



Atletico Madrid star Antoine Griezmann heads the ball during a training session in Majadahonda yesterday on the eve of their La Liga match against Real Madrid.

# Griezmann plots Real upset

AFP, Madrid



Antoine Griezmann believes Atletico Madrid can inflict the worst possible start to a season defining two-weeks for Real Madrid as Atletico go for a record fourth straight La Liga win at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Griezmann scored the winner last season as Atletico became the first side to ever win away to Real in the league for three consecutive seasons.

"I see us as favourites. I believe in my teammates and the coach," said a bullish Griezmann on Thursday.

Despite their triple assault on the Bernabeu, Atletico have still had to play second fiddle to Real after losing to their city rivals in the Champions League for each of the past three seasons - twice in the final.

Real were also the dominant force when the sides last met in November as Cristiano Ronaldo's hattrick sealed a 3-0 win.

Zinedine Zidane's men lead Barcelona at the top of the table by two points and have a game in hand on their title rivals with Atletico 10 points back in third.

"We have to win more for the fans than for the points," added Griezmann.

"Madrid played great and caused us a lot

PHOTO: AFP

## QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

### 'Bangladesh came here thinking they can win'

Asanka Gurusinha, Cricket Manager of the Sri Lankan team threw light on the positive attitude of the Bangladeshi cricketers after the tourists won the second Twenty20 international in Colombo by 45-runs to level the series.

### Conte plays down exit talk

Chelsea manager Antonio Conte gave short shrift to media reports linking him with a move away from the English Premier League leaders and said he was eager to build "something important" at Stamford Bridge.

### Klopp wants Liverpool to close out matches like Chelsea

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp believes his side can benefit by emulating Premier League leaders Chelsea, especially in their ability to close matches out from a winning position.

### Mickelson breaks par for 50th time at Masters

Phil Mickelson broke par for the 50th time at Augusta National, overcoming the whipping winds for a one-under-par 71 in the opening round at the US Masters.

### 'West Ham need to drop egos and work as a team'

West Ham United manager Slaven Bilic has called on his players to drop their egos and work as one in order to end their woeful run of five consecutive Premier League defeats when they host relegation-threatened Swansea City.

# BOA polls today

SPORTS REPORTER

The elections of the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) will be held today at the BOA House with some 80 councillors voting the office bearers. The polls will open at 9:00am.

The BOA polls have already lost attraction after some vital posts including the president's and secretary general's saw no contest.

Out of the 37 posts, three will remain vacant for the next four years as no fitting councillors for those posts have been found. The president [Army Chief General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiu Huq], the secretary general [Syed Shahed Reza], two vice presidents [Anjan Chowdhury Pintu and Mahbub Ara Gini], one deputy secretary [Najib Ahmed] and six executive members from different quotas have already been elected unopposed.

The councillors, however, will have the opportunity to cast their votes to elect three vice presidents, two deputy secretaries, a treasurer and 17 members.

Four candidates are contesting three vice president posts; three candidates will be competing in two deputy secretary posts while two candidates will be in the race for the treasurer's post.

In the executive member posts, 15 candidates will be competing for the 14 posts of Olympic disciplines while four candidates will fight it out for the three Regional Olympic body posts.

# 'Blues won't crack under pressure'

AFP, London



Premier League

Cesc Fabregas insists Chelsea won't buckle under the strain of Tottenham's relentless pursuit as the Premier League title race ratchets up another notch this weekend.

With just eight games remaining Chelsea are clinging to a precious seven-point lead over second-placed Tottenham, but the Blues are showing a few glimpses of vulnerability.

Antonio Conte's side ground out a barely deserved 2-1 win over Manchester City on Wednesday just days after crashing to a shock 2-1 home defeat against struggling Crystal Palace.

Meanwhile Tottenham have reeled off five successive victories, including an incredible escape act at Swansea on Wednesday when they scored three times in the final minutes to clinch a 3-1 success.

With Chelsea playing on Saturday evening at Bournemouth, Tottenham have the chance to turn up the pressure again by temporarily trimming the lead to four points with a win against Watford at White Hart Lane a few

hours earlier.

Chelsea midfielder Fabregas admits his team have been feeling the heat lately, but he is confident the way they recovered from the Palace setback proved title nerves won't trigger a stunning meltdown in the final weeks of the season.

"The result on Saturday put a lot of pressure on us. We know we still have a good advantage, but this is the Premier League and you don't want to be giving points away, especially at home," Fabregas said.

"We have character. We can bounce back at anything that comes in front of us,"

## FIXTURES

(1400 GMT unless stated):

### Saturday

Bournemouth v Chelsea (1630 GMT), Manchester City v Hull, Middlesbrough v Burnley, Stoke v Liverpool, Tottenham v Watford (1130 GMT), West Brom v Southampton, West Ham v Swansea

### Sunday

Everton v Leicester (1500 GMT), Sunderland v Manchester United (1330 GMT)

### Monday

Crystal Palace v Arsenal (1900 GMT)

# Italian doctor rescues Messi

AFP, Milan



Lionel Messi "cried tears of frustration" in his battle to beat vomiting urges and muscle problems, says the Italian doctor who claims he revamped the Barcelona striker's lifestyle to maintain his superstar status.

