

'MESSI DESERVES TO RETIRE AS CHAMPION'

MADRID: Argentina coach Edgardo Bauza believes Lionel Messi deserves to retire from international football in style as a World Cup winner. Messi flirted with the notion of quitting playing for his country after three successive final heartbreaks, to Germany in the 2014 World Cup and to Chile in the Copa America in 2015 and earlier this year. But the Barcelona star had a change of heart after talks with Bauza in August. For Bauza, Messi's initial decision was borne out of frustration rather than any real desire to turn his back on Argentina. "When we were chatting it occurred to me he was very interested in selection and what worried him more than anything was how to improve." According to Bauza: "I didn't meet Messi to persuade him, I was convinced that during our chat a chance would open up." Joining five-time World Player of the Year Messi at the meeting with the new boss of the Albiceleste in Barcelona was his club teammate Javier Mascherano. "After our talks all I had to say was 'ok boys, you'll be picked for the next game,'" Bauza recalled in an interview in Sunday's Catalan newspaper Sport. "I reckon he still has a lot to give to the team." —AFP



THAILAND'S POOM CRUISES TO VICTORY IN INDONESIA

JAKARTA: Thailand's Poom Saksansin cruised to a comfortable five-shot victory when he closed with a five-under-par 67 to win his first Asian Tour title at the BNI Indonesian Masters yesterday.

The 23-year-old held a two-shot lead at the start of the day and stayed ahead of the chasing pack by shooting six birdies against one bogey to finish on 18-under-par 270 at the Royale Jakarta Golf Club.

Thai teenagers Phachara Khongwatmai and Suradit Yongcharoenchai, both aged 17, and Japan's Masahiro Kawamura settled for tied second place at the \$750,000 event.

Poom, who won his first Asian Development Tour title in Malaysia last year, showed no signs of nerves when he made the turn in 34 before tightening his grip with three straight birdies on holes 10, 11 and 12.

Dropping only two shots in 72 holes, Poom played solid golf throughout the week and stayed calm under pressure when a host of players briefly threatened his lead early in the round.

"It feels great to be a champion. I just tried not to make bogeys today. Anything in the red numbers was good enough for me. Honestly, I was only hoping to make

enough money to keep my Asian Tour card. This victory exceeded my expectations," the golfer said in comments supplied by the organisers.

The victory earned him \$135,000, which promoted him from 101st to 21st position on the Asian Tour Order of Merit. "This win opens up so many doors and opportunities for me. I get to play in the big events now and I'm really looking forward to it. There's still a lot of room for improvement for me and before I step up in the big events, I need to work even harder on my game," Poom said.

Scores after round 4 of the BNI Indonesian Masters (par 72):

270 - Poom SAKSANSIN (THA) 69-69-65-67
275 - Phachara KHONGWATMAI (THA) 67-71-69-68, Suradit YONGCHAROENCHAI (THA)
67-74-66-68, Masahiro KAWAMURA (JPN) 66-71-68-70

276 - Gaganjeet BHULLAR (IND) 66-73-70-67
277 - Chikkarangappa S. (IND) 70-67-73-67, LEE Chieh-Po (TPE) 71-70-68-68

278 - Casey O'TOOLE (USA) 69-69-73-67, Marcus FRASER (AUS) 69-67-70-72, Thongchai JAIDEE (THA) 68-69-69-72, Kalem RICHARDSON (AUS) 68-68-69-73. —AFP

NAPOLI'S STRIKER MILIK OUT FOR SEVERAL 'MONTHS'

WARSAW: Napoli striker Arkadiusz Milik could be out for several months after suffering a knee injury in Poland's World Cup qualifier win against Denmark. The Polish football federation said Sunday he will probably need surgery on the injured left knee which suffered anterior cruciate ligament damage during Poland's 3-2 win against Denmark in Warsaw on Saturday. "Arek Milik has undergone tests on his injured knee, which have shown damage to the anterior cruciate ligament," Kwiatkowski, the federation spokesman, said on Twitter. "Arek will return to Napoli on Sunday. He is likely to have to undergo surgery and could be out for several months."

