

BALO DOES IT AGAIN

As he was set to return to the city of his birth, Palermo, with Milan on Wednesday evening, Mario Balotelli decided to pay tribute to his roots by posting a photo on Instagram. Next to the picturesque image of lights twinkling on an idyllic bay, Balotelli gushed: "I love the city where I was born!!! Palermo." However, it was soon pointed out to Balotelli that he'd not actually posted an image of his beloved Palermo at all, but rather a photo of Cefalu -- a town roughly 50 miles away. The Milan forward then added "It's still a photo of Sicily"



Jamie vows to stay

AFP, Leicester

Jamie Vardy pledged his future to Leicester after the best goal of his remarkable career inspired a 2-0 win over Liverpool that kept the shock Premier League leaders on course for the title.

Vardy produced an absolute belter to break the deadlock in the 60th minute at the King Power Stadium on Tuesday when the England striker lashed home from 30 yards out.

The 29-year-old struck again 11 minutes later to seal a win that puts Leicester three points clear of second placed Manchester City and a step closer to completing their incredible bid to win the English crown.

With 18 goals to his credit this term, Vardy will inevitably be in high demand from the league's big guns at the end of the season.

But Vardy, who was playing non-league football just a few years ago, is in talks over a new deal worth a reported £80,000 (\$115,000) per week that would keep him at the club until at least 2019.

"It's nothing people don't know, I'd like to be here for a long time," Vardy

Abdul Hadi no more

SPORTS REPORTER

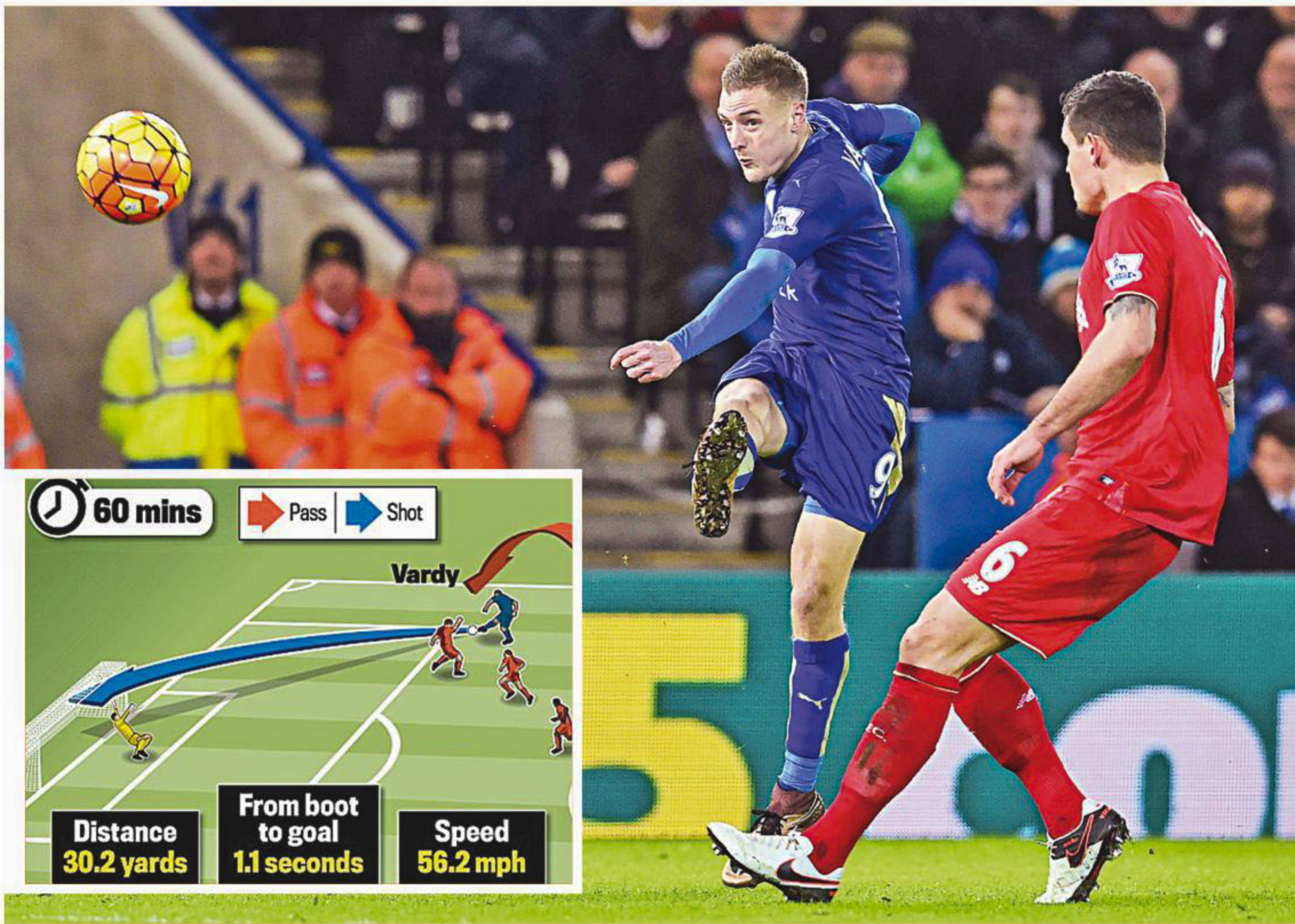
A cricket enthusiast, a threatening swing-bowler and a pioneer when it comes to coaching in Bangladesh; there are few in the cricketing arena who aren't aware of Abdul Hadi Ratan's contribution to the game.