Doctor Giuliano Poser, a sports nutritionist who specialises in optimising muscle performance through the use of specific foods, is credited with helping Messi control violent urges to be sick before games.

And using the principles of kinesiology -- muscle monitoring to access information about a person's well being -- he has also helped the five-time Ballon d'Or winner shake off the nagging muscle issues that had increasingly plagued him in recent seasons. Although the 29-year-old Argentine "struggled to adapt" at first, after regular visits to the clinic in Venice he is now reaping the benefits, says Poser.

"I think he even cried tears of frustration," Poser told Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera on Friday.

"But he's now accepted it. There is no unique formula in kinesiology, but through testing we can see how food intake affects each and every muscle in the body."

Poser says he introduced major changes to Messi's diet, bringing in organic and seasonal foods. Those were just the final touches to a "completely new lifestyle", he claims.

"It's not just a case of changing diet," said Poser, who has also worked with footballers from Serie A sides Udinese and Palermo during a 30-year career.

"We live in a time in which foods contain too many contaminants and that can be seen in energy levels when measuring resistance and recovery."

"You don't become a professional player, and even less a phenomenon like Messi, just for the things you eat."

"Messi can still be Messi. But he has been intelligent because he wants to maintain his current level. He's not happy to be one of the 10 best players in the world. He wants to be number one."

"I see myself as simply making fine adjustments to a powerful supercar by encouraging the use of organic food, raw grains, seasonal fruits and vegetables, extra virgin olive oil, eggs and fresh fish."

Messi began seeing Poser over two years ago, although it has taken time for him to benefit.

# Chiellini now a business graduate

AGENCIES, Turin

Juventus defender Giorgio Chiellini has graduated in business administration at the University of Turin after writing a thesis about the club's business model.

Chiellini, 32, graduated on Thursday and received the highest possible mark of 110 with distinction and a special mention.

"To the end," the Italy international wrote on his Instagram profile, borrowing the Juventus slogan.

"I'm proud of this degree; proud to have done it. Happy to have reached this objective."

Chiellini -- who can now call himself Dr Giorgio Chiellini -- compared the Juventus model with those of other leading clubs.

"He examined Juventus' business model with reference to promotion of their own brand and the management of human capital and the impact this had on their football and economic performance," professor Pietro Biancone, who guided Chiellini through his degree, told Sky Sport Italia.

"The business model was then compared with those of other top European clubs such as Real Madrid, Athletic Bilbao and Porto."

# Sanchez wants to stay

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger believes Alexis Sanchez wants to stay at Arsenal, despite reports the striker could leave the London club if they fail to qualify for the Champions League.

Veteran French manager Wenger, in charge of Arsenal since September 1996, has yet to announce if he will stay with the club when his own contract expires at the end of the season and the Gunners boss was giving little away again on Friday.

But he was rather more forthcoming about the future of 28-year-old Chile forward Sanchez, whose own Arsenal deal expires at the end of next season.

"I believe that basically he wants to stay at the club and it's down to finding an agreement with his agent," said Wenger.

"I think the players first have to see are they happy to the club and after (that) most of the time it's down to finding an agreement, but the finances are involved in it, yes."

Wenger, speaking ahead of Arsenal's match against London rivals Crystal Palace on Monday, was again tight-lipped about his own prospects with the Gunners.