Milik, 22, joined Napoli in August from Ajax and has made a huge impact at the Serie A club. And after two rounds of the Champions League for Napoli he is joint top scorer on three goals along with Lionel Messi (Barcelona), Sergio Aguerro (Manchester City) and Edinson Cavani (Paris Saint Germain). —AFP

AURIER THROAT SLIT GESTURE CAUSES STIR

PARIS: Controversial Paris Saint-Germain full-back Serge Aurier has caused a social media stir after making a throat slitting gesture during a World Cup qualifier. Ivory Coast international Aurier celebrated a goal against Mali by turning to the crowd and dragging his finger across his throat. Ivory Coast won the African Group C qualifier in Bouake 3-1. Aurier made the hand gesture after his cross was turned into his own net by Salif Coulibaly to give the hosts a 2-1 lead in the 31st minute. Aurier's name was trending on social media after the incident, with many mocking him or blasting the media. The controversial 23-year-old was in trouble last month when he was sentenced to two months in prison for assaulting a police officer-although in France such short sentences are automatically commuted. Last season he was also in trouble with his club after making derogatory comments about his then-PSG coach Laurent Blanc and other team-mates, including current Manchester United star Zlatan Ibrahimovic, on a social media video post. He was suspended by his club for five weeks but owned up to having committed "a stupid mistake". —AFP



SUZUKA: Japanese Grand Prix winner Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team's German driver Nico Rosberg holds his trophy as Mercedes AMG Petronas members celebrate at their paddock after the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix race in Suzuka yesterday. — AFP

ROSBERG EXTENDS LEAD WITH DOMINANT JAPAN WIN

SUZUKA: Nico Rosberg tightened his grip on the Formula One title race with a dominant victory at the Japanese Grand Prix yesterday, the German's first win at Suzuka also helping Mercedes claim a third consecutive constructors' crown. Rosberg, who started on pole, was never seriously threatened and crossed the line 4.9 seconds clear of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, who fended off a late-charging Lewis Hamilton after the Briton recovered from a woeful start to finish third. Rosberg extended his lead over Hamilton to 33 points in the overall standings following his ninth win of the season and with four rounds remaining, the 31-year-old can claim a maiden title without needing to win another race.

The win was also the 15th of 17 races for Mercedes this season and confirmed three years of dominance, during which time the German outfit has won 47 of 55 races.

"It's been an awesome weekend for sure, the whole weekend had gone great from the word go," Rosberg, who led every session at Suzuka, told reporters.

"Congrats to all my colleagues in the team, for clinching a third constructors' world title.

"Definitely, it's been an unbelievable effort all these years, so let's celebrate hard," added Rosberg, who becomes only the fifth driver in Formula One history to win nine races in a sea-

son. Hamilton went into the race searching for a Suzuka hat-trick to revive his flagging championship prospects after being forced to retire from the lead at the last race in Malaysia but his chances of victory were dashed within a matter of seconds. The Briton was unable to capitalise on his front-row start as he crawled off the line and found himself languishing down in eighth place by the time he reached Turn One as his Mercedes team mate disappeared over the horizon.

MERCEDES PROTEST

"I made a mistake," said Hamilton, who last won at the German Grand Prix in July prior to the series' annual summer break. "And then just working my way up from there was tricky but I did the best I could."

Once he had recovered from the disappointment of the tardy start, a mix of his trademark spectacular overtaking and clever strategy by Mercedes saw him scythe through the field and very nearly snatch second from Verstappen.

However, the Dutchman held on after rebuffing the Briton's final attempt to pass with a robust move at the chicane on the penultimate lap that sent the Mercedes wide into a run-off area and prompted the German team to lodge an official protest.

As the objection came quite late yesterday, stewards opted to defer a decision on the matter until both drivers could give their views on the incident at the next race, which is scheduled to take place in Austin, Texas on Oct. 23.

