

Costa strike sends Blues to summit

AFP, London



Diego Costa scored his 10th goal of the season as Chelsea won 1-0 at Middlesbrough to record a sixth consecutive victory and take over at the Premier League summit.

Costa struck for the third straight game with half-time approaching as Antonio Conte's side underlined their title credentials by posting a sixth clean sheet in a row.

It took them a point clear of Liverpool and Manchester City, and three ahead of fourth-place Arsenal.

Only the woodwork prevented Chelsea from winning by a more handsome margin as Pedro Rodriguez hit the bar midway through the second half, during which Middlesbrough were forced to hang on for long spells.

Aitor Karanka's side retained hope while the deficit remained at a single goal, but the gulf in class between the sides was clear and it leaves Boro one point above the relegation zone in their first season back in the Premier League following promotion.

Costa rewarded Chelsea's dominance as the Spaniard put the visitors -- unchanged for the fifth consecutive league game -- ahead four minutes before the end of a tight first half.

It stemmed from a disputed corner, as Middlesbrough claimed debutant full-back Fabio da Silva had not touched the ball as it ran out of play.

Eden Hazard's in-swinging set-piece looped into the air as Calum Chambers and Gaston Ramirez challenged Marcos Alonso at the near post.

Despite the hosts having numbers back to defend Costa reacted first to volley the loose ball home from inside the six-yard box, taking him to double figures for the campaign.

Middlesbrough goalkeeper Victor

Valdes was partially at fault for failing to come off his line.

His indecision was in stark contrast to earlier in the half when the former Barcelona man produced a stunning fingertip save to deflect a first-time Pedro shot over the bar.

It was one of few clear-cut chances before the interval as Boro were largely successful in their attempts to negate the threat of Conte's side by packing midfield and looking to counter-attack.

The out-of-touch Alvaro Negredo wasted their two main openings, first firing across the face of goal and then heading wide from Antonio Barragan's deep cross.

Ramirez shot over early in the second half after Negredo's dummy created space on the edge of the box for the Uruguay international, but it was a rare threat from the hosts.

Boro have forced draws against Arsenal and Pep Guardiola's City this season, but after falling behind they rarely looked like troubling Chelsea's three-man back line.

