

Sports

Evicted villagers pay the price for MotoGP's Indonesia return

First major race in the archipelago since 1997

LOMBOK: The holiday island of Lombok welcomed thousands of fans yesterday for Indonesia's first superbike race on a new circuit that is part of a mega tourism infrastructure project denounced by the UN over the eviction of local families.

With a population of more than 270 million people, many of whom get around on two wheels, Indonesia has one of the world's biggest communities of bike-race fans. But the archipelago had not hosted a major race since 1997.

Several villages have been relocated voluntarily or by force for construction of the new Mandalika circuit. But around 40 families — along with their cattle and dogs — are still holding out in the center of the track despite intimidation to cede their land. Environmentalists also question the wisdom of hosting large-scale events on an island under threat from natural disasters.

The superbike spectacle on the 4.3-kilometer (2.7-mile) circuit yesterday was a prelude to a MotoGP race — the top tier of the motorcycle Grand Prix — to be held on the island in March 2022. "I am here to watch World Superbike. It is very cool and I almost could not believe (Indonesia has this circuit) ... The event will help the economy here," said Rini Yuniarti, a fan from Bali.

The government hopes to create thousands of jobs and attract up to two million foreign tourists a year with the circuit complex, which covers more than a thousand hectares bordered by white-sand beaches. But the gleaming new project has been the subject of bitter conflict between authorities and local residents. Near one village in the area the houses have been abandoned and a metal sign reads: "This land belongs to the state."

But Abdul Latif, 36, and his four children have so far stayed behind because they have not received any compensation for leaving. "Life is difficult here now... Access is very restricted," he said. "We play cat-and-mouse with security personnel guarding the area."

Another villager, 54-year-old Abdul Kadir, said young people struggled to get to school because they were blocked by security. "We have to go through a tunnel to go to school," said her 10-year-old daughter. "I would like to go to school easily like before."

Making matters worse, local wells have run dry for six months since tunnels were built under the circuit, leaving residents without water.

'They dragged me away'

Many villagers have lost their livelihoods, with farmers confiscated their land and fishermen relocated from the coast. Security forces have been deployed to remove some families while others have been coerced into accepting meagre compensation packages, said human rights lawyer Widodo Dwi Putro, who is defending the villagers.

Sibawai, a 53-year-old farmer, has lost most of his land. He said the authorities tried to evict him several times before police came for him in January 2021. "They deployed around 700 personnel just for my land. I tried to prevent the bulldozers from entering but they dragged me away," he said.

United Nations experts in March called on the Indonesian government and the companies involved in the project "to respect human rights". Special rapporteur on human rights and extreme poverty Olivier De Schutter said the project had seen "complaints about land grabbing, evictions of indigenous communities in the Sasak ethnic group and intimidation and threats against defenders of local populations".

Several international companies previously associated with the \$3 billion-dollar project denied still being a part of it, including construction giant Vinci and holiday operator Club Med. The Accor group operates a Novotel on the site and is building a Pullman hotel.

The company told AFP it did not own the land or the hotel but would manage it on behalf of the



KUTA MANDALIKA: This aerial picture taken on November 17, 2021 shows the Mandalika International Circuit, with a section (top center) inside the circuit showing a village inhabited by about 40 families surrounded within the track, in Kuta Mandalika in Central Lombok. —AFP

Indonesian public company Indonesia Development Tourism Corporation. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is due to contribute \$250 million to the project, said it had carried out a study and did not identify any human rights violations.

'Just the start'

Lombok is one of 10 new locations that Indonesian authorities want to develop into tourism destinations in the same vein as Bali. The impoverished island has struggled to rebuild since a major earthquake struck in 2018, killing more than 500 people. For most locals, tickets to the motorbike races are too expensive and many have to settle for watching from a hill overlooking the circuit. But authorities are hopeful the venture will suck in investment.

Superbike and Moto GP events represent "one of the best ways to attract visitors and for significant

investments to be made in our region", said Zulkieflimansyah, governor of West Nusa Tenggara province, of which Lombok is a part. "This international road circuit will be just the start."

Asked about the accusations of human rights violations, Zulkieflimansyah — who like many Indonesians goes by one name — said he was "very optimistic" that the disputes would be settled to the satisfaction of investors and the local community.

