



LONDON: Manchester City's David Silva (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Burnley in this file photo. —AP

NASRI: CITY HAS TITLE EDGE

MANCHESTER: Manchester City midfielder Samir Nasri has warned rivals Chelsea that his side have the experience to chase them down in the race for the Premier League title. Manuel Pellegrini's City trail Jose Mourinho's league leaders by three points as they prepare to host mid-table Sunderland on New Year's Day. City won the title last season despite having trailed both Arsenal and Liverpool for long periods during the campaign and Nasri believes that knowhow gives City an advantage in the current title race. "Everyone is stronger," said the Frenchman. "We get older, we get more mature and stronger mentally. You learn to deal with different situations. At this club we've been through all the different

situations. We know how to deal with the pressure. "We know we are good at being second and chasing someone. We've done it before. We know how to deal with every situation and we are ready for it." City spurned a good opportunity to cut Chelsea's lead to one point on Sunday when they squandered a 2-0 lead to draw 2-2 with struggling Burnley after the London club were held to a 1-1 draw at Southampton. It also meant Pellegrini's men missed out on the chance to register a club-record 10th successive victory, but Nasri says the main focus now is on adding to their points total. "We're frustrated," he said. "We were aware of the Chelsea result and it was a great chance for us to be just one point behind.

"Nobody talks about that record of 10 consecutive wins. That doesn't matter. The most important thing was to finish the year at home with a win, with 45 points from the first half (of the season). "That would have been a good thing, but we didn't do it. All we want to do is win. We couldn't do that, so let's be focused for Sunderland." City striker Stevan Jovetic is expected to be fit enough to start the match against Gus Poyet's team, having appeared as a substitute against Burnley. James Milner has been used as a makeshift striker in the absence of Jovetic and Sergio Agüero and Edin Dzeko, both of whom remain out through injury. Fernando is unavailable after collecting his fifth yellow card of the season, meaning Frank Lampard could start in

midfield. Meanwhile, Poyet has challenged Jack Rodwell to kick-start his flagging Sunderland career by showing former club City what they are missing. The one-time England midfielder has failed to impress since a £10 million (\$15.6 million, 12.8 million euros) switch to the Stadium of Light in August, making just 10 league starts and scoring once. Rodwell might have hoped to prove Pellegrini wrong for showing him the door after an unhappy two-year spell at the Etihad Stadium. But the former Everton player has struggled to make an impact in the northeast and has managed just one substitute appearance

in the last five games. The 23-year-old failed to even make the bench for the 0-0 stalemate at Aston Villa on Sunday that kept Sunderland four points above the relegation zone. But with midfielders Sebastian Larsson and Liam Bridcutt both injury doubts for Thursday's trip to Manchester, Rodwell has been put on standby to face his old club. "I need him," said Sunderland coach Poyet. "I'm sure he'll bounce back and probably have a great opportunity on Thursday with the injuries in midfield." Larsson is struggling with ankle ligament damage, while Bridcutt suffered concussion after clashing with Villa striker Christian Benteke as Poyet's side fought out their 11th draw this season. —AFP

WENGER CALLS ON FA TO BAN DIVERS

LONDON: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has called on the Football Association (FA) to ban players who dive in order to rid the game of play acting to win free kicks or penalties. Diving is once again a hot topic in the Premier League after three Chelsea players, Cesc Fabregas, Diego Costa and Willian, were all booked for simulation this month. Chelsea defenders Gary Cahill and Branislav Ivanovic have also recently been accused of diving by opposition managers with Blues boss Jose Mourinho countering that there was an agenda against players at his club. Wenger said the only way to solve the problem would be for the FA to take retrospective action against players who have clearly dived. "I'm against diving," Wenger told reporters. "We should punish it after the game. The problem will be to decide when it was obvious diving or not. That's a big issue and sometimes it's not obvious," the Frenchman added. "Punish only obvious cases but not mixed ones. "You have to suspend the players, I don't know how long. It depends. I am not a specialist in this kind of thing. "But the only way that the players will stop doing it, is if they feel they can get punished. Whether it is Arsenal, or Manchester United, or Liverpool or Chelsea, it is for everybody the same." The Arsenal manager was also quick to dismiss speculation linking forward Lukas Podolski with a move to Inter Milan. The German has found himself largely out of favour this season, having started only two matches, but Wenger was adamant that any move to Italy was not imminent. "That is a joke. Inter Milan are not serious. There's only talk," he said. Arsenal are currently fifth in the standings, level on 33 points with fourth-placed Southampton, who they face today. —Reuters



