Liverpool rocked by Galatasaray defeat in last 16 first leg; Bayern smash six past Atalanta


Galatasaray's Mario Lemina (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal.

ISTANBUL: Liverpool suffered a 1-0 defeat against Galatasaray in the Champions League last 16 first leg on Tuesday as Mario Lemina's goal left the Reds in danger of a shock exit.

Arne Slot's side paid the price for a disjointed display in Istanbul, with Lemina netting in the first half at raucous RAMS Park.

The six-time European champions hope to salvage a turbulent campaign by winning the Champions League for the first time since 2019.

But Liverpool, languishing in sixth place in the Premier League less than a year after winning the title, will need a second leg escape act at Anfield on March 18 to avoid arguably the lowest moment in their miserable season.

Slot won't look back fondly on his 100th game in charge of Liverpool, who defended poorly and lacked cohesion in attack.

Mohamed Salah made his 81st Champions League appearance for Liverpool, surpassing Jamie Carragher for the most games in the competition by a Reds player.

But, not for the first time this season, it was a night to forget for the Egypt forward, who was hauled off in the 60th minute after an anonymous performance.

The Reds were beaten 1-0 by Galatasaray in the group stage in September and once again they wilted in the hostile atmosphere generated by Galatasaray's frenzied fans.

Meanwhile, in Bergamo, Bayern Munich put one foot in the quarter-finals by sweeping aside Atalanta 6-1 in a powerful demonstration of why the German giants are one of the favourites to win the competition.

In front in the 12th minute in Bergamo of the first leg through Josip Stanisic, Bayern are all-but through following a stunning brace from standout player Michael Olise and further strikes from Serge Gnabry, Nicolas Jackson and Jamal Musiala.

Bayern have lost just once at home this season and the marauding display, which came with Harry Kane and Jamal Musiala both starting the game on the bench, left Atalanta with basically no chance of progressing.

A blockbuster tie against one of Real Madrid or Manchester City awaits Bayern in the next round, save for a historic collapse in next week's second leg in Munich.

Atletico beat error-strewn Tottenham

Atletico Madrid took advantage of error-strewn Tottenham in the Champions League to rack up a 5-2 last 16 first leg victory yesterday.

The Premier League side fell 4-0 down inside 22 minutes with three glaring mistakes, including two by goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky, leading to the hosts' first three goals at the Metropolitano stadium.

Julian Alvarez netted twice for Diego Simeone's side, with Marcos Llorente, Antoine Griezmann and Robin Le Normand also on target in the Spanish capital.

Pedro Porro pulled one back for the visitors and Dominic Solanke added another as they fell to a sixth straight defeat across all competitions but salvaged a shred of hope for the second leg.

Yamal penalty rescues Barca from defeat

Elsewhere, Lamine Yamal's penalty with the last kick of the game rescued Barcelona from defeat at Newcastle in a 1-1 last 16, first leg draw.

The Magpies were headed for a night to savour at St. James' Park when Harvey Barnes opened the scoring on 86 minutes. — *AFP*

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

ROUND OF 16
RESULTS
Galatasaray **1-0** Liverpool
Atalanta **1-6** Bayern Munich
Atletico Madrid **5-2** Tottenham Hotspur
Newcastle United **1-1** Barcelona
Today
8:45pm
Bayer Leverkusen vs Arsenal
11:00pm
Bodo/Glimt vs Sporting CP
Paris Saint-Germain vs Chelsea
Real Madrid vs Manchester City


Atletico Madrid's Julian Alvarez (right) scores his team's fifth goal.


Padel, a mixture of tennis and squash, has exploded in popularity in recent years.

Padel to feature at Asian Games in 'significant moment'

TOKYO: The racquet sport of padel has hailed "a significant moment" in its rapid growth after being included as a medal event at the Asian Games in Japan this year.

Carlos Alcaraz, Cristiano Ronaldo and Max Verstappen are all big fans of the game, which is a mixture of tennis and squash and has exploded in popularity in recent years.

The Asian Games take place every four years and the Covid-delayed edition in China in 2023 had about 12,000 athletes, more competitors than the Olympics.

Luigi Carraro, president of the Lausanne-based International padel Federation (FIP), said: "This is a significant moment for our sport.