Unfortunately for the country's cricketing fraternity, he passed away early morning yesterday due to a renal failure. He was 61.

Ratan had served as a coach of the BCB's Game Development Department from 2005 to 2014.

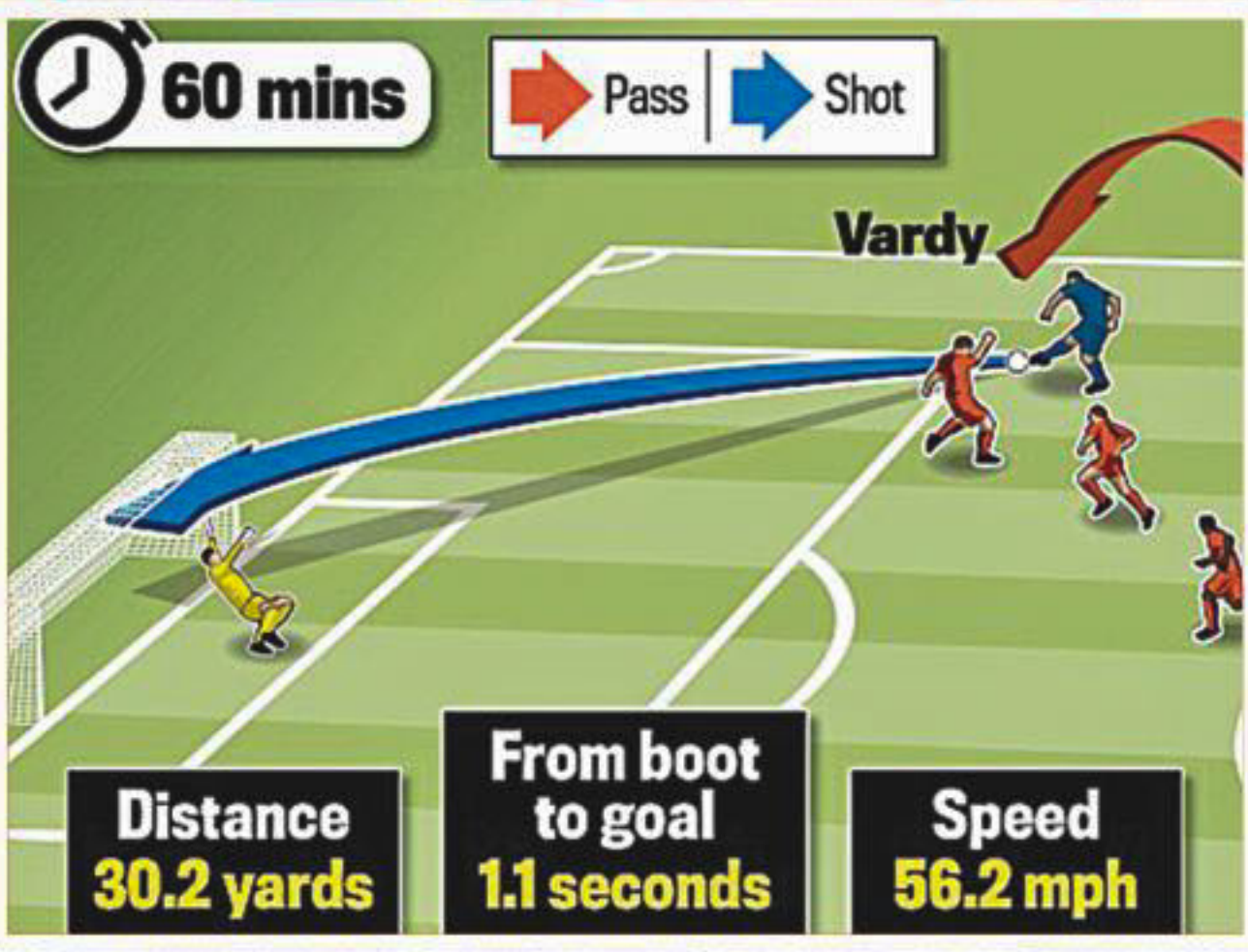
He began his distinguished career in cricket coaching in the mid 90s after a long domestic cricket career in which he played mostly for Rupali Bank in the Dhaka League. He was associated with the BCB's age group programmes and worked extensively with the under 14, under 16 and under 18 groups since joining the BCB in 2005. His main role was that of Dhaka Metro Coach. He had also been a head coach for first class teams and junior national teams and an assistant coach of the National Team.

