

## Sports

## Ronaldo back in lineup for Portugal

**LISBON:** Cristiano Ronaldo is set to return to Portugal's lineup for the decisive World Cup qualifier against Switzerland today. Ronaldo did not start in the 2-0 win at Andorra last week because he was not fully fit, but he came off the bench in the second half to score the team's first goal and help set up the second by Andre Silva. The Real Madrid forward practiced normally along with the rest of Portugal's squad yesterday ahead of the showdown against the Swiss at the Stadium of Light. Portugal coach Fernando Santos kept Ronaldo on the bench against Andorra because he didn't feel the forward was 100 percent fit when he reported to the national team's training camp. He said he also didn't want to risk an injury to the team's most important player considering the match was played on artificial turf. Portugal is three points behind Switzerland in Group B and needs a victory to secure first place and the automatic spot for next year's World Cup in Russia. —AP

## Only one athlete positive in Vancouver Games re-tests

**BERLIN:** Re-testing of more than a thousand samples from the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics uncovered only one athlete to have taken banned substances, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said yesterday. The IOC said it had conducted re-tests of 1,195 urine samples, including those of all medalists from the winter Games seven years ago as well as of all Russian athletes. "Three adverse analytical findings, all coming from one athlete, are being taken forward for results management," the IOC said in a statement. It did provide any details of the athlete in question, nor of his or her sport or nationality. The low number of positive re-tests from Vancouver is in stark contrast with the results from samples from the 2008 Beijing and 2012 London Olympics. More than 100 athletes tested positive in total in those re-tests and some 75 medals had to be reallocated. More than 80 percent of those cases involved the sports of weightlifting and athletics. —Reuters

## Hardaker suspended over failed drug test

**LONDON:** Castleford Tigers fullback Zak Hardaker has been ruled out of England's rugby league World Cup squad after failing a drugs test, the Rugby Football League (RFL) said in a statement yesterday. The 25-year-old, a key player for his club, has been provisionally suspended from all competition after failing the test following a Super 8s game between Castleford and Leeds Rhinos on Sept 8. The RFL did not name the banned substance but media reports said it was cocaine. England were due to announce on Monday their squad for the World Cup starting in Australia at the end of this month, and Hardaker had been expected to feature in it. The player, who faces a potential two-year ban, apologised for his "enormous error of judgement" to his team mates, club and fans in a statement on the Tigers' website (www.castlefordtigers.com). "I would like to make it clear that in no way did I, nor would I, ever take a substance with the intention of enhancing my performance," added Hardaker, who did not play in Saturday's 24-6 Super League Grand Final defeat by Leeds. — Reuters

## South Africa coach Gibson adjusts sights to World Cup

## Gibson looking forward to meeting AB de Villiers

**BLOEMFONTEIN:** With a 2-0 Test series victory over Bangladesh out of the way, new South Africa head coach Ottis Gibson has started planning for the 2019 Cricket World Cup. After winning the second Test with two days to spare, the first of three one-day internationals against Bangladesh is set for Kimberley on Sunday and it will mark the first stage on a long road to the showpiece in England.

Former West Indies all-rounder Gibson has been charged with ending South Africa's failure to win a major global event. After South Africa's innings win against Bangladesh, he said he and captain Faf du Plessis have already started working towards the tournament.

"We've got about 30 to 35 one-day games between now and 2019," said Gibson. "The idea between Faf and myself and the selectors is to have a look at players, to give opportunities to players who might be on the fringes, so that in a year's time we narrow that pool down. "At the moment we need a wide pool of players to look at so we can start to see who we might need, also bearing in mind the conditions. "We'll be playing in England, so we'll be looking at the type of players we might need for those conditions, to give them opportunities in the next year." Gibson said that in the year leading up to the World Cup, he hoped to have a good idea of which players to take. "The last year is to try to nail down 15 or 16 names we can pencil in. But it's still a long way between now and then," he said.