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Alberto Moreno (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring during the English Premier League soccer match in this file photo. —AP

TRIBUTES TO RODGERS FOR LIVERPOOL UPTURN

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool midfielder Jordan Henderson has paid tribute to manager Brendan Rodgers as his team leave behind a rollercoaster 2014 with a New Year's Day home game against Leicester City. After finishing runners-up in the Premier League in May, Liverpool have struggled to match that form in the current campaign, although a 4-1 victory over Swansea City on Monday re-ignited hopes of a top-four finish. The result was also a relief for Rodgers, whose methods have come in for criticism during Liverpool's inconsistent start to the season, but whose side have now lost only once in seven league outings. "The manager has been fantastic ever since he came to the club," said Henderson. "He's working really hard for us on the training field to ensure that tactically we are better and improving all the time. "It's up to us as players to ensure we put that into practice on the pitch and we

definitely did that against Swansea. We got our just rewards for that. "This season has been hard on everyone. We've gone from winning every week to not winning as often. The manager has always been the same. He has always looked to improve things on the training field. "Now it's down to us as players to make sure we do that on match days. If we keep playing like that, we'll get that consistency and more good results." Henderson reflected the confidence in the Anfield camp that, with the disappointment of missing out on last season's title behind them, another top-four finish, and Champions League football, is again within reach. "We had an amazing start to the year and then the disappointment of falling just short in May," said the England international. "We've had a difficult start to this season, but we just have to keep going and playing like that. If we do that we'll go in the right direction and hopefully we can

finish the season well. "Of course we can finish top-four. We've got quality players here. You saw against Swansea that when we play well, we look a top, top side. We just need to be more consistent and make sure we do that every game." Liverpool will be without defender Martin Skrtel, who earned a one-match suspension after his booking in the Swansea victory. Meanwhile, Rodgers spent Tuesday awaiting word from the Football Association as to whether they would punish forward Raheem Sterling retrospectively, after television pictures suggested he slapped Swansea defender Federico Fernandez. Steven Gerrard, rested against Swansea, can expect a start against bottom club Leicester, while Mario Balotelli may have to be satisfied with a substitute place once again. Leicester will be without Paul Konchesky, who serves a one-match sus-

pension, while Andy King is still missing with a thigh problem, but striker Jamie Vardy is available after a ban of his own. Manager Nigel Pearson is still unable to give a return date for goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel, who is recovering from an operation to repair a broken metatarsal. "Kasper is at home at the moment and resting," said Pearson, whose side moved to within three points of safety after winning 1-0 at Hull City on Sunday. "The next time he will have consultation, we will have a better idea of what the length of time he will be out. That will be two or three weeks yet. "We have a few bumps and bruises, but for the most part the biggest things from the last few games will be fatigue if anything. "The question is always, 'Do you go with a similar side and hope, or back your judgement, that they will be able to reproduce energy levels?'" —AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Stoke City v Man United	15:45
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
beIN SPORTS 11 HD	
Southampton v Arsenal	18:00
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
Hull City v Everton	18:00
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	
Man City v Sunderland	18:00
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
beIN SPORTS 11 HD	
Aston Villa v Crystal	18:00
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
QPR v Swansea	18:00
beIN SPORTS 6 HD	
Newcastle v Burnley	18:00
beIN SPORTS 5 HD	
West Ham v Bromwich	18:00
beIN SPORTS 8 HD	
Liverpool v Leicester	18:00
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	
Tottenham v Chelsea	20:30
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
beIN SPORTS 11 HD	