

## Short Takes

### Yoon shines at Asian golf tourney

**Rayong (Thailand), Jan 11** : Sangpil Yoon of South Korea edged closer to regaining his Asian Tour card after posting a second round two-under-par 69 to stay one shot off the pace at the Asian Tour Qualifying School Final Stage here on Thursday.

The 19-year-old Korean, who opened with a 68 at the Rayong Green Valley Country Club, stumbled with a triple-bogey on the second hole but recovered strongly with five birdies on his way home for a two-day total of five-under-par 137. Yoon made the grade in his first attempt at the Asian Tour Qualifying School last year but failed to retain his card after finishing 131st on the 2017 Order of Merit.

He hopes to play his way back onto the region's premier Tour by breaking into top 35 and ties after the intense 90-hole battle this week.

Minkyu Kim, also of South Korea, fired seven birdies against two bogeys for a 66 to grab the clubhouse lead on 136.

The opening round of the Qualifying School Final Stage was earlier disrupted by a lengthy rain suspension on Wednesday which resulted in a total of 123 players returning to complete their rounds on Thursday morning.

### Women's Power Cup handball tourney from Friday

**New Delhi, Jan 11 (IANS)** : The Handball Federation of India on Thursday announced the launch of the inaugural Women's Power Cup, starting at the Karnail Singh Stadium here on Friday.

A total of six teams, divided into two pools will feature in the tournament comprising nine matches.

The teams taking part in the tourney are Delhi Fighters, Haryana Panthers, Uttar Pradesh Challengers, Himachal Pradesh Snatchers, and Jammu and Kashmir Snow Eagles.

The organisers announced a cash prize of Rs 5,000 each to the members of the winning team.

### Leganes make history, Numancia embarrass Real Madrid

**Madrid, Jan 11** : Leganes made history by advancing to the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey, while Real Madrid, who also qualified, were held 2-2 here by second-division side Numancia.

After last reaching the round of 16 in 2000-2001, Leganes are through to the quarters despite losing the second leg 1-2 away to Villarreal, reports Efe.

Leganes, who won the first leg 1-0, grabbed the lead late Wednesday with what turned out to be a decisive away goal from Nabil El Zhar.

Raba equalised for the hosts early in the second half and Denis Cherysev got a second goal for Villarreal in the 88th minute, but it was not enough to deny Leganes.

Real Madrid, who cruised to a 3-0 victory over Numancia in the first leg, came into Wednesday's contest at the Santiago Bernabeu virtually assured of advancing to the Copa quarterfinals. Even so, the Blancos were in need of a strong performance to reassure fans dismayed by their heroes' troubles in La Liga, where the defending champions trail leader Barcelona by 16 points. Coach Zinedine Zidane rested his starters in favour of subs eager to prove themselves, such as Theo Hernandez, Marco Asensio and Dani Ceballos.

The second-stringers failed to make the most of their chance and the first half ended 1-1, after Lucas Vazquez connected for Real Madrid with a solid header and Guillermo equalised for the visitors just before the break.

The Blancos were not much better in the second half, though Vazquez scored again at the hour mark to make it 2-1 for the home side.

From that point on, however, Numancia dominated play, pulling level at the late on a late goal by Guillermo.

In Wednesday's other match, Alaves topped Formentera 2-0 to advance 5-1 on aggregate.

### England to meet Nigeria, Costa Rica in World Cup warm-ups

**London, Jan 11** : England will take on Nigeria and Costa Rica in their World Cup warm-up football games.

The squad will play Nigeria at Wembley on June 2 and Costa Rica at Leeds United's Elland Road stadium on June 7, reports Xinhua.

England begins their campaign against Tunisia in Volgograd on June 18.

It will play Panama in Nizhny Novgorod on June 24 before taking on Belgium four days later in Kaliningrad.

## ISL: Buoyant NorthEast have ATK in their sights

**Guwahati, Jan 11** : NorthEast United FC may have won their first match under the guidance of their technical advisor Avram Grant, but they will need to be at their best to stop a desperate ATK in a ninth round Indian Super League (ISL) clash at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium here on Friday.

ATK have won just twice in eight games and can cut the gap to the play-off spots to just two points with a victory.

Their assistant coach Bastob Roy likened the situation to that of Real Madrid in the La Liga, saying that this was how football was and that they would now have to create their own luck rather than rely on the rub of the green.

"Have you seen the situation of Real Madrid? This is football, it's part of the game and we are trying to come out

of this situation. We still think we can make the play-offs. The table is very unpredictable and with two wins in a row, we may be able to achieve it. Luck is not with us," he said.

"Chance factor has been against us. We are not looking behind but looking forward. The only thing we can do is hard work. Luck is not in our hands. In football you have to score and not concede. That's what we work on," he added, not disclosing the team's plans for NorthEast United, who were impressive in their 2-1 win against FC Goa.