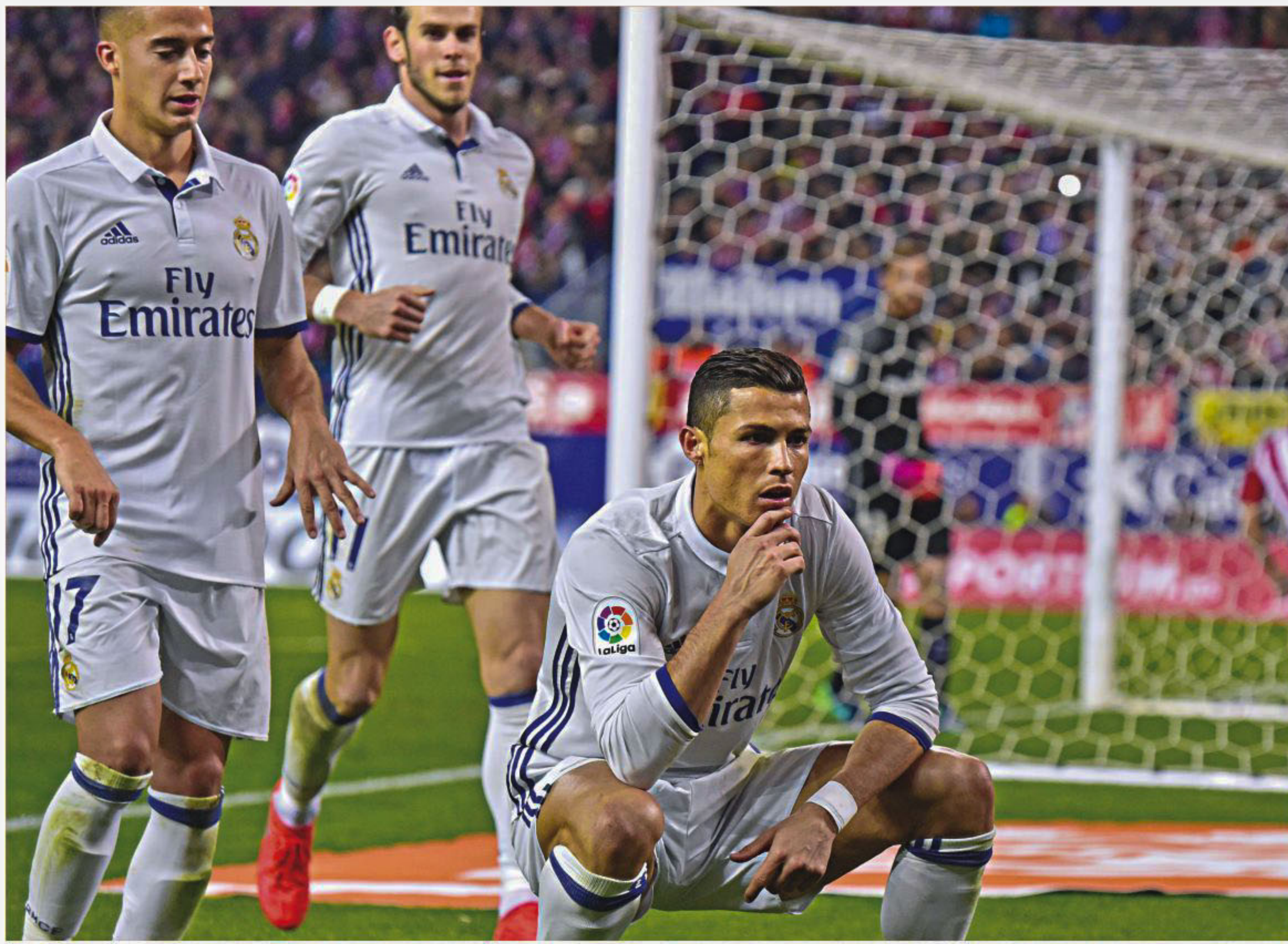
Having not conceded a league goal since September 24 -- almost 10 hours of football -- Chelsea are on their best defensive run for six years.

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois preserved their latest shut-out late on when he parried a powerful Negredo volley as the hosts belatedly pushed bodies forward.

The majority of chances arrived at the other end.

Alonso almost doubled the visitors' advantage within seconds of kick-off in the second half, the Spaniard forcing a fine low save from Valdes after Hazard helped on Victor Moses's cross.

The second goal failed to materialise, but Chelsea closed out their latest victory with relative ease to secure another valuable three points towards their growing title challenge.



Cristiano Ronaldo (R) was the architect of Real Madrid's first league win over Atletico Madrid since 2013, scoring a fabulous treble with the Vicente Calderon solemnly bearing witness to his greatness.

PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldo silences Calderon

Real go four clear at top of La Liga

AFP, Madrid



Cristiano Ronaldo's hat-trick delivered Real Madrid's first success over Atletico Madrid in La Liga for three years with a 3-0 win in the last meeting between the sides at Atletico's

Vicente Calderon.

Real now lead second-placed Barcelona by four points after the Catalans paid a heavy price for the absence of Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez in a 0-0 draw with nine-man Malaga earlier on Saturday.

Ronaldo struck the decisive spot-kick as Real edged Atletico on penalties in the Champions League final in May and was the match winner once more, albeit with a slight hint of fortune.

The Portuguese's opener took a wicked deflection on its way past the excellent Jan Oblak.

Ronaldo doubled Real's lead from the penalty spot 19 minutes from time before a brilliant Gareth Bale cross teed him up for the simplest of finishes to complete his hat-trick.

"We played an enormous game from the start against a very difficult opponent," said a delighted Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane.

"There are very few teams that can come here and win 3-0."

A third league defeat in four games leaves Atletico's title ambitions in tatters in their final season at the Calderon.

Diego Simeone's men are now nine points adrift of Real down in fifth.

"Above all in the first-half they were better than us," admitted Simeone.