“At the moment we need a wide pool of players”

## AB DE VILLIERS RETURN

Gibson has had talks with fast bowler Morne Morkel, who reportedly is thinking of accepting a county contract in England if he doesn't get assurances that he will be part of the World Cup plans.

"That's not my understanding," said Gibson. "I absolutely didn't tell him anything about the World Cup because it is so far away. I encouraged him to enjoy his cricket, which he was doing last week until he pulled up (with an injury)."

Gibson is looking forward to meeting star batsman AB de Villiers, who was not available for the Tests, but

is currently playing in a first-class match for his franchise, the Titans. De Villiers will also play for a South African Invitation XI in a warm-up match for Bangladesh in Bloemfontein on Thursday, ahead of the one-day internationals.

"We're all looking forward to seeing AB in the next week," said Gibson. "I've had a few conversations with him, but we

haven't had a face-to-face yet." Gibson said he was pleased with the way the Test team had performed in a one-sided series against Bangladesh.

"At the start of the season everyone said 'easy series', but you still have to go and play cricket. "We're very happy with the cricket we played. I said to the players, if you believe the opposition isn't that good, you must play to a standard and we've played to a very high standard." —AFP



Ottis Gibson

## Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur asks board to decide future

**DHAKA:** Mushfiqur Rahim has declined to step down as captain after Bangladesh's demoralising 2-0 test series defeat in South Africa, instead leaving it to the country's cricket board to decide on his future.

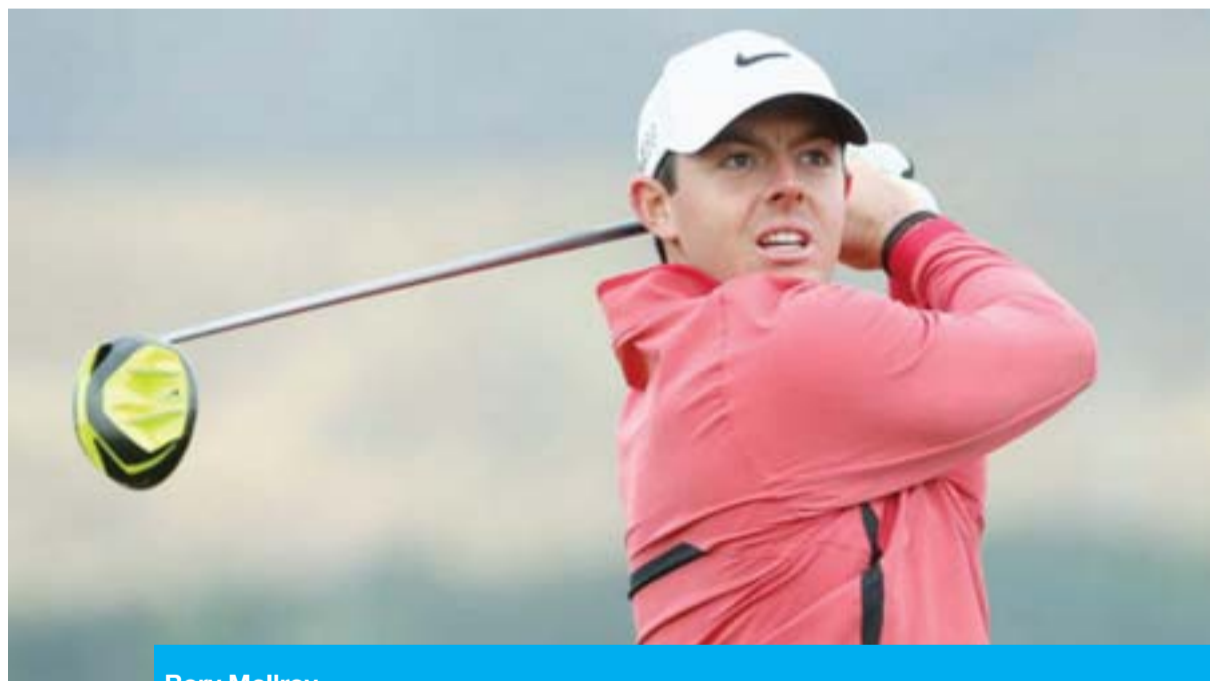
The long-serving Bangladesh skipper has come under heavy criticism for the two heavy losses with critics questioning his decision to field first on batting-friendly pitches in both Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein.

