinian lives.

The conference is a response to the crisis, with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa and several dozen ministers from around the world expected to attend.

It is coming at a moment when "the prospect of a Palestinian state has never been so threatened, or so necessary," Barrot said. Beyond facilitating conditions for the recognition of a Palestinian state, the meeting will have three other focusses -- reform of the Palestinian Authority, disarmament of Hamas and its exclusion from Palestinian public life, and normalisation of relations with Israel by Arab states that have not yet done so.

No new normalisation deals are expected to be announced at the meeting, according to a French diplomatic source.

But "for the first time, Arab countries will condemn Hamas and call for its disarmament," Barrot said.

The conference "offers a unique opportunity to transform international law and the international consensus into an achievable plan and to demonstrate resolve to end the occupation

and conflict once and for all, for the benefit of all peoples," said Palestinian ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour, calling for "courage" from participants.

Israel and the United States will not take part in the meeting, while international pressure continues to mount on Israel to end nearly two years of war in Gaza.

Despite "tactical pauses" in some military operations announced by Israel, the humanitarian catastrophe in the ravaged coastal territory is expected to dominate speeches by representatives of more than 100 countries as they take the podium from Monday to Wednesday.

Turkey's Fourth Largest City at Risk as Wildfires Sweep Southern Europe

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Wildfires that have engulfed Turkey for weeks threatened the country's fourth-largest city on Sunday, forcing more than 3,500 people to flee their homes and leaving two people dead.

Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro are also battling blazes fed by unusually high temperatures, dry conditions and strong winds.

Overnight fires in the forested mountains surrounding Bursa, in northwest Turkey, spread rapidly, tinting the night sky over the city's eastern suburbs with a red glow. Dozens of severe wildfires have hit the country daily since late June, with the government declaring the two western provinces of Izmir and Bilecik as disaster areas on Friday.

Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli told reporters late Sunday that 3,515 people had been safely evacuated from villages to the northeast of Bursa as more than 1,900 firefighters battled the flames. The highway linking Bursa to the capital, Ankara, was closed as surrounding forests burned.



A firefighter died from a heart attack while on the job, the city's mayor, Mustafa Bozbey, said, adding that the flames had scorched 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres) around the city. One person was killed and two seriously injured when a water tanker fell into a ravine outside Bursa, local media reported.

Orhan Saribal, an opposition parliamentarian for the province, described the scene as "an apocalypse."

By morning, lessening winds brought some respite to firefighters, who continued efforts to battle the flames. However, TV footage revealed an ashen landscape where farms and pine forests had earlier stood.

Yumakli said fire crews across the country confronted 84 separate blazes Saturday. The country's northwest was under the greatest threat, including Karabuk, where wildfires have burned since Tuesday and 1,839 people have been evacuated from 19 villages.



Piastri Beats Norris in Rain-Delayed Belgian Grand Prix

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (Dispatches) - Oscar Piastri passed McLaren teammate and title rival Lando Norris with a bold early move to win the rain-delayed Belgian Grand Prix and extend his Formula One lead to 16 points.

Charles Leclerc was a distant third for Ferrari as reigning champions McLaren celebrated their sixth one-two finish in 13 races and the third in a row.

The race at Spa-Francorchamps was red-flagged after an initial formation lap and delayed by an hour and 20 minutes due to the weather, with standing water and heavy spray affecting visibility.

Piastri was in no mood for hanging around when the racing got going with a rolling start after four laps behind the safety car to check conditions.

The Australian slipstreamed Norris through the daunting Eau Rouge and then scythed past down the Kemmel straight into Les Combes in a move of total commitment in the treacherous conditions.

"I knew lap one would be my best chance of winning the race. I got a good exit out of Turn One, lifted as little as I dared out of Eau Rouge," he said.

"The rest of the race we managed really well. I struggled at the end. Maybe the mediums were not the best for the last five or six laps. We had it mostly under control."

The win was his sixth of the season, making the 24-year-old the first Australian -- on a list that includes past world champions Jack Brabham and Alan Jones -- to triumph so many times in a single campaign.

Norris had a slight battery issue, the Briton asking over the radio why he had "no pack" before his race engineer assured him it was coming back, but he was not looking for any excuses afterwards.

"Oscar just did a good job. Nothing more to say. Committed a bit more through Eau Rouge, and had the slipstream and got the run," he said.