"For the first 20 minutes of the second-half we created chances, played in their half and controlled the game, but then came the penalty which took the wind out of our sails."

Real were without six key players in captain Sergio Ramos, Pepe, Casemiro, Toni Kroos, Alvaro Morata and Karim Benzema, but impressively controlled the first 45 minutes.

Only an incredible save by Oblak prevented Ronaldo opening the scoring with a towering header on 12 minutes that the Slovenian somehow clawed away low to his left.

Oblak made another smart save to deny Luka Modric moments later, but he was helpless for the opener as Ronaldo's free-kick was deflected behind him via the Atletico wall.

It took Atletico until the start of the second period to get to grips with the European champions, but came out a different side after the break.

Yannick Carrasco curled inches wide from the edge of the area before Antoine Griezmann blasted a shot across goal with no Atletico player waiting to knock to the ball into an unguarded net.

However, any hopes of an Atletico fightback were punctured when Stefan Savic upended Ronaldo inside the area and the three-time World Player of the Year dispatched the resulting spot-kick.

And with Atletico stretched at the back, a brilliant run and low cross from Bale on the counter-attack teed up Ronaldo to prod home at the far post.

Meanwhile, Sevilla moved up to third as they produced a stunning fightback from 2-0 down to win 3-2 at Deportivo la Coruna.

'Ballon d'Or no longer debatable'

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane insisted he has no doubt Cristiano Ronaldo will be the deserving winner of a fourth Ballon d'Or come January, but his hat-trick in a 3-0 defeat of Atletico Madrid on Saturday may convince others.

Ronaldo returned to haunt Atletico just five months after scoring the winning penalty in Real's second Champions League victory over their city rivals in three seasons.

In the final La Liga derby at Atletico's Vicente Calderon, Ronaldo's deflected free-kick opened the scoring before he doubled the lead from the penalty spot and completed his 39th Real Madrid hat-trick with a simple finish from Gareth Bale's fine cross.

"I never had any doubt. It is not his three goals that are going to change my mind," said Zidane on Ronaldo's case to be crowned the world's best player for 2016.

"He showed it all last season, he shows it in every game. There is so much expected of him, but he is ahead of the rest."

"Three goals in a match like this may make everyone agree, but for me there is no debate. The Ballon d'Or will be his."

Fakirerpool go joint top

SPORTS REPORTER

Fakirerpool Youngmen's Club joined leaders Saif SC on top of the Marcel Bangladesh Championship League table after playing out a 1-1 draw against Karwan Bazar P.S at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

If Youngmen's Club held the lead when Indrajit gave it to them in the third minute then with an outright win they could have taken the solo lead in the eight team table. However, the club from Fakirerpool was denied that privilege when Tuhin scored in the 33rd minute for newcomers Karwan Bazar.

With their third draw in six matches, Fakirerpool equal Saif SC with 12 points while Karwan Bazar remained at fifth position with seven points from six outings.

Ibe robbed at knifepoint

AGENCIES, London

Bournemouth forward Jordan Ibe was robbed at knifepoint when thieves rammed his car just four days after suspected gunmen allegedly threatened West Ham striker Andy Carroll.

The 20-year-old had his 25,000 pound Rolex watch stolen after his car was struck in Surrey Quays, south-east London.

The attack came after England international Carroll, 27, was the victim of an alleged attempted robbery as he drove home from a training session on November 2.

Scotland Yard said detectives were investigating the attack on Ibe, which took place near at around 1.45pm on November 6.

A police spokesman said: "One of the suspects threatened the victim with a knife before stealing his watch. The victim was not injured. At this early stage, officers are investigating whether the suspects intentionally collided with the victim's car."

West Ham manager Slaven Bilic described Carroll as "very brave" after the player was allegedly targeted as he drove his Mercedes G-Wagon back to his home in Essex from the club's Rush Green training ground.

Rahmatganj fall to Baridhara too!

