

## Key Vatican cardinal caught up in real estate scandal resigns suddenly



Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu attends a ceremony in Vatican City

Reuters | Vatican City

A powerful Vatican cardinal caught up in a real estate scandal resigned suddenly yesterday and gave up his right to take part in an eventual conclave to elect a pope, in one of the most mysterious episodes to hit the Holy See in years.

A brief statement, issued unusually in the evening, said that Pope Francis had accepted the resignation of Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, head of the department that decides who will be the saints of the Roman Catholic Church.

But perhaps more significantly, the statement said the Becciu, 72, had "given up the rights associated with being a cardinal".

The one-line statement gave no details but the most important right of Roman Catholic cardinals under 80, as is Becciu, is to take part in a conclave to elect a new pope after the current pope dies or resigns.

The relinquishing of that right indicated that the reason for Becciu's resignation was particularly serious. The last cardinal to give up that right was Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Scotland, who resigned over a sex scandal in 2013.

Becciu was until 2018 deputy secretary of state, one of the most powerful positions in the

**80** years is the age limit for cardinals to take part in a conclave to elect a new pope. Becciu, 72, would have been able to participate in a possible future conclave to elect Francis' successor

Vatican.

During his tenure in that office the Vatican became embroiled in a controversial deal in which the Secretariat of State used Church money to purchase a luxury building in London as an investment.

That investigation led to the suspension last year of five Vatican employees, the resignation of the Vatican's police chief and the departure of the former head of the Vatican's Financial Information Authority (AIF).

Becciu has denied all wrongdoing in the London property deal and defended the purchase, saying the property has increased in value.

In June, Vatican police arrested Gianluigi Torzi, an Italian middleman who was part of a controversial deal, and charged him with extortion, embezzlement, aggravated fraud and money laundering, the Vatican press office said in a statement.

# Trump barnstorms US, drawing contrast with Biden

Trump is under pressure to make the most of the remaining weeks before the November 3 election

● Trump hits battleground states courting key voters

AFP | Washington

With just 38 days until the US election, President Donald Trump ramped up his campaigning with back-to-back events yesterday in battleground states -- a frenetic pace in contrast with the more sedate approach of Democratic rival Joe Biden.

The 74-year-old president's grueling schedule includes hosting events in three US states plus the capital Washington in a 12-hour slog that culminates with a nighttime rally in Virginia.

Trump -- who trails Biden in national polling and is narrowly behind in several swing states seen as crucial to his path to re-election -- is under pressure to make the most of the remaining weeks before the November 3 election.

Throwing caution to the wind amid the ongoing coronavirus crisis, he appears maskless at his events, which often feature crowds that are not socially distanced -- a scenario his own government experts have warned against.

And in a bid to fire up his base over the weekend, the president has said that on Saturday, he will announce his pick to replace liberal Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died last week at 87.



US President Donald Trump makes his way to board Air Force One before departing from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland (file photo)

After a boisterous rally in Jacksonville late Thursday, Trump began the day in Florida with a roundtable with Latino voters, a constituency that is crucial to his hopes of holding the critical swing state.

"The opposition has not been good to Hispanics at all, he's been very bad to Hispanics," the president said of Biden at the event, which took place at his golf club in Doral, near Miami.

"I'm a wall between the American dream and chaos," he said, adding that Biden would "lay waste to Florida's economy."

Trump next flew to neighboring Georgia, which has voted reliably Republican in the last six elections but which is now rated a toss-up, to deliver remarks on black economic empowerment.

Later, after gathering with supporters at the Trump-owned hotel in Washington, he holds a Make America Great Again

rally in Virginia, where the state's Democratic governor announced yesterday that he and his wife have tested positive for Covid-19.

**Statements, not rallies**

Biden's campaign strategy has been cautious ever since the pandemic forced several US states into extended lockdown, with the US death toll now topping 200,000.

The 77-year-old former vice president spent months hunkered down in his Delaware home. While he has ramped up campaigning in swing states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan, his events are tightly scripted with only occasional interaction with voters.

He attended a ceremony yesterday in the US Capitol as Ginsburg lay in state there. Aside from virtual events, there were no other campaign stops on his

schedule.

His wife Jill Biden though was headed to Maine to meet with loggers, blueberry farmers and lobstermen to sell her husband's economic plan.