"So nothing to complain of. He did a better job in the beginning, and that was it. Nothing more I could

do after that point. I would love to be up top, but Oscar deserved it today."

Piastri now has 266 points to Norris' 250. Red Bull's reigning champion Max Verstappen is third but 81 points off the lead and the championship more than ever a two-horse race with Hungary up next weekend before the August break.

McLaren lead the constructors' standings with 516 points to Ferrari's 248 while Mercedes fell further behind their Italian rivals on 220.

Piastri pitted on lap 12 of 44 to switch from intermediates to medium tyres on a drying track and Norris followed a lap later, but opting for the hards and rejoining nine seconds behind.

The Briton might have hoped Piastri would have to pit again but the Australian made the tyres last to the chequered flag on a one-stop strategy.

Piastri crossed the line 3.415 seconds clear of Norris, who had been chasing a third win in a row and managed to reduce the gap in the final laps before late mistakes left the ever-calm Australian under no pressure.

Saturday sprint winner Verstappen finished fourth in his team's first grand prix since the dismissal of team boss Christian Horner, with George Russell fifth for Mercedes.

Williams' Alex Albon held off Ferrari's seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton -- last year's winner with Mercedes -- to secure sixth.

Hamilton had been one of four drivers due to start from the pit lane but given a big boost by the switch to a rolling getaway and a fresh engine installed overnight.

The Briton was also the first to make the decision to switch to slicks and pit, gaining six places.

Liam Lawson was eighth for Racing Bulls with Gabriel Bortoletto ninth for Sauber and Pierre Gasly securing the final point for Alpine.

India Dig Deep With Bat to Draw Fourth Test Against England



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - India, led by captain Shubman Gill, battled with great character to secure a hard-fought draw in the fourth test against England and keep the series alive going into the final game.

After losing two wickets before they had scored a run in their second innings, India batted for over five sessions for the loss of two more wickets to end the final day on 425-4 at Old Trafford.

A courageous hundred from Gill -- his fourth of the series -- and dogged unbeaten centuries from Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar gave the home crowd little to cheer on a tough day for England.

A closely-fought series remains at 2-1 to England and the hosts must avoid defeat in the final test at the Oval in London, starting on Thursday, to win it.

"This is no less than a win for us, given we were around 300 runs off the lead. Our batsman put on a great display," Gill told the BBC.

"As soon as England got the new ball, it was doing a little bit but our batters did really well and it was tremendous, with a little bit of luck going our way as some balls can get dragged on, brilliant batting and brave batting."

England captain Ben Stokes, who took five wickets in India's first innings but was not fit to bowl much on Saturday, brought himself into the attack on Sunday morning with India resuming on 174-2.

The hosts were firm favourites to seal victory at this point, even more so when Stokes' reintroduction paid dividends. The 34-year-old trapped KL Rahul lbw for 90, ending his excellent third-wicket partnership with Gill at 188.

Gill remained undeterred, however, even after getting a nasty blow on the hand. In his first series as captain, the 25-year-old became only the third skipper to score four hundreds in a single test series.

Man Utd Boss Amorim Hails Really Important Fernandes



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim heaped praise on captain Bruno Fernandes after the midfielder scored twice in a 2-1 pre-season win over fellow Premier League club West Ham United at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Fernandes, who scored 19 goals and provided 19 assists in 57 appearances across all competitions for United last season and won the club's Player of the Year award, was linked with a move to Saudi Pro-League club Al Hilal earlier this year.

However, the 30-year-old said last month that he had considered the move but ultimately turned it down to keep playing at the highest level.

Asked about Fernandes' importance to the team, Amorim told reporters after the win: "It was so clear last season, you can see it with the goals and assists. But it's not just that."

"I think now he has more players, I feel, to help him to lead the group, and that is a good thing. He is our leader and really important, not just on the field but off the field. He leads by example."

"Sometimes, the problem is he gets frustrated and loses a little bit of focus of his job. Sometimes, he wants to help the teammates so much, it is not the best thing to do. They have to do their job, and Bruno has, for example, to wait for the ball."

United have signed Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo so far in the transfer window, with Amorim saying the signings would take some of the pressure off Fernandes in attack.

"Last year, I felt sometimes I pushed him back to have more possession in the build-up, and we miss Bruno near the box," Amorim added.

"With different characteristics from Bryan (Mbeumo) and Matheus Cunha - and I really like Kobbie Mainoo's game - he (Fernandes) will have more help this season."

De Minaur Saves Three Match Points to Lift Washington Open Title

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Alex De Minaur rallied from a set down and saved three match points to claim the Washington Open title with a 5-7 6-1 7-6(3) win over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in the final of the ATP 500 event.

The Australian number one, who lost the 2018 final to Alexander Zverev, felt he rode his luck to secure his 10th career title and ensure he will enter the top 10 in the world rankings ahead of next month's U.S. Open.

The two 26-year-olds exchanged breaks early in the opening set before Spain's Davidovich Fokina seized control by breaking again and closed out the set with the help of some crisp forehand winners.

De Minaur responded emphatically in the second set, converting two of four break-point opportunities while holding serve throughout, wrapping up the set in just over 30 minutes with an ace to level the contest.

The Spaniard looked on course for his first career title when he broke to grab the lead in the decider but he failed to serve out the match at 5-3, sending a forehand long to hand the break back to seventh seed De Minaur.

Davidovich Fokina's frustration mounted as the 12th seed squandered three match points on De Minaur's serve, and the Australian then capitalised on a series of unforced errors in the tiebreak to edge the contest.

"I came here in 2018 and it gave me so much confidence, so I'm so happy that I was able to come back and end up winning the title," De Minaur said at the trophy presentation.



"Alejandro, you're way too good not to have one of these, it's coming for sure," he added, gesturing to the trophy.

"You deserved it today, I just got lucky. You are a hell of a competitor, hell of a player. No one on the tour wants to play you. And this is not the end, this is only going on for you."

Davidovich Fokina recalled that he had required a wild card to play in the U.S. capital last year and was pleased to have at least guaranteed a rise to a career high world number 19 when the rankings are updated on Monday.

"He deserved the win, he was fighting every ... ball, he was always

pushing through my limits," Davidovich Fokina said.

"We had a job to do before we started the year, to be at the middle of the year in the top 20. This week we did it, just not with the trophy. But for sure, we will keep going, pushing our limits, pushing harder."

Meanwhile Leylah Fernandez earned the biggest win of her career as she beat Anna Kalinskaya 6-1 6-2 in the Washington Open final.

After a brief rain delay in the nation's capital, Fernandez - who was just one game away from defeat in the semi-finals - overcame the extreme humidity to capture her first WTA 500 title in her first final in over a year.

The Canadian gained the upper hand early on, securing a break thanks to a Kalinskaya double fault, before breaking again with a sharp return winner.

The Russian world number 48 appeared to struggle physically as Fernandez calmly served out the opening set in just under half an hour.

Kalinskaya could not find her stride in the match, dropping serve twice in the second set, while the 22-year-old Fernandez remained in control, never looking back on her way to the title.

Fernandez will look to carry her momentum into her home tournament, the Canadian Open in Montreal, where she faces Australia's Maya Joint in the first round.

Kalinskaya, who will play against American Ann Li, remains in search of her maiden WTA title after another setback in a final.

Pogacar Claims Fourth Tour Title

PARIS (Dispatches) - Tadej Pogacar claimed his fourth Tour de France title on Sunday, cementing his status as the most dominant rider of his generation and moving alongside Britain's Chris Froome on the all-time winners' list.

The 26-year-old Slovenian, who triumphed in 2020, 2021 and 2024, delivered a near-flawless performance, even coming close to prevailing on a spectacular final stage on the Champs Elysees after an epic duel with Belgian Wout van Aert.

"Just speechless to win a fourth Tour de France. Six years in a row on the podium and this one feels especially amazing, and I'm super proud that I can wear this yellow jersey," Pogacar, who was second in 2022 and 2023, said.

Pogacar attacked relentlessly in the ascents of the Butte Montmartre but eventually suffered a brutal counterpunch from



Van Aert, who went solo to win the last stage.

The competitive element was largely neutralised on Sunday after organisers decided to freeze the times with about 50 kilometres left due to hazardous road conditions in driving rain.

It did not prevent Pogacar from going for it, however, but Van Aert proved to be the best on the day, beating Italian Davide Ballerini and third-placed Matej Mohoric with Pogacar taking fourth place.

The world champion effectively sealed his victory in the Pyrenees, with a brutal attack on the climb to Hautacam and a commanding victory in the uphill individual time trial, leaving chief rival Jonas Vingegaard more than four minutes behind.

Twice champion Vingegaard of Denmark ended up 4:24 off the pace in Paris.