SPORTS REPORTER



Title contenders Rahmatganj MFS yet again fell to a bottom-table side in the JB Bangladesh Premier League as they suffered a 0-2 defeat against Uttar Baridhara Club at MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

Rahmatganj MFS, who had been in a tight race with Abahani and Chittagong Abahani till the close of the first phase, have been putting up inconsistent performances since the start of the second leg matches. The Old Dhaka outfit had returned to winning ways in their previous match by beating holders Sheikh Jamal following two consecutive defeats against strugglers Mohammedan SC and Sheikh Russel KC. But they returned to their lackluster form after falling to Uttar Baridhara, who lifted themselves off the bottom and onto 11th position with 13 points.

With their fourth defeat in 15 matches, Rahmatganj now have 25 points, 10 behind league leaders Abahani.

Even though neither side managed to break the deadlock in the first half, the second half saw lightweight Uttar Baridhara create a few chances to capitalise on, especially after Rahmatganj defender Eleta Benjamin was given marching orders in the 57th minute.

Monir Hossain gave Uttar Baridhara the lead in the 73rd minute with a seemingly harmless shot from outside the box which Rahmatganj goalkeeper Al Amin failed to block before substitute Khalekuzzaman Sabuj doubled the lead with a left-footed angular shot.

In the day's other match, Brothers Union handed a 2-1 defeat to Arambagh KS to climb up to fifth position with 21 points. Nkowcha Kingsley gave Brothers the lead in the third minute and the lead was doubled by Augustine Walson in the 25th minute.

Sajidur Rahman pulled one back for Arambagh in the 63rd minute, but that was not enough to deny Brothers a richly-deserved victory. The defeat kept Arambagh were in sixth position with 20 points.

Juve flaunt starlet in Pescara win

AFP, Milan



Juventus starlet Moise Kean made his Serie A debut at the age of 16 and 265 days Saturday after replacing Mario Mandzukic in a 3-0 win

over Pescara that tightened the champions' grip on the top of Serie A.

Juventus were cruising to a comfortable win against the league newcomers in Turin after goals from Sami Khedira, Mandzukic and Hernanes wrapped up a fourth consecutive league win to move them seven points ahead of Roma before the remaining weekend fixtures.

But coach Massimiliano Allegri gave fans an indication of a likely future star of the club when he sent Kean on for a

long-awaited debut having stunned observers with several impressive performances for the club's under-19 side.

Kean, who turned 16 on February 28, had little time to get into his stride but showed some fancy footwork on his way to winning a corner that, on the stroke of full-time, was not given.

It was a brief yet promising cameo that will give fans around the world of seeing Kean -- of Ivorian heritage but who has played at all levels for Italy -- become the first player born after 2000 to play in the Champions League from next year.

He was not included in the club's 21-man squad list for the competition on September 1.

But Kean has already being watched by rival clubs in Europe, and Juventus

CEO Beppe Marotta said he hopes Kean's agent doesn't have ideas.

"Playing at Juventus should be a point of pride for him. He's in the best possible place," Marotta told Mediaset Premium.

"If it comes down to money, that's a different story. His agent should reason with him, it shouldn't just come down to money."

Allegri added: "He has the chance to play alongside top players here. He has soaked up what it's like to be part of a great squad. His attitude will make the difference."

Juventus travel to Sevilla on Tuesday in a bid to secure their last 16 ticket in the competition and Allegri added: "It's an important game for us because we have to win one of our last two games to go through."

Earlier, a second-half brace from Lorenzo Insigne boosted Napoli's hopes of maintaining Champions League football in a 2-1 win at Udinese that pushed the southerners up to fourth at six points behind Juve. It helped Napoli return among the top five.

Amid a seven-month goal drought, Insigne looked the last player to get his name on the scoresheet.

Playing despite a bout of flu and amid injuries to striker Arkadiusz Milik and Manolo Gabbiadini, Insigne turned on the style in 10 second-half minutes to claim his maiden league goals.

"It was obviously he was going for at least a brace," said coach Maurizio Sarri.

"I could see it in the way he reacted after hitting his first goal. He was reborn and about to become very dangerous every time he touched the ball."



Juventus showed a glimpse of their 16-year-old prospect, Italian forward Moise Kean, in a comfortable win over Pescara at the Juventus Stadium in Turin on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP