

What to WATCH

GTV & STAR SPORTS SELECT 2
TEN 2
 Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
 First Test, Day 3
 Live from 9:30am
Bundesliga
 Koln v Dortmund
 Live from 1:30am (Saturday)

TEN 2
La Liga
 Real Sociedad v Deportivo
 Live from 2:00am (Saturday)

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
 First Test, Day 3
 Time: 9:30am
 Venue: ZACS, Chittagong

Independence Cup
 Abahani v Arambagh
 Time: 4:00pm
 Venue: BNS, Dhaka

Clubs set transfer window

SPORTS REPORTER

All the Premier Division Hockey League clubs unanimously took the decision to participate in the inter-club players' transfers, being held after a two year hiatus, and scheduled the three-day window to begin on March 27 during a league committee meeting yesterday.

After the National Sports Council formed the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) ad-hoc committee on January 11 there were concerns that a few clubs may boycott the much-needed hockey league, which is also returning after a two-year gap, as they were against the ad-hoc committee. Four clubs did not even send the names of their respective representatives to the committee within the stipulated deadline.

However representatives of all 13 clubs, with the exception of Azad SC, attended the first league committee meeting and expressed their desire to play in the premier league, which was last held in 2016.

"I have been in the league committee for the last 15 years but I have never

seen all clubs reach a consensus with everything discussed at the meeting but it happened this time," Abahani representative Zaki Ahmed Ripon told reporters after the meeting at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

"The dispute regarding the elections and ad-hoc committee is a different matter which has no relation with the players' transfers. Usha KC is always in favour of playing and we want to play the league. We will take part in the transfers timely," opined Usha KC representative Sefayet Hossain Dalim.

"Everyone agreed to play the domestic competitions and Mohammedan also want to play the league. But we want a healthy environment so that every team can take part in the league smoothly," said Mohammedan SC representative Ariful Haque Prince.

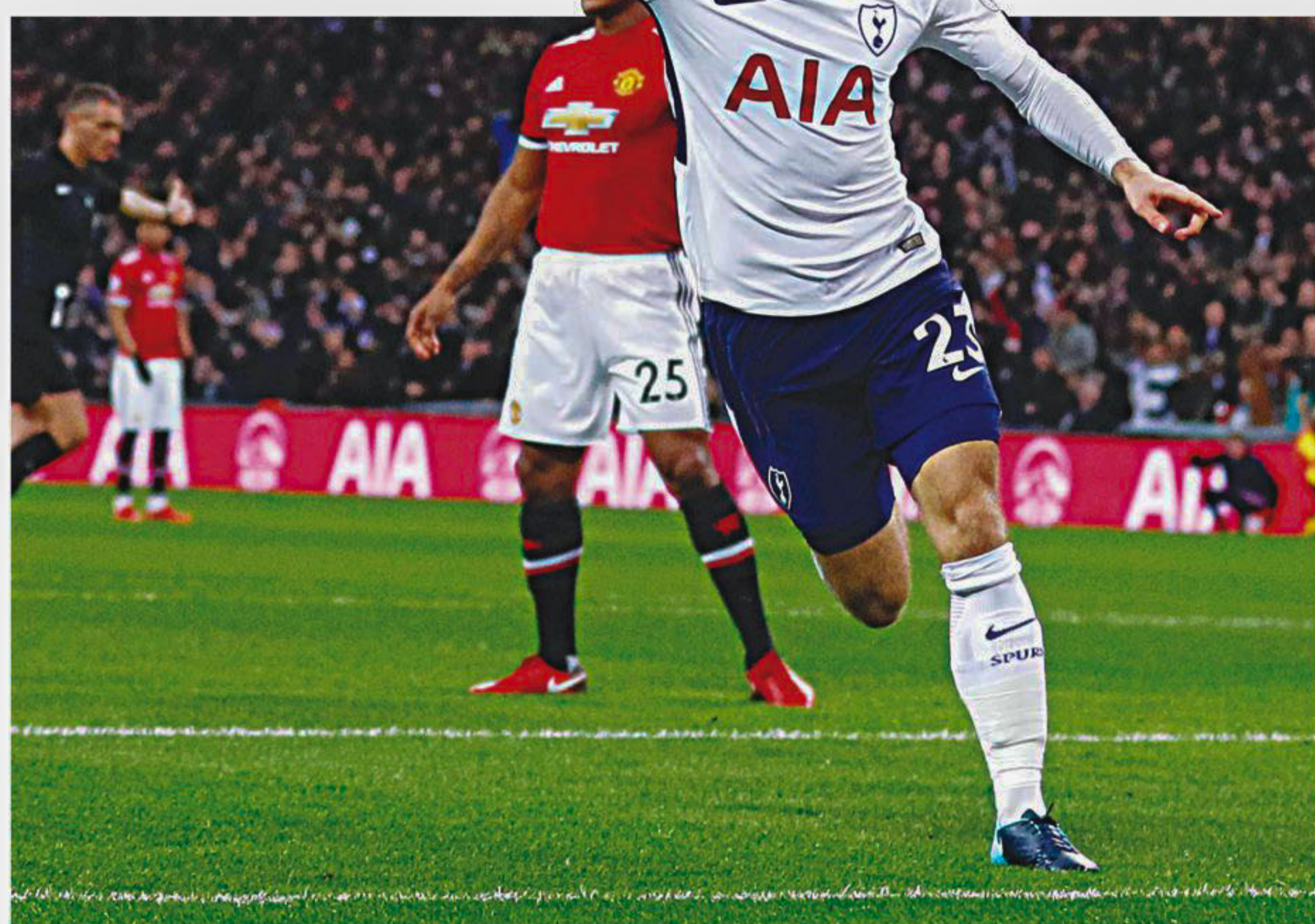
The BHF executive committee had initially set a tentative date for the transfers for February 18 to 20, so that national team players would be able to fly out to Oman and take part in the Asian Games Qualifiers having completed the transfers, but the league committee deferred it by nearly a month following the demands from