The BCB extended its heartfelt sympathies to the family of the departed yesterday.



Leicester City star Jamie Vardy (L) scores the opening goal from a stunning half-volley during their Premier League encounter against Liverpool at the King Power Stadium on Tuesday. (Inset) A graphical illustration of Vardy's shot.

PHOTOS: AFP/INTERNET



Foxes flying high

AFP, London



Jamie Vardy scored a brace including a sensational long-range goal as Leicester City sank Liverpool 2-0 on Tuesday to safeguard their spot at the Premier League summit.

Manchester City kept pace, the day after Pep Guardiola was announced as their new manager, by winning 1-0 at Sunderland courtesy of Sergio Aguero, but Arsenal lost ground after a 0-0 draw at home to Southampton.

Manchester United blew off the cobwebs in a 3-0 win over Stoke City, but nothing could overshadow the predatory brilliance of Vardy, whose double preserved Leicester's three-point lead over second-place Manchester City.

Reports had emerged earlier in the day that the 29-year-old England striker is due to sign a new contract and he delivered a perfectly timed reminder of his talent at the King Power Stadium.

He opened the scoring on the hour with a goal-of-the-season contender from wide on the right, running onto Riyad Mahrez's pass from the Leicester half, allowing the ball to bounce and ripping a ferocious, dipping strike over Simon Mignolet from 30 yards.

Eleven minutes later Vardy made the game safe, finishing neatly from Shinji Okazaki's deflected shot, as Claudio Ranieri's men produced another stunning performance to bolster their remarkable title bid.

Leicester visit Manchester City on Saturday and Manuel Pellegrini's men kept themselves within touching distance of the leaders with victory at the Stadium of Light in the Chilean's 100th league game as manager.

Pellegrini will make way for Guardiola at the season's end and his hopes of signing off

with a league title were kept on track by Aguero's 16th-minute strike -- his sixth goal in four appearances.

But Arsenal's title hopes took a blow in a goalless draw with Southampton that left Arsene Wenger's men five points below Leicester and saw them slip to fourth place.

Exacerbating Arsenal's fans' disappointment was the sight of arch rivals Tottenham Hotspur stealing above them into third place on goal difference.

Mauricio Pochettino's men won 3-0 at Norwich City courtesy of a second-minute

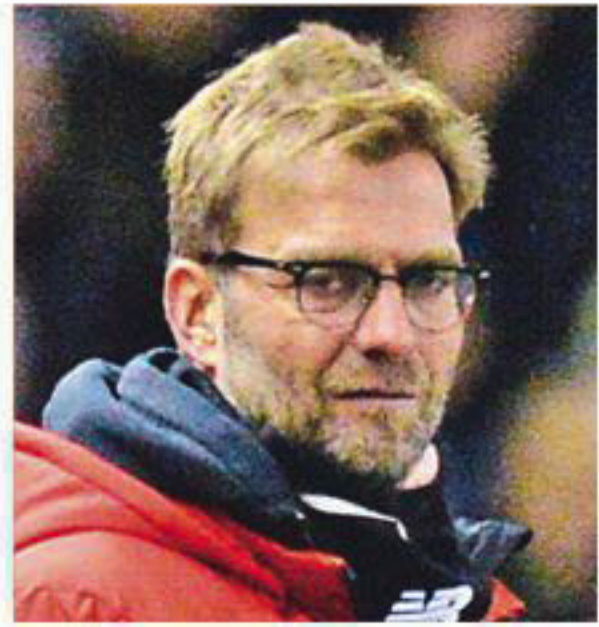
RESULTS		
Arsenal	0 - 0	Southampton
Crystal Palace	1 - 2	Bournemouth
(Dann 27)		(Pugh 34, Afobe 57)
Leicester	2 - 0	Liverpool
(Vardy 60, 71)		
Man United	3 - 0	Stoke
(Lingard 14, Martial 23, Rooney 53)		
Norwich	0 - 3	Tottenham
		(Alli 2, Kane 30-pen, 90)
Sunderland	0 - 1	Man City
		(Aguero 16)
West Brom	1 - 1	Swansea
(Rondon 90+2)		(Sigurdsson 64)
West Ham	2 - 0	Aston Villa

Dele Alli goal and a Harry Kane double -- a 30th-minute penalty, won by Alli, and a calm one-on-one finish late on.

Fifth-place Manchester United remain five points off the Champions League places after putting Stoke to the sword with uncharacteristic verve.

Louis van Gaal's side had been booed off after losing 1-0 to Southampton in their previous game at Old Trafford, but they were a team transformed in a display that will give the under-fire Dutchman some much-needed breathing space.

KLOPP's reaction



Jurgen Klopp admitted he nearly clapped Jamie Vardy after the striker scored from an audacious effort against Liverpool.

"Things like this happen when you are in such a good moment like Jamie Vardy and Leicester are," Klopp said. "Obviously you need a little bit of luck but it was really good. First of all you need to be brave enough to do it."

"It's the perfect season for Leicester and the perfect season for Jamie Vardy. They deserve every point they get and Jamie has deserved every goal he's scored until now. I was close to clapping my hands to be honest but I just felt too bad at that moment," he continued.

"At the end, the game is decided by a world-class goal from Jamie Vardy," Klopp added. "One second before we were in their box and we didn't shoot. That maybe shows you the difference."

Fresh legal blow for Neymar

AFP, Sao Paulo



Barcelona and Brazil's star striker Neymar suffered a fresh legal blow Tuesday when Brazilian prosecutors filed a tax fraud and forgery case against him.

The 23-year-old and his family have denied any wrongdoing over alleged irregularities in his superstar signing for Barcelona in 2013.

But hours after he gave testimony in Spain in one case, a new front opened up as federal prosecutors in Brazil launched proceedings against him and his father.

Investigators in both countries suspect Neymar's family and the club hid the real value of the deal under which Barcelona signed him from Brazilian side Santos. Barcelona valued the transfer at about 57 million euros (\$62 million), but Spanish authorities think it added up to more than 83 million euros.

Brazil's federal prosecution service accused the player, full name Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, and his father of forging contracts to pay less tax.

It made the same accusations against his father and two senior FC Barcelona management figures: the club's current president Josep Maria Bartomeu and his predecessor Sandro Rosell.

A federal court must now decide whether to admit the charges and put them on trial. Last September, Brazilian authorities froze \$47 million worth of the player's assets pending investigations.

The federal prosecution service said in a statement the charges related to "tax evasion and forgery," which cost the state "millions" in lost taxes.

Wearing jeans and sunglasses, Neymar seemed relaxed as he arrived at Spain's National Court in Madrid with his father Neymar da Silva Santos, who was also called to testify before an investigating judge.

The player signed an autograph in front of a group of photographers before giving the thumbs-up and entering court, where he stayed an hour and a half.

He made no comment when he left, but took a multitude of selfies with young supporters.

Guangzhou break bank for Martinez

AFP, Beijing

Asian champions Guangzhou Evergrande smashed China's transfer fee record Wednesday when they announced a deal to secure Atletico Madrid's unsettled Colombian striker Jackson Martinez for 42 million euros (\$46 million).

Martinez, 29, is the latest Europe-based player to move to the cashed-up Chinese Super League and was described as a "goal poacher" and "fox in the box" in a Chinese-language statement on the club's website.

"The moment has arrived to start a new stage in my career," Martinez told Atletico's website.

"The club and I have spoken in the last few days and we are agreed this is the best thing for everyone."

The purchase broke the week-old Chinese record fee of 28 million euros, paid by Jiangsu Suning to acquire Brazilian midfielder Ramires from Chelsea.

It lifted the Chinese Super League's total spending during the current transfer window to 203.9 million euros, according to website transfermarkt which tracks commercial dealings in the sport -- second only to the English

Feder undergoes knee surgery

AFP, Basel



Seventeen-time Grand Slam winner Roger Federer underwent "successful" surgery on his knee Wednesday and will be ruled out of action for one month, his agent said.

Federer underwent the surgery to repair a torn meniscus sustained the day after his semifinal match at the Australian Open, according to Tony Godick.

As a result of the surgery, Federer will now miss the ATP tournaments in Rotterdam and Dubai this month.

"I am so disappointed to have to miss Rotterdam and Dubai as they are two of my favourite tournaments on the ATP World Tour," Federer said.

"While this is an unfortunate setback, I feel grateful that up until now I have remained mostly healthy throughout my career. My doctors have assured me that the surgery was a success and with proper rehabilitation, I will be able to return to the Tour soon."

Unlike great rival Rafael Nadal, Federer has enjoyed a relatively injury-free career, the exception being bouts of recurring back pain.

The last time that happened was at the 2014 ATP World Tour Finals in London when he withdrew at the last minute from the final against Djokovic.

Federer will now aim at being fit in time for the first two Masters Series tournaments of the year at Indian Wells and

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