"The Asian Games represent one of the most important multi-sport events in the world, and the confirmation of padel as a medal sport reflects both the rapid development of the sport across Asia and its growing global impact."

Padel is typically played as doubles and takes place within an enclosed space that resembles a tennis court.

In a statement late last week, the Olympic Council of Asia said that teqball -- which combines football and table tennis -- will also feature as a medal event at the Games in Nagoya and Aichi.

The Games run from September 19 to October 4. — *AFP*

Enrique confident PSG can raise game ahead of Chelsea showdown

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said yesterday his side had "no doubts whatsoever" that they can rediscover the form that led them to Champions League glory last season as they prepare to face Chelsea in the last 16.

"We have no doubts whatsoever. We are going into the best part of the season and we need to be able to handle the step up," the Spaniard told reporters at PSG's training ground when asked whether his team could return to the level of performance they showed a year ago.

PSG welcome Chelsea to the Parc des Princes on Wednesday in the first leg of their last-16 tie, as the sides meet for the first time since the English outfit's 3-0 victory in last July's Club World Cup final.

That was the only blemish on a remarkable last campaign for PSG which saw the Qatar-backed club win the Champions League for the first time in their history.

But the demands of that marathon season have left a trace, with numerous players struggling for form and fitness in 2025/26.

PSG lost 3-1 at home to Monaco last weekend, a result which left them just a point clear of Lens at the top of Ligue 1.

They finished 11th in the league phase of the Champions League after winning just one of their last five matches, and then scraped past Monaco in the play-off round.

But Luis Enrique is hoping that meeting Chelsea can bring the best out of his team, who eliminated three Premier League sides in the knockout rounds on the way to last season's final.

"All the English teams are exceptional, top-class sides, and Chelsea we know very well from having played against them last summer," he said.

"They have changed coach since then and some players too, but we know how difficult these games are and we will try to be ready."

The former Barcelona boss, who praised Chelsea coach Liam Rosenior for the "attractive and attacking" style he played during 18 months in Ligue 1 at Strasbourg, also said trying to retain the Champions League title was less daunting a prospect than winning it for the first time.

"I think the first time was harder but the second time is not easy -- We all know we can win the second one and that is what we will try to do." — *AFP*


Paris Saint-Germain's Joao Neves and Ousmane Dembele (centre) attend a training session.


Aryna Sabalenka celebrates a point against Naomi Osaka of Japan.

Sabalenka powers past Osaka into Indian Wells quarter-finals

INDIAN WELLS: World number one Aryna Sabalenka powered into the Indian Wells quarter-finals yesterday, beating former champion Naomi Osaka 6-2, 6-4 in a battle of Grand Slam champions.

It was another straightforward, straight-sets victory for Sabalenka, who fired 31 winners with eight aces.

"Overall I'm happy that I put so much pressure on her, that I brought variety today on the court," said Sabalenka, who mixed her booming groundstrokes with effective forays to the net.

"I think she was a little confused in the key moments, and I'm happy to see that," Sabalenka said.

"I'm happy that my serve worked well, on the return I played really great tennis." Sabalenka wrapped up the first set with two breaks of serve before Osaka began to find her rhythm.

But the Japanese star was unable to crack the serve of Sabalenka, who saved both break points she faced in the second set and grabbed a break for 4-3 with a pair of forehand winners.

It was just the second meeting between the two, both four-time Grand Slam winners.