The Democratic candidate visited Florida last week to kick off Hispanic Heritage Month, but the event featured no large audience.

His recent go-to strategy to counter Trump appears to be releasing statements that address the president's various campaign stops.

"Since President Trump's last visit to Florida just two weeks ago, over 40,000 more Floridians have tested positive for coronavirus and the state marked 13,000 Covid-related deaths," Biden said Thursday as Trump flew to Jacksonville.

"President Trump does not have a plan, but I do -- to beat Covid-19, build our economy back better, and protect and build upon the Affordable Care Act."



Donald Trump currently trails his challenger, Democrat Joe Biden, in national opinion polls with 38 days to go until the election

## Landmine detection rat wins top UK animal bravery award

AFP | London

A landmine detection rat in Cambodia has been awarded for saving lives, "lifesaving bravery and devotion to duty".

The giant African pouched rat has been formally recognised for his work and been presented with a miniature gold medal, the animal equivalent of the George Cross. He was awarded by the British veterinary charity People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) for his work detecting undetonated landmines in Cambodia.

Cambodia has spent years slowly clearing the land of explosives, but it's dangerous work. This is where Magawa, the rat, comes in.

Magawa, who was trained by the Belgian charity APOPO, has sniffed out 39 landmines and 28 items of unexploded ordnance, making him the organisation's most successful "HerORAT".

"The work of HerORAT Magawa and APOPO is truly unique and outstanding," said PDSA director-general Jan McLoughlin.

"HerORAT Magawa's work directly saves and changes the lives of men, women and children who are impacted by these landmines."

Millions of landmines were laid in Cambodia between 1975 and 1998, causing tens of thou-



Magawa, the African giant pouched rat is seen at its home

sands of casualties.

Magawa, based in the northern city of Siem Reap, is the first rat to receive a PDSA medal in the 77 years of the awards, joining an illustrious band of brave canines and felines -- and even a pigeon. The PDSA Gold Medal is the animal equivalent of Britain's George Cross. The charity also awards the Dickin Medal, for military animals.

**Sniff and scratch**

APOPO trained Magawa in his native Tanzania to detect the chemical compound within explosives by rewarding him with

tasty treats -- his favourite being bananas and peanuts.

The rats alert de-miners by scratching the earth.

He can scurry across an area the size of a tennis court in just 30 minutes, something that would take four days using a conventional metal detector.

He is big enough to be attached to a leash as he goes about his business but light enough not to set off mines.

"The PDSA Gold Medal award brings the problem of landmines to global attention," said Christophe Cox of APOPO.

Cox said its team of "Her-

ORATs" speeded up landmine detection because of their keen sense of smell and recall.

"Unlike metal detectors, the rats ignore scrap metal and only sniff out explosives making them fast and efficient landmine detectors," Cox said.

"This not only saves lives but returns much-needed safe land back to the communities as quickly and cost-effectively as possible."

APOPO currently has 45 rats finding landmines and 31 detecting tuberculosis in Africa and Asia, according to its website.



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CHRISTOPHE COX

APOPO

## Remains of Jurassic sea predator found in Chile's Atacama desert



A view of fossil remains of the marine predator found by scientists in the middle of the Atacama desert

AFP | Washington

Scientists have unearthed the remains of Jurassic sea predators resembling killer whales in the world's driest desert in Chile.

Pliosaurus were reptiles from about 160 million years ago with a more powerful bite than Tyrannosaurus rex, according to University of Chile researchers. The fossils are the second oldest record of this species in the Southern Hemisphere.

Chile's vast Atacama desert, once largely submerged beneath the Pacific Ocean, is now a moonscape of sand and stone with parts untouched by rain for years. Pliosaurus reined the

region, with their large skull, elongated face, short neck, menacing teeth on a hydrodynamic body and fin-like limbs. Scientists found jaw, tooth and limb fragments of the creatures "ecologically similar" to killer whales at two sites in the Loa river basin near the mining city of Calama.

The find helps scientists fill gaps in evolution, said Rodrigo Otero, a University of Chile paleontologist who led the research.

The complete fossil, under excavation since 2017, is likely to measure six to seven meters (19.7 to 23 feet). The skull is around a meter (3.3 feet) long, with teeth each around eight to 10 centimeters (3.1 to 3.9 inches) long, Otero said.