"When the team does really well, all the credit goes to the management and when we are not doing well, all the blame comes to the captain. I can take it," Mushfiqur told reporters after South Africa won the second test by an innings and 254 runs on Sunday.

"Obviously all the blame comes to me being the captain. The board will decide about me, since there's a lot of time before the next test series. "It is not about what I want. I can't decide to stay as captain, neither can I leave it. The board has to take the decision and I am sure they will take a good one for the team. Country comes first, not the individual."

The 30-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman has captained Bangladesh in 34 tests since 2011. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan was another to express surprise at Mushfiqur's decision to field after winning both tosses, with the skipper saying he had always tried to lead the team from the front. "Captaincy is always challenging, more so in a team like ours. We are ranked number nine or 10 always, so there's a lot of pressure playing against top sides," Mushfiqur added. "The last two tests didn't go as the last couple of years have gone. "The blame is coming at me, because I decided to field first in both tests. Maybe I haven't been leading properly and that's why the team isn't doing well."

"This is why I am saying that I should be given opportunity to correct my mistakes." Bangladesh are currently ranked ninth but have emerged as a strong force at home, picking up maiden test victories against England and Australia in the last 12 months. Mushfiqur also led the side to a test victory away to Sri Lanka in March. — Reuters



Rory McIlroy

## Rory McIlroy sets sights high after a winless year

**KINGSBARN:** Rory McIlroy has set himself three challenging career goals—including becoming the best "international" player ever—as he plots his comeback in 2018 following an injury-hit and trophyless year.

The four-time Major champion, who has been dogged by a rib injury, finished in a disappointing tie for 63rd at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship on Sunday, meaning a first season without a title since 2008. His immediate goal arrives at the Masters in April, when he will attempt to become only the sixth player to complete the career Grand Slam of all four Major titles.

Also on his career list is overhauling Nick Faldo to become the most successful European golfer ever and perhaps most ambitious of all—he wants to surpass South African great Gary Player's haul of nine Majors that make him the leading "international" golfer of all time. "The Grand Slam is the next reasonable goal on the agenda and then my goal is to become the best European Tour golfer ever and try and surpass Nick Faldo in that," said McIlroy, aiming to return to competition early in the New Year.

"Then, and if had a career goal, it would be the best international golfer ever as Gary Player has nine Majors so I would like to think I can get close to that tally."

"Clearly, the Americans have dominated the world of golf for the last 100 years with Jack Nicklaus and Tiger (Woods) and Walter Hagen and all those guys but the next big goal is winning the Masters for the Grand Slam and then becoming the best European ever."

The Northern Irishman has won 13 European Tour titles but is still 17 wins shy of Nick Faldo's mark (Faldo won six Majors) and needs to win six more Majors to surpass Player. McIlroy, 28, has seen younger rivals such as Jordan Spieth, who has three Majors to his name—steal the lime-light since he won the 2014 PGA Championship.

"I just feel with the experience I have now, I'm definitely a better player I feel than the player that won some of those tournaments and some of those Majors," said the world number six.

"I see no reason why I can't better that in the next 10 years and that's why I feel like these three months are very important for me to put some really good things in place and step away and just reassess everything and reassess where I'm at and where I need to be."

"Also, the landscape of the game has changed a bit since I started to win Majors. You've got young, hungry guys now that are fearless, basically, and they are playing the game how I basically came out and played a few years ago. "It's just about trying to gain an advantage here or there, so just reassessing everything and making sure I'm sort of not leaving any stone unturned and do everything I can to get back to the best player in the world." — AFP

## ICC to approve Test championship this week

**WELLINGTON:** The International Cricket Council (ICC) is set to approve plans for