Meanwhile, former Chelsea manager Grant will look for the attitude which was seen against FC Goa, when his side notched their first win after four defeats on the trot.

They can leapfrog ATK with a win and that will be the most motivating factor

**Melbourne, Jan 11** : Ahead of the five-match ODI rubber against Australia, starting on Sunday, English top-order batsman Jos Buttler on Thursday rated the tours of India and Australia as the toughest challenges for his side.

Buttler, who is also the vice captain of the 50-over side, feels the One-day International series, starting at the Melbourne Cricket Ground will be a "great test" for the Englishmen, who were humiliated 0-4 in the preceding Ashes Test rubber.

"Coming here and going away to India are the two biggest challenges for us in the last few years.

Massive challenges for us and exciting ones," Buttler was quoted as saying by ecb.co.uk.

"The Australians became the world champions here at the MCG three years ago, so it will



be a great test for us as a side.

But the swashbuckling batsman is confident of turning things around in coloured outfit and indicated that they will stick to their own game plans in the series.

"We won't be trying to change much with the

way we play. You got to be smart and adaptable to the conditions and try to play the type of cricket we normally play," he said.

After the opener at the MCG, the visitors will play the second ODI in Brisbane on January 19, followed by the third

game in Sydney on January 21.

The final two games will be played at Adelaide (January 26) and Perth (January 28).

The ODI rubber between Australia and England will be followed by a T20I tri-series also involving New Zealand.

## Atwal determined to win EurAsia Cup

**Shah Alam (Malaysia), Jan 11** : Team Asia captain Arjun Atwal asserted on Thursday that he intends to win the third edition of the EurAsia Cup golf tournament by unleashing his strongest pairings in Fridays opening Fourball matches.

Having drawn 10-10 in the inaugural edition in 2014 and going down margin of 18.5 to 5.5 in 2016, Atwal, who is captaining the side for the first time, is eager to set the record straight with a win at the

Glennarie Golf and Country Club. "The matches look pretty balanced. But the players in my team are all champions and they all know how to win," Atwal said in a statement.

"If you come into our team room, you'll see their banners up and each and every one of them holding trophies.

It takes a lot of guts and hunger to win a golf tournament, and all 12 of my players have it," Atwal added.

The Indian, who won the

Asian Tour Order of Merit in 2003, is counting on Korea's Byeonghun An and Thailand's Kiradech Aphibarnrat to deliver the first point in their opening match against England's Tommy Fleetwood and Paul Casey.

Asia's second pairing of Yuta Ikeda and Gavin Green may also prove to be a formidable one as Ikeda, the highest ranked Asian player at world number 36 is poised to strike a decisive partnership with Green.

Asia's number one as they

attempt to take down England's Matthew Fitzpatrick and Belgium's Thomas Pieters.

Atwal's strategic pairing of Thailand's Phachara Khongwatmai and Japan's Hideto Tanihara where there is a mix of youth and experience could prove to be the difference as they face off with Sweden's Alex Noren and Ireland's Paul Dunne.

Atwal picked Korea's Sunghoon Kang for the fourth match with Thailand's Poom

Saksansin while Team Europe's captain Thomas Bjorn opted for Major winner Henrik Stenson of Sweden and France's Alexander Levy.

Malaysia's Nicholas Fung together with China's Li Haotong will then square off against Austria's Bernd Wiesberger while the Indian duo of Anirban Lahiri and S. S. P. Chawrasia will try to wrap up the points for Team Asia in their last match against England's Ross Fisher and Tyrrell Hatton.

## Golfer Natarajan claims second National finals qualifying spot

**Mumbai, Jan 11** : Golfer Rajesh Natarajan claimed the second National finals spot, winning the city qualifiers of the Mercedes Trophy golf meet, it was announced on Thursday.

Rajesh returned a nett score of 71.8 to emerge victorious. He will now join actor R. Madhavan, who won on the first day.

Delighted after the win, Natarajan said: "I am very happy to win the qualifiers of such a prestigious event and look forward eagerly to the National Finals now.

I thank Mercedes for the wonderful experience and we had a wonderful time here at the BPGC."

One more qualifier will be identified on Friday, the third and the final day of the Mumbai qualifiers.

The best Gross Winner of the day was Akshay Kilachand who carded an excellent round of 76and there were a host of other



prizes on offer to be won on the day.

Prominent winners included Devang Sharma who won the Ballantine's Long Drive Challenge with a long drive of 260 yards.

Aryanman Rajpurohit won the Mercedes-Benz Closest to Pin contest while the Mercedes-Benz Closest to Pin in Two

Shots was won by R. Ramakrishnan, who landed the ball 5 ft from the pin after two shots.

The format of play was Double Peoria. This unique format of adjusting handicaps of players levels the playing field enabling golfers to have a greater chance of qualifying for the National Finals.