clubs'.

"The clubs wanted some time to arrange money to take part in the transfers, so the meeting accepted their demands and fixed the date for March 27 to 29 and the players will take part in the transfer soon after their arrival from Oman after playing the qualifying tournament," informed league committee secretary Kazi Moinuzzaman Pila.

At the meeting it was also decided that the quota for foreign recruits will be reduced from five to four, though the clubs will be allowed to register a total of seven foreign players. Each participating team will also be allowed to sign up to four players each from service teams such as Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) in a bid to make the tournament more competitive.

The hockey season will kick off with the Club Cup tournament ten days after the transfer deadline while the premier league will begin two-three days after the completion of the Club Cup, with both tournaments set to take place under the newly installed floodlights at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.



Christian Eriksen set Tottenham Hotspur on the winning path just 11 seconds into their match against Manchester United, pouncing on a sleeping defence and curling expertly past David de Gea in their Premier League encounter at White Hart Lane on Wednesday.

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:

Bartra denies 'wrong information' about testimony

Spanish defender Marc Bartra has refuted claims that he has not yet overcome the attack on the Borussia Dortmund bus seven months ago.



Blatter considering legal action against FIFA

Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, currently serving a ban from the sport, says he is considering legal action against FIFA.



Giroud relishing CL challenge at Chelsea

Olivier Giroud said a return to Champions League was a key factor in his decision to join Chelsea from Arsenal on the final day of the transfer window.



Arambagh in Abahani's way

SPORTS REPORTER



After a four-day break due to Saif SC's participation in the AFC Cup, the Walton Independence Cup resumes today through the third quarterfinal at Arambagh as

the Bangabandhu National Stadium at 4:00pm BST. Having clinched the titles of the Federation Cup and the Bangladesh Premier League, Abahani came into the season-closing Independence Cup with the aim of completing a rare treble, a feat achieved only once by Sheikh Russel since the introduction of the professional football league.

Abahani were the only team to qualify for the quarterfinals with two wins and are now up against a spirited Arambagh, who advanced on the basis of a superior goal difference.

Abahani have already beaten Arambagh twice this year in the professional football league and while they will hope to take another step towards the title, they will do so cautiously.

"The knockout match is like a final and we are taking tomorrow's match as the final," said Abahani captain Mamun Mia. "As both sides will feature local players, the match will definitely be difficult, but we have to prove that we are better than them despite having already won two titles this season."

Arambagh assistant coach Abdul Kaiyum Sentu was optimistic of pulling off an upset. "As it is a clash among local players, we are hopeful of doing something good. We will not let them go without a fight, especially [not after] the way we played against Chittagong Abahani in our last match," said Sentu, adding that they may miss the services of two key players -- Rabiul and Arifat -- due to injuries.

Siddikur's decent start

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman made an above-average start to the Maybank Championship, carding a one-under-par (71) in a weather-disrupted opening round in Malaysia yesterday to share the 72nd position in the 3 million dollar event.

The 34-year-old carded four birdies against one bogey on the front nine, but had a disastrous time on the back nine as he carded a double-bogey on the 10th hole. He hit one birdie and a further bogey there to finish the day at the Saujana Golf and Country Club.

Englishman Chris Paisley took the clubhouse lead at the end of the first round with a seven-under-par (65). He has a one-stroke lead over countryman David Horsey and Frenchman Mike Lorenzo-Vera, who both finished with scores of six-under-par (66). However, Lorenzo-Vera was forced off with two holes to play due to bad light.