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel, who started sixth due to a three-place grid penalty for shunting Rosberg at the start in Malaysia, did well to finish fourth but his hopes of a podium spot were compromised late on by slow moving back markers. The German got off to a fantastic start and looked competitive in third but after losing touch with Verstappen and getting passed by Hamilton on his second pit stop, a bold tyre strategy failed to pay off for Ferrari.

His Finnish team mate Kimi Raikkonen, who started eighth after collecting a five-place penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change, also complained of track-hogging back markers on his way to a fifth-place finish.

Daniel Ricciardo, winner in Malaysia a week ago, was sixth in his Red Bull as Force India pulled further ahead of Williams in their private battle for fourth overall.

Sergio Perez and Nico Hulkenberg finished seventh and eighth ahead of Felipe Massa and Valtteri Bottas, who struggled for pace all weekend but made the most of a one-stop strategy to salvage some points. —Reuters

WORLD CHAMP BUEMI WINS CHAOTIC HONG KONG EPRIX

HONG KONG: Reigning Formula E world champion Sebastien Buemi threw down the gauntlet to his rivals as he won the first ever Hong Kong ePrix after an incident-packed season-opener yesterday. The Renault e.dams driver started fifth on the grid but he powered through to win the 45-lap city-centre race by 2.477sec from Lucas di Grassi, who started second-last after a crunching crash in qualifying. Di Grassi and Robin Frijns both came to grief at the same chicane in qualifying, forcing the cancellation of the usual Super Pole shoot-out for the first time in the all-electric series' short history. In a race with plenty of wheel-

to-wheel action, NextEV drivers Nelson Piquet Jr and Oliver Turvey were leading until lap 17 when they came off at the same troublesome chicane, bringing out the safety car. After the drivers had switched to their second race cars-as their batteries are not powerful enough for a full race-Switzerland's Buemi emerged on top and put his foot down to the chequered flag.

Formula E, which aims to raise the profile and technological abilities of electric vehicles, is entering its third season, which consists of 12 races and also includes Buenos Aires, Paris and New York. —AFP



HONG KONG: Renault e.dams driver Sebastien Buemi of Switzerland celebrates with the trophy on the podium after victory in the Formula E championship in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

EMBATTLED HAMILTON VOWS TO FIGHT ON AFTER SUZUKA DEFEAT

SUZUKA: Lewis Hamilton has vowed to "give it everything" in his pursuit of a fourth Formula One drivers' title, which slipped further from his grasp following a third-place finish in yesterday's Japanese Grand Prix.

The Briton's title hopes were dealt a crushing blow a week ago when he was forced to retire with a fiery engine failure from the lead in Malaysia. He went into yesterday's race hoping to revive his flagging championship prospects, but a botched start scuppered his efforts.

Hamilton's championship-leading Mercedes team-mate Nico Rosberg completed a ninth win of the season to extend his advantage in the standings to 33 points.

"That's a healthy margin for Nico, he did a great job, so congrats to him," said Hamilton, who fought his way back through the field with some spectacular overtaking after his slow getaway from second on the grid saw him plummet to eighth. "I'll give it everything I've got, as I did in the race and we'll see what happens."

Hamilton is a formidable competitor who thrives on adversity and converted a 43-point deficit to Rosberg early in the season into a 19-point advantage with a streak of six wins from seven races. Even his best, however, may not be enough. Only four of a record 21 races remain and Rosberg can take the title even if he does not win again, leaving Hamilton's own hopes pinned on misfortune striking the German's campaign. Much will also depend on whether Hamilton can bounce back from his setbacks in Malaysia and Japan. He cut a withdrawn and dis-

tracted figure in Suzuka and refused to answer questions from the press after qualifying, which some interpreted as a sign that the pressure of the title fight was starting to get to him.

But his team boss Toto Wolff had no doubt that the Briton would regroup before the next

race in Austin, Texas, where he sealed the title last year with three rounds to spare. "Lewis functions best when he's under pressure and when he has a target," said the Austrian. "I have no doubt that this will be an intense fight to the end. This is far from over." — Reuters



SUZUKA: Third-placed Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team's British driver Lewis Hamilton waves his hand as he arrives at the podium after the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix at the Suzuka Circuit yesterday. — AFP