ATP/WTA INDIAN WELLS RESULTS

Women: 4th Round
Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Naomi Osaka (JPN x16) 6-2, 6-4
3rd Round
Jessica Pegula (USA x5) bt J Ostapenko (LAT x26) 4-6, 6-3, 6-2
Belinda Bencic (SUI x12) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x22) 6-2, 6-3
Sonay Kartal (GBR) bt Madison Keys (USA x15) 2-6, 6-2, 6-3
Elena Rybakina (KAZ x3) bt Marta Kostyuk (UKR x28) 6-4, 6-4
K Siniaková (CZE) bt M Andreeva (RUS x8) 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3
Elina Svitolina (UKR x9) bt Ashlyn Krueger (USA) 6-4, 6-2
Karolína Muchová (CZE x13) bt Antonia Ruzic (CRO) 6-0, 6-3
Iga Swiatek (POL x2) bt Maria Sakkari (GRE x32) 6-3, 6-2
Men: 3rd Round
Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) bt A Rinderknech (FRA x26) 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 6-2
Casper Ruud (NOR x13) bt V Vacherot (MON x24) 3-6, 6-3, 6-4
Rinky Hijikata (AUS) bt A Bublik (KAZ x10) 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/3), 6-3
Cameron Norrie (GBR x27) bt A De Minaur (AUS x6) 6-4, 6-4
Novak Djokovic (SRB x3) bt A Kovacevic (USA) 6-4, 1-6, 6-4
Jack Draper (GBR x14) bt F Cerundolo (ARG x19) 6-1, 7-5
Daniil Medvedev (RUS x11) bt Sebastián Báez (ARG) 6-4, 6-0
Alex Michelsen (USA) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x7) 6-4, 7-6 (8/6)

Osaka won the first back in 2018 on the way to her first major title at the US Open.

"That's actually crazy," Sabalenka said of the fact they haven't met more often. But she predicted there were more clashes in their future as Osaka, now ranked 16th, regains her momentum on the WTA Tour after taking off all of 2023 and having daughter, Shai, in July of that year.

Sabalenka, runner-up at Indian Wells in 2023 and 2025, will continue her pursuit of a first title in the prestigious ATP and WTA Masters 1000 event against either sixth-seeded American Amanda Anisimova or 10th-seeded Canadian teen Victoria Mboko.

Mboko, 19, is among a quartet of rising talents in action later Tuesday, along with Alexandra Eala, Linda Noskova and Talia Gibson.

Eala, the 20-year-old who has put Philippines tennis on the map, takes on 14th-seeded Czech Noskova under the lights on Stadium court.

Aussie qualifier Gibson takes on seventh-seeded Italian Jasmine Paolini. — *AFP*

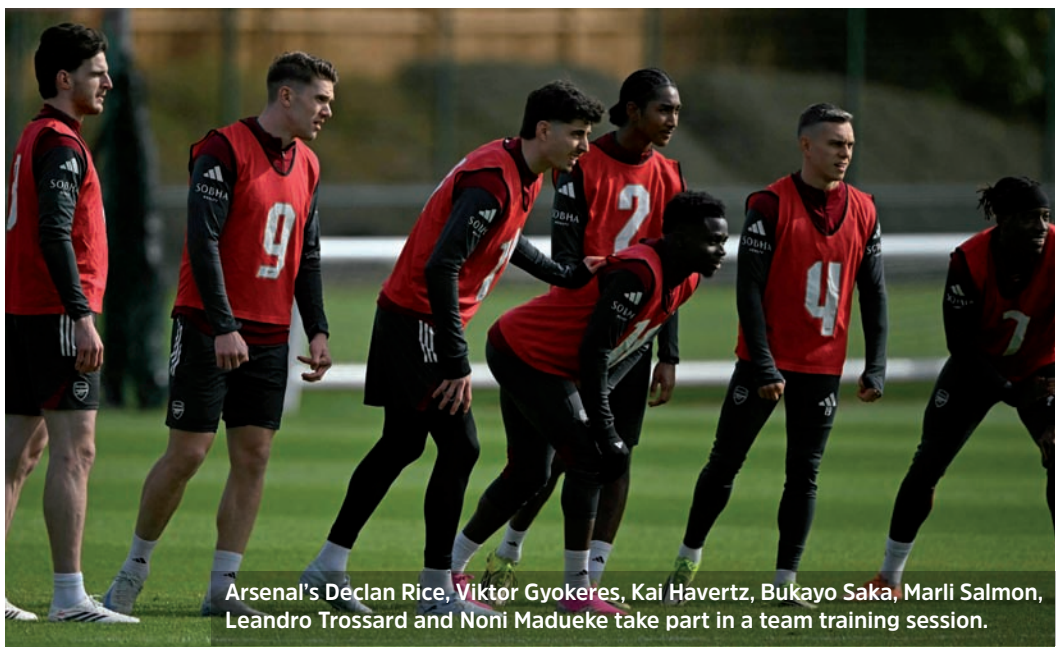
Barca permitted to expand Camp Nou capacity to 63,000

BARCELONA: Barcelona have obtained permission to open their north stand and expand the capacity at their partially rebuilt Camp Nou home to nearly 63,000, the Spanish champions said yesterday.