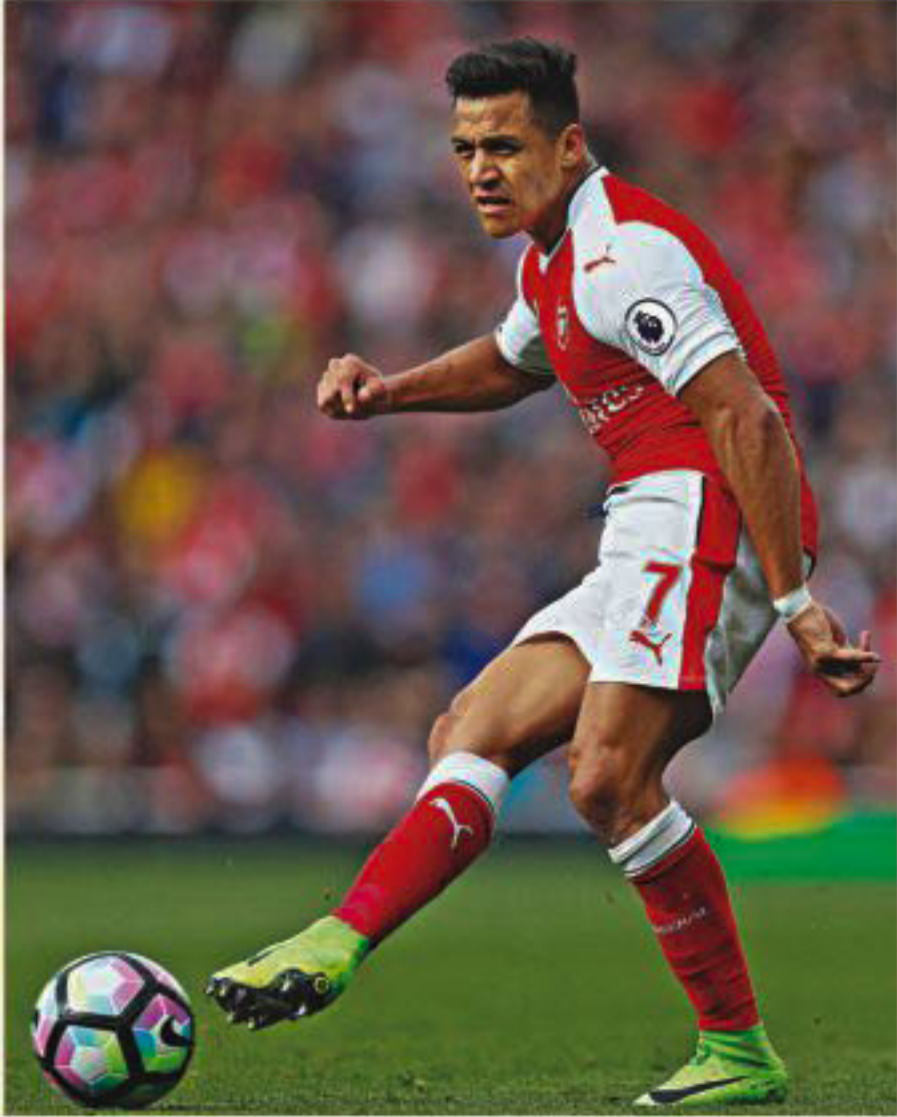
Arsenal last won the Premier League title in 2004 and the pressure on Wenger has intensified this season, with the club often looking as though they will miss out on a top four spot that secures Champions League qualification.

Wenger's side are currently fifth -- four points behind fourth-placed Manchester City but with a game in hand.

City will, however, go seven points clear if they beat strugglers Hull on Saturday.

The 67-year-old Wenger has faced calls to quit from some fans' groups unhappy with what they see as Arsenal's repeated inability to sustain a title challenge.

But Wednesday's 3-0 win over West Ham ended with supporters staying behind to



chant his name in a gesture of support for Wenger.

Various attempts Friday to get further clarity from Wenger about his future proved largely fruitless.

Asked if an announcement would come from himself or the club, Wenger simply said: "From the club."

Meanwhile a question that sought to find out if Wenger had any pre-requisites when it came to a new contract deal, saw him say: "No, nothing to add to that."

Arsenal's pre-season plans were mentioned in an attempt to gain some indication that Wenger would indeed be staying on at Arsenal.

But in the manner of a diplomat, Wenger said: "Of course (plans are in place for pre-season). No (that does not indicate he will stay), it's just that I do my job to plan for the future of the club."

"I cannot tell you now (if a decision will be made before the end of the season) because I don't know, I am focused on our next game."

# Koke robbed at gunpoint

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid midfielder Koke was robbed at gunpoint in a Madrid car park on Thursday evening for a watch reportedly valued at 70,000 euros (\$77,000), police sources confirmed on Friday.

"Yesterday at seven in the evening in a car park in Chamberi (a central district of Madrid) he was in his car and an individual on a motorbike pointed a gun at him and stole his watch," the police source told AFP.

The Spanish international reported the robbery with an investigation now underway.

Widespread reports in the Spanish media valued the watch at 70,000 euros.

Koke has still been included in the Atletico squad for Saturday's Madrid derby against Real Madrid.

# Table tennis team leave for China

SPORTS REPORTER

A seven-member Bangladesh Table Tennis team left for China yesterday to take part in the Asian Table Tennis Championship which will get underway on April 9 in Wuxi.

The team comprises of three male players -- Parag, Mahbub and Manosh -- and three female players -- Rahima, Rumi and Mou with umpire Mohaimenul Haque Nishan accompanying the top six players of the country.

# NRB Bank Marathon held

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy's Tuhin Shikdar and Mirona Khatun became champions in the men's and women's sections in a mini marathon titled NRB Bank Independence Day Marathon yesterday.

Abdul Hai of Bangladesh Air Force and Abdur Rahim of Bangladesh Navy finished second and third respectively in the men's section as the marathon ended at Manik Mia Avenue after starting from Army Stadium in Banani. Reshmi Akter and Rabeya Akter of Bangladesh Police finished second and third respectively in the women's section.