Jose tears into his flops

Conte under fire after 3-0 loss to Bournemouth

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho accused his Manchester United stars of failing to follow instructions after Christian Eriksen scored just 11 seconds into Tottenham's 2-0 win at Wembley.

United boss Mourinho was furious with his side's sloppy defending as they made a host of mistakes that allowed Eriksen to blast Tottenham ahead with the joint second fastest goal in Premier League history.

Phil Jones allowed Harry Kane to win a header from the kick-off and, with the rest of the United defence caught flat-footed, Dele Alli pounced with a deft pass that Eriksen steered home from close-range.

Adding insult to injury for Mourinho, Jones booted a Kieran Trippier cross into his own net midway through the first half to double Tottenham's lead.

"I don't think it is very normal to concede a goal like we did after 15 seconds," he said. "It is especially ridiculous because the players, they watch it before, we analyse opponents and work on opponents' dynamics and routines."

"The players they knew the long ball, they knew that Harry Kane - before the kick-off, is already inside the opponent's half. We knew everything."

"Then we don't press the ball - one mistake. We don't pick the ball in the air - second mistake. We don't win the second ball on the ground - third mistake."

"We don't cover the inside when Eriksen comes - four mistakes. Four mistakes after 15 seconds and you are losing 1-0 against a good team."

With second placed United clinging to faint hopes of catching leaders Manchester City, it was a badly-timed meltdown from Mourinho's men.

They are now 15 points behind City and Mourinho admitted he harbours no hopes of catching Pep Guardiola's side. Instead, he will focus on ensuring United survive the fight to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish.

Tottenham's win puts them just two points behind fourth placed Chelsea and third placed Liverpool, with a crucial trip to Anfield looming on Sunday.

Mauricio Pochettino was enthused by the way his team dominated such formidable opposition, but the boss refused to rate it the best of a season

that also includes impressive wins over Real Madrid and Liverpool.

"I don't know if it was the best, but for sure one of the best. The performance was fantastic," he said. "Manchester United are a great team, so to dominate and to keep a clean-sheet, the team deserve a lot of praise of course."

Antonio Conte had no doubt the pressure on his position would intensify after his Chelsea side's stunning 3-0 defeat by Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday.

The Blues head coach insists his Chelsea team, the reigning Premier League champions, are over-achieving this season -- but claims he is "relaxed" if members of the club's hierarchy view things differently.

Defeat left Chelsea in fourth place in the Premier League, just two points above Tottenham Hotspur and Conte accepted there were concerns over whether the Blues would qualify for next season's Champions League.

"The pressure, it's normal. It's normal for a coach, for a manager," Conte said. "It's normal if you are Chelsea's coach."

"After the first game this season, you (the media) tried to put pressure on my job. But I'm trying to do my best."



As vocal and hot-blooded as he was in his playing days, Gennaro Gattuso's unique brand of encouragement seems to be working wonders for his former club AC Milan.

Gattuso sparking revival

REUTERS, Milan

It is not always pretty to watch, and few expected it would be, but AC Milan are showing signs of a revival under their fiery former midfielder Gennaro Gattuso.

A 0-0 draw against Lazio on Wednesday in the Coppa Italia, which followed a 2-1 league win over the same opponents three days earlier, extended their unbeaten run to six games in all competitions, reversing an alarming pre-Christmas slump.

After Sunday's win over Lazio, Gattuso allowed his players to slap him on the head in the middle of the pitch in an unorthodox celebration.

"I just want to make my squad happy, especially the players who are angry with me because they are on the bench," he said.

Gattuso had not coached a Serie A team before he was rushed into the job in November after Vincenzo Montella was sacked. But he has clearly succeeded in

transmitting the fighting spirit he was renowned for as a player.

"Perhaps I am the worst coach in Serie A, but I always want to win, even playing in the garden with my son," he said after a Coppa Italia win over neighbours Inter in December.

Gattuso spent 12 seasons playing for Milan, winning two Serie A titles and two Champions Leagues, and was known as one of Italy's toughest players.

His coaching career has been a mixed bag including short stints at Swiss club FC Sion and Italian Serie B side Palermo, six months at Greek side OFI Crete and then a move to Pisa where he won promotion from the Italian third tier.

"I never doubted that he could transmit his soul, his character and his grit to the players," coach Carlo Ancelotti told Corriere della Sera in an interview on Wednesday.

Milan, who visit Udinese on Sunday, are still a long way from qualifying for the Champions League, the minimum after a 230-million-euro spending spree in the summer.

EPL smashes winter record

AFP, London



Premier League clubs spent a record £430 million in the January transfer window as top sides scrambled to boost their squads in the race to secure lucrative Champions League spots, according to analysis by Deloitte.