After severe delays in reopening the stadium, which was shut for over two years during building work, the club were able to house fans in three of the four stands with a capacity of 45,000 when they returned in November. The La Liga leaders host Sevilla on Sunday in the first match where they can take advantage of the increased capacity, after the city council granted them the necessary licence. The Catalan giants had initially planned to reopen the stadium in November 2024, but a string of delays led to their return home being pushed back by a year.

Work will continue at the Camp Nou to build the third level of the stadium, to take it to a capacity of 105,000, and then add a roof, with the €1.5bn ($1.75bn) project expected to be completed in the summer of 2027. — *AFP*

Arsenal favourites against Leverkusen in Champions League last 16


Arsenal's Declan Rice, Viktor Gyokeres, Kai Havertz, Bukayo Saka, Marli Salmon, Leandro Trossard and Noni Madueke take part in a team training session.

PARIS: Champions League action sees Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea meet for the first time since last year's Club World Cup final today, while Real Madrid host Manchester City in the first leg of their last-16 tie as the sides clash in a knockout tie for the fifth season running.

Bayer Leverkusen vs Arsenal

Premier League leaders Arsenal, who have never been crowned European champions, remain on track for four trophies this season as they chase their first major silverware since 2020.

Mikel Arteta's men won all eight matches in the league phase to cruise into the last 16, where success against Leverkusen will set up a tie against Bodo/Glimt or Sporting.

Central defender William Saliba has missed Arsenal's past two matches with an ankle issue but could be back here.

Currently sixth in the Bundesliga, Leverkusen are still rebuilding after a tumultuous summer in which they lost coach Xabi Alonso and several players including Florian Wirtz, Granit Xhaka and new Gunner Piero Hincapie.

"We're strong at home. We have a chance there - we can win there," Alejandro Grimaldo said Saturday. Remarkably, Leverkusen's win against Olympiacos in the play-off round was their first victory in a Champions League knockout tie since 2002, when they reached the final before losing to a Zinedine Zidane-inspired Real Madrid.

PSG vs Chelsea

PSG are wobbling as the reigning European champions put their title on the line against Chelsea in the first meeting of the teams since the London side won 3-0 in last July's Club World Cup final.

Luis Enrique's PSG edged past Ligue 1 rivals Monaco in the play-off round and lost to the principality side on Friday as their lead at the top of the French table from Lens was cut to one point.

The Parisians are a long way off the scintillating form they showed in the second half of last season, with Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele one of several players struggling for fitness -- he is expected to be available here, however.

PSG will also be wary of Chelsea coach Liam Rosenior, who did well against them in his 18 months in charge of Strasbourg.

Estevao Willian and Jamie Gittens are nearing a return for Chelsea but neither were risked in Saturday's 4-2 win against Wrexham in the FA Cup and it is unclear if they will feature here.

Chelsea reignited their chase for Champions League qualification for next season last midweek as Joao Pedro's hat-trick inspired a 4-1 win at Aston Villa.

Real Madrid vs Manchester City

Alvaro Arbeloa's record 15-time European champions stumbled at home against Manchester City in the league phase, back when Xabi Alonso was in charge.

Their prospects of extending their European dominion have not risen much higher since, particularly with a spate of injuries including to key players Kylian Mbappe and Jude Bellingham, who are set to miss the first leg at least. Vinicius Junior, vital in the play-off round against Benfica, carries the keys to Madrid's potential success here.

The City boss made 10 chances for Saturday's FA Cup tie against Newcastle United and they still cantered to a 3-1 win.

Erling Haaland did not feature in that game due to an ankle injury and the Norway striker's availability remains in doubt.

City and Real have met in 15 previous Champions League matches. Madrid knocked City out in the past two seasons, winning 6-3 on aggregate in the play-off round last term and triumphing in a quarter-final penalty shoot-out in 2023/24.