Maharani, an environmental activist with NGO the Lombok Research Centre, said the risks from earthquakes and tsunamis were a worry. "A landslide could directly come down to hit and cover the circuit area. In the case of a tsunami the circuit could become a water pit," he said. Abdul Latif, stuck in the center of the circuit clinging to his home, had no desire to watch the race. "I feel abandoned and isolated," he said. "Like a bird in a cage." —AFP

News in brief

Liverpool ends Arsenal's unbeaten run

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool handed Arsenal a reminder of the gulf they have to bridge to compete with the Premier League elite by ending the Gunners' 10-game unbeaten run with a 4-0 thrashing at Anfield. The Reds' front three of Sadio Mane, Diogo Jota and Mohamed Salah were all on target before substitute Takumi Minamoto set the seal on a return to form for Jurgen Klopp's men after losing for the first time in 26 games in their last outing at West Ham. Victory lifts the Reds up to second and within four points of leaders Chelsea. —AFP

Barca give Xavi debut victory

BARCELONA: Xavi Hernandez made a winning start as Barcelona coach on Saturday as a dubious Memphis Depay penalty was enough to defeat local rivals Espanyol 1-0 in La Liga. The win lifts Xavi's team from ninth in the table to sixth, six points behind fourth-placed Atletico Madrid, who earlier needed a late Felipe header to win 1-0 at home to Osasuna. Sevilla, in third, were held to a 2-2 draw by Alaves. There was also an undeniable uplift in mood at Camp Nou, with the 74,418 attendance almost double the 37,278 that watched Barca draw against Alaves two weeks ago. —AFP

Messi scores first Ligue 1 goal

PARIS: Lionel Messi struck his first goal in Ligue 1 on Saturday as Paris Saint-Germain overcame a red card for goalkeeper Keylor Navas to defeat Nantes 3-1. Kylian Mbappe carried on his prolific goalscoring run with an early opener at the Parc des Princes, but Randal Kolo Muani equalized for Nantes in the second half after Navas was sent off. A freak own goal by Dennis Appiah put PSG back in front with 10 minutes left before Messi wrapped up a 12th win in 14 league games this season ahead of next week's Champions League trip to Manchester City. —AFP

Fiorentina ends Milan's unbeaten run

MILAN: Dusan Vlahovic struck twice as Fiorentina ended AC Milan's unbeaten Serie A record on Saturday with a thrilling 4-3 win in Florence. Fiorentina are up to sixth on 21 points, four away from the Champions League positions. Milan's first league defeat in their 13th match of the season meant they missed the chance to go top. Leonardo Bonucci struck twice from the penalty spot in a 2-0 win at Lazio which continued Juventus' climb up the Serie A table following a rocky start to the campaign. Italy defender Bonucci smashed home almost identical spot-kicks in each half at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome to move Juve seventh, level on points with Fiorentina and fifth-placed Lazio. —AFP

Ogier heads into semi-retirement with eighth WRC title

PARIS: Sebastien Ogier heads into semi-retirement having clinched an eighth World Rally Championship title in nine years but without ever quite escaping the shadow of his former mentor Sebastien Loeb.

The 37-year-old Ogier wrapped up the title on Sunday at Monza by holding off his Toyota teammate Elfyn Evans to move within one of Loeb's record tally of nine world championship triumphs. Between them, the two Frenchmen have won 17 of the last 18 titles but because Ogier missed out in 2019, he will, unless he changes his mind, finish one short of his compatriot.

Ogier plans to race selected rallies next season while trying other disciplines. He has said he wants to compete at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, where his current employer Toyota also enters cars. Loeb finished second in that race in 2006 and has also finished second in the Dakar Rally.

The pair brought a new approach to rallying. "They changed rallying. They brought style! By being very precise, very direct," said Jari-Matti Latvala, Ogier's boss at Toyota. "Before, drivers were much more

aggressive on the ground. Loeb came in and started to be much straighter with the car, without sliding, and Ogier continued."

Ogier grew up in Gap, in the shadow of the French Alps. As a child he used to marvel as the Monte Carlo Rally zoomed through his mountains. His father was a fuel delivery driver and his mother an accountant. Ogier has a degree in mechanics and contemplated becoming a ski instructor. He is also French champion in the competitive Lyon variation of boules. He started his rally career with Citroen.