The sum spent was nearly double the previous record of £225 million, with deadline day alone, January 31, seeing clubs complete deals totalling £150 million, also a new record for the winter window.

Deloitte's Sports Business Group estimates spending by Premier League clubs in the 2017/18 season to be a record £1.9 billion, eclipsing last season's record of £1.4 billion.

Nearly two-thirds of the gross expenditure was by the top six, while the bottom six accounted for about a fifth.

The winter transfer window usually sees the bulk of spending by clubs at the bottom of the league as they attempt to spend their way to survival from relegation, although last month's spurge is more like a normal summer window.

"Such is the level of competition for a coveted top-four position in the Premier League, as well as ongoing European battles, that top clubs have been willing to break with more traditional summer investment strategies to steal a march on their rivals mid-season, with several club transfer records being broken in this window," said Jones.

He added that international trade had flourished, with the highest-ever January gross overseas outlay in Premier League history (£260 million), but also the highest amount of January receipts from abroad (£185 million).

La Liga was just behind the Premier League with 271 million euros spent, which included Philippe Coutinho's 160 million euro move from Liverpool to Barcelona.

ITALY HITS FIVE-YEAR LOW

At the same time, Italy's Serie A hit a five-year low for spending during a frugal January transfer window with ten-times less cash splashed than in the English Premier League.

Muted big-name transfers such as Argentine midfielder Javier Pastore to Inter Milan from PSG never materialised with Italian clubs spending an estimated 50 million euros -- less than the English second tier.

The figure was half that spent last season and a five-year low, putting Italian football just ninth for money spent during the global transfer market, after the record one billion euros spent by Italy's top clubs during the summer of 2017.

JANUARY HEAT

Unlike most serene, almost boring, winter transfer windows when clubs are busier grandstanding for their summer acquisitions than getting anything done, the past 31 days have seen an incredible number of high profile transfers. In most cases the media is left to search for bits and pieces of information regarding one, and on rare occasions two, mid-tier transfers. In another year perhaps Olivier Giroud's move from Arsenal to Chelsea or Ross Barkley's transfer to Stamford Bridge may have been the main attraction, but those faded into the background with the likes of Philippe Coutinho and Alexis Sanchez switching allegiance in the increasingly volatile market.

PHILIPPE COUTINHO

After a five-year stint at Liverpool and a drawn-out chase from Barcelona the previous summer, Coutinho completed a 120-million-euro move to the Nou Camp in the winter window's blockbuster deal. Although he did not win any trophies at club level, the 25-year-old won the Liverpool Player of the Year award twice and will likely pick up a La Liga winner's medal in May, if not earlier.



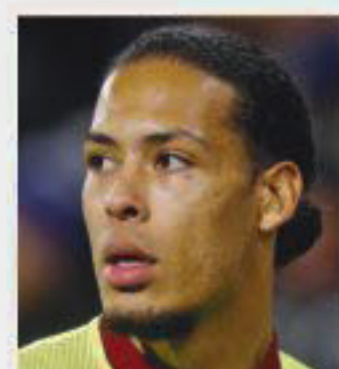
ALEXIS SANCHEZ

Unarguably the steal of the season, Chilean superstar Alexis Sanchez drew the ire of two clubs as he came to Manchester United. The 29-year-old looked like he would move to Manchester City for free in the upcoming summer, but Arsene Wenger's desire to get something in return for his best player saw him accept a swap deal which saw Old Trafford misfit Henrik Mkhitaryan go the other way.



VIRGIL VAN DIJK

Despite being reported for tapping-up the player and issuing an apology in its aftermath in the summer, Liverpool were not deterred in their chase of Van Dijk. And, faced with a stubborn Southampton board and the current state of the market, the Reds coughed up a world-record 85 million euros. They will be hoping the centre-back can shore up their frail defence as they make a push for a top-four Premier League finish.



AYMERIC LAPORTE

Manchester City continued their defensive overhaul by signing the 23-year-old for the second-most expensive fee ever paid for a defender after triggering his 65-million-euro release clause. The Citizens have spent half-a-billion under Pep Guardiola, most of that on their backline, and perhaps the Frenchman, who already has six years of top-flight experience under his belt, will be the final acquisition for an already exceptional Manchester City side.



PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG

Arsene Wenger finally gave the world a look into his mythical war chest as he splurged 65-million-euros to bring Bundesliga's top goal-scorer of the previous season to the Emirates. The 28-year-old comes not only with a reputation of being one of the world's finest goal-scorers, but also as a bit of a troublemaker, something Wenger will have to remedy. But if he does, the Gabonese can be the key to something bigger than the FA Cup.