Bodo/Glimt vs Sporting

Bodo/Glimt's fairytale run continues as they welcome Portuguese champions Sporting to the Aspmyra Stadion, which lies inside the Arctic Circle.

Kjetil Knutsen's team finished the league phase with wins against Manchester City and Atletico Madrid before beating Inter Milan home and away in the play-offs. That success was all the more remarkable given that the Norwegian league is only just about to come out of its off-season.

Winger Jens Petter Hauge is Glimt's danger man, having scored six goals in 10 Champions League appearances this season.

Sporting, meanwhile, make the journey from Lisbon having finished an impressive seventh in the league phase, in which they notably beat PSG.

Rui Borges's team are unbeaten in 12 games but were held 2-2 at Braga on Saturday, a result which kept them four points behind domestic league leaders Porto. Their main threat is Colombian striker Luis Suarez, who has 31 goals in all competitions this season. — *AFP*

Real not inferior to City even without Mbappe: Arbeloa


Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior (right) controls the ball during a training session.

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said yesterday his team should not feel inferior to Champions League opponents Manchester City, even without injured striker Kylian Mbappe.

The French superstar did not train ahead of Wednesday's last 16 first leg because of a knee sprain and cannot face Pep Guardiola's side at the Santiago Bernabeu, although Arbeloa said he is improving.

Madrid also have Jude Bellingham, Rodrygo Goes and Eder Militao sidelined among other players, but the coach said the record 15-time kings of Europe had to be confident.

"We are Real Madrid and I think that we never feel lesser than anyone else," Arbeloa told reporters.

"It doesn't matter the circumstance, it doesn't matter who is in front of us, we are Real Madrid and we should not feel inferior to anyone.

"Tomorrow we have an opponent we know well, the identity of the club, coach, players, what Manchester City is... but we'll head into it full of hope." Mbappe was in France last week for tests and treatment on a knee sprain, which Arbeloa said was looking better.

"He's a lot better, as I've said a lot over the last few weeks it's something that we have to look at day by day," said the Spaniard.

"All this week has been very positive, he's come back feeling good and each day he's doing better, so I hope he's back soon." Without Mbappe, Brazilian winger Vinicius Junior will lead the attack for Real Madrid.

"He's taking a lot of responsibility... we need the best of him if we're going to knock out Manchester City," added Arbeloa.

Arbeloa, who took over from Xabi Alonso in January, said his first two months in the job have been a "big learning experience", and he expects Guardiola to arrive in the Spanish capital with a surprise up his sleeve.

"He's always good a surprise prepared, he's a coach who in these kind of games has something different ready," said Arbeloa. — *AFP*

Ten players denied visas to US for CONCACAF club tournament

KINGSTON: Ten players with Jamaican side Mount Pleasant have failed to obtain US entry visas for the club's CONCACAF Champions Cup clash against Los Angeles Galaxy today, club officials have confirmed. Mount Pleasant traveled to Los Angeles on Sunday with an 18-man squad which included five academy players after the team's roster was decimated by visa problems.

Seven members of the Mount Pleasant squad are Haitian nationals, and the issue brings into sharp focus one of the concerns surrounding this year's World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Haiti is one of 19 countries targeted by US President's immigration crackdown, with Haitian nationals' entry to the US suspended under a presidential order issued last June.

Mount Pleasant's sporting director Paul Christie said the visa stumbling block would leave Mount Pleasant at a competitive disadvantage as they prepare to face the 2024 MLS Cup champions this week. — *AFP*

India team to pocket $14m for T20 World Cup victory

NEW DELHI: India's all-conquering men's cricket team will pocket $14m after lifting the T20 World Cup for a record third time, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

The co-hosts and pre-tournament favourites swept aside New Zealand by 96 runs in Sunday's final in Ahmedabad to become the first team to retain the trophy and the first to win it on home soil.

Cricket commands an unrivalled following in the world's most populous country, with top players enjoying star status and the game serving as a rare unifying force in an otherwise diverse nation.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), the world's richest and most powerful cricket body, praised the players, support staff and selectors for the "historic achievement" as it announced the cash reward.

The victory cemented India's place "among the most successful teams in the history of the format", BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said in a statement.

The prize money will be shared among the entire team, including coaches and support staff.