## England announce Test squad for New Zealand tour

**London, Jan 11** : England dropped Ashes trio of Gary Ballance, Jake Ball and Tom Curran while including paceman Mark Wood and uncapped batsman Liam Livingstone for the two-Test tour of New Zealand in March.

Another surprise inclusion in the team was controversial all-rounder Ben Stokes, though his involvement remains subject to any relevant legal or disciplinary developments in relation to a brawling incident in Bristol in September.

Despite their poor outing with the willow in the 0-4 Ashes humiliation against Australia, James Vince and

Mark Stoneman have retained their places in England's Test squad.

Vince averaged 26.88 batting at number three in the Ashes and opener Stoneman averaged 25.77.

Commenting on the selection of Livingstone, England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) national selector James Whitaker, said: "Liam has been a player that we have been impressed with for quite some time, having performed well in the county system with Lancashire and over the past couple of years with the England Lions."

"He is a very talented and tough cricketer who has the

ideal qualities and character to be successful in the Test arena," he added.

England face the Black Caps, who are one place ahead of them in the ICC Test rankings in fourth, in a day-night Test in Auckland from March 22-26 and then in Christchurch from March 30-April 3.

England squad: Joe Root (Captain), Moeen Ali, James Anderson, Jonny Bairstow (WK), Stuart Broad, Alastair Cook, Mason Crane, Ben Foakes, Liam Livingstone, Dawid Malan, Craig Overton, Ben Stokes, Mark Stoneman, James Vince, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood.

## Wenger wants Sanchez to stay longer at Arsenal

**London, Jan 11** : Without elaborating on why he relegated star forward Alexis Sanchez to the bench during the 0-0 draw at Chelsea, Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger insisted he still hopes the Chile international will stay at Arsenal for the rest of the football season.

"I don't have to justify every decision I make, you know. I made over 1,000 games and over 1,000 teams and I got it every time wrong, but I have to make a decision," Wenger was quoted as saying by espnfc after Wednesday's match.

"I want him to stay for longer because he's a very important player for us. When he came on tonight, you could see that he created straight away danger.

"We have to accept as well when you play so many games and Sanchez plays every game that sometimes a breather in the middle of the season helps a little bit," he added.

Amidst speculation of the forward moving to Manchester City, Sanchez was only a substitute to



start the first leg of the Carabao Cup semi-final is close to being finalised.

Sanchez then played the last 25 minutes, and Wenger insisted that his team selection "had nothing to do with the transfer market." "People don't know Alexis well -- this is a guy who is completely focused to play football. Have you seen how he came on today, how he warmed up? Like a player who wants to play football," Wenger said.

"He can make a difference between what's going on outside and what's going on the football pitch, with facts, not psychological theories. The fact is when

you turn up on the pitch, you play football and you give 100 percent.

That's what he does." Jack Wilshere limped off with an ankle sprain during the tie, although Wenger didn't think the injury was "too bad." "He has an ankle sprain, the first look at it was not too bad. But of course for Sunday I think he will be short," Wenger said. "How long he will be out, I don't know."

"It's a shame to lose him when he's in such a good form. It was by blocking the shot that turned his ankle. It's his good ankle so I'm quite positive," Wenger said.

## Perth Stadium gets ICC green light to host cricket matches

**Perth, Jan 11** : The International Cricket Council (ICC) has approved the Perth Stadium as a venue fit to host all international cricket formats, Cricket Australia (CA) confirmed on Thursday.

The Perth stadium will become the 12th venue in Australia to hold accreditation to host international cricket content and is all set to host the fifth and final One-day International between Australia and England on January 28.

ICC Match Referee, Richie Richardson, completed the venue inspection and submitted a glowing report on the stadium.

"This is by far the most impressive and well laid out stadium I have ever visited. The comprehensive amenities, along with the quality and functionality of the facility, surpasses the required standard to host any international cricket

match," Richardson said in a statement. "The layout of the stadium provides convenient easement within and around the facility and it is located within close proximity of the city center.

"The new Perth Stadium is a wonderful, refreshing, world class stadium, and I have no hesitation in recommending that the venue is approved for staging all three formats of international cricket," Richardson concluded.

Cricket will be the opening sporting event at the Stadium, with the ODI providing an incredible opportunity for cricket fans in Western Australia, and the broader national and international cricket community, to experience the game at its very best in Perth's new state-of-the-art stadium.

CA CEO James Sutherland said: "It is not only very exciting for Cricket to host the first major sporting event at Optus Stadium, but it is also a huge honour.

An historic event, a capacity crowd, a state of the art stadium and an Australia-England fixture - what more could a cricket fan want for?"

"The stadium is a magnificent asset for the state of WA and its sports fans. We very much look forward to bringing this big Australia-England One-Day match to Perth at the Stadium on January 28," he added.