"Ogier had the human qualities, intelligence and adaptability in particular, and a fluidity of driving that would enable him to become a great driver," said Olivier Quesnel, his boss at Citroen, in 2008. Ogier won the WRC junior championship in 2008.

"He arrived at Citroen at a very young age and trained with Loeb," recalls Xavier Mestelan Pinon, technical director of Citroen Racing at the time. "He had the talent and potential to get to this level, and he also had the chance to learn from the best. In the beginning, he worked



MONZA: France's Sebastien Ogier (center) celebrates his 8th World title with co-driver France's Julien Ingrassia (right) as runner-up Britain's Elfyn Evans (left) looks on, on the podium yesterday after the ACI Rally Monza 2021 of the FIA World Rally Championship at the Monza racetrack, Italy. —AFP

hard to 'copy' Sebastien."

But the two egos could not fit in one garage. A clash was inevitable. After a 2011 season in which they both won five rallies, Ogier left. "I knew we were letting go of a real diamond. It was painful to let go of such a driver, who had grown up with us, but we had other projects with Loeb," said Mestelan Pinon.

Ogier joined Volkswagen and competed the following year with their second-tier Skoda subsidiary. The next season he moved up and won the first of four straight titles with Volkswagen. He then won two with Ford. After an ill-fated return to Citroen, where he finished third in 2019 as Estonia's Ott Tanak broke the French reign, Ogier joined Toyota. —AFP



Mobil 1 along with Red Bull clinch thrilling victory

AUSTIN: Mobil 1 along with Red Bull Racing is one of the most successful teams in recent Formula One history, winning 62 Formula One Grand Prix races, four Drivers' and four Constructors' World Championships during the last 15 years. The vast knowledge and expertise needed to succeed in Grand Prix Racing fits perfectly with the Mobil 1 team's approach: It's about clear thinking, extensive research, and a combined effort of technology and creativity.

Commenting on the partnership, Team Principal Christian Horner mentioned: "Mobil 1 has been an iconic brand in Formula One for more than 30 years, and our partnership provides us with a unique opportunity to tap into ExxonMobil's world-class expertise."

Max Verstappen claimed a brilliant United States Grand Prix from his rival Lewis Hamilton in the last stages of the breathless race held in Austin Texas in October 24, putting Sergio Perez's heroic performance in the third place. Throughout the season, ExxonMobil supports Red Bull Racing Honda on and off the track. Earlier this year, Mobil 1 brought a new engine oil upgrade called the Mobil 1 RB16B Engine Oil designed specifically for the new Honda power unit, helping deliver maximum power without compromising protection or fuel efficiency.

Knicks beat Rockets, Wizards topple Heat

LOS ANGELES: Bradley Beal scored 21 points as the Washington Wizards battled back from a 16-point third quarter deficit to defeat the visiting Miami Heat 103-100 on Saturday. Spencer Dinwiddie and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope combined for all 15 points during a 15-2 fourth quarter run for the Wizards, who moved within a half game of Eastern Conference leading Brooklyn Nets.

Both Caldwell-Pope and Dinwiddie finished with 16 points as the division-leading Wizards split the home-and-home series with the second-place Heat. Miami beat Washington 112-97 in Florida on Thursday night. Caldwell-Pope and Dinwiddie scored every point during the fourth quarter run to give the Wizards a 99-96 lead with 1:43 remaining. Kyle Kuzma nailed four of six free throws in the final minute for the Wizards, who snapped the Heat's four-game winning streak. Jimmy Butler scored 29 points and Tyler Herro added 20 in the loss.

In New York, Alec Burks scored 20 points and Julius Randle flirted with a triple double as the New York Knicks used a fourth quarter surge to beat the mistake-prone Houston Rockets 106-99. Burks, who scored just three points in the first three quarters, helped put the finishing touches on a contest that featured 12 lead changes and nine ties at Madison Square Garden.

"I was just trying to make winning plays and it just happened like that. Shots went in," Burks said. Randle had 16 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists, while Emmanuel Quickley came off the bench to score 13 points in the win. —AFP