The Indian team will separately receive $2.34m from the International Cricket Council while runners-up New Zealand will earn $1.17m.

Midnight celebrations broke out across the country on Sunday as delirious fans in blue Indian shirts took to the streets, beating drums and dancing to Bollywood hits. — *AFP*

Machida, Buriram advance in ACL


Japan's Machida Zelvia players celebrates their victory over South Korea's Gangwon FC.

TOKYO: Japan's Machida Zelvia booked their place in the Asian Champions League (ACL) quarter-finals in their competition debut after beating South Korea's Gangwon 1-0 in yesterday's last 16 second leg.

Thailand's Buriram United joined them in the last eight after squeezing past Australia's Melbourne City 4-2 on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

Machida, who were playing non-league football less than 15 years ago, went through 1-0 on aggregate after Hotaka Nakamura's first-half header made the difference.

"We were determined to make history for Machida," said Nakamura.

"It was a tough game but we have written a new page for the club. Now we move on to the next stage and we want to show everyone something great." The Asian Champions League becomes a single-leg knock-out competition from the quarter-finals onwards, with all games set to be played in Saudi Arabia next month.

The Asian Football Confederation last week postponed last-16 matches played by clubs in the Middle East after the US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Machida and Gangwon kicked off for the second leg of their tie at the Japanese club's homely stadium in the suburbs of Tokyo after a 0-0 draw in South Korea last week.

Machida suffered an early blow when Japan international winger Yuki Soma was forced off with an injury in the 12th minute.

His replacement Na Sang-ho supplied the cross for the winning goal in the 25th minute as Nakamura ran in at the back post to head home. Machida, who had never played in the Japanese first division until 2024, won last season's domestic Emperor's Cup. Buriram came through a tense tie with Melbourne despite losing midfielder Robert Zulj to a red card after just 20 minutes.

Goalkeeper Neil Etheridge was the hero in the shoot-out, saving twice before Australian Kenny Dougall slammed home the winning spot kick. The win meant Buriram qualified for the quarter-finals for the second successive season. — *AFP*

Spain's Ayuso takes Paris-Nice race lead after team time-trial


Lidl - Trek's Spanish rider Juan Ayuso in action during the Paris-Nice cycling race.

POUILLY-SUR-LOIRE: Spanish rider Juan Ayuso pulled on the leader's yellow jersey yesterday after the third stage of the Paris-Nice cycling race.

Ineos, led by Kevin Vauquelin and Oscar Onley, won the team time-trial at Pouilly-sur-Loire with Ayuso's Lidl-Trek outfit second.

Frenchman Vauquelin powered his team to a big finish in the 23.5km ride through the Nievre in central France giving the British team a two-second advantage on Lidl-Trek.

"I would have loved to take the yellow jersey but there's still a very, very tough week to go, so I have to look ahead," said 24-year-old Vauquelin.

Decathlon CMA-CGM were third at 11sec with double Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard's Visma-Lease a bike team fourth at 15sec.

Ayuso took the yellow jersey from American Luke Lamperti thanks to the four bonus seconds gained in the intermediate sprint on Monday.

The Spaniard finished the day with a two-second edge over Vauquelin, who started the stage 24th overall, and three seconds over Briton Onley, who jumped from 63rd.

Vauquelin is hoping to give France a first winner in the 'Race to the Sun' since Laurent Jalabert in 1997 with poor conditions expected.

"I feel really good," said Vauquelin.

"Especially since the weather is going to turn bad, and I think that's an advantage for me, unlike riders like Jonas Vingegaard or Juan Ayuso who are more climbers."

Ayuso has his eyes fixed on the Tour de France in July. "That's even the reason I decided to come here and also to the Dauphine (in June)," said the Spaniard.

"It's very important to get some benchmarks in preparation for the Tour de France, and our performance gives me a lot of confidence."

Ayuso has a 17sec lead on Vingegaard but remains wary with five days to go to the finish in Nice on Sunday.

"Seventeen seconds is not negligible, but we know it's likely to be complicated from tomorrow onwards with the weather.

"It's far from over."

Wednesday's fourth stage will be a flat 195km run from Bourges to Uchon with an uphill finale for the first summit finish in this year's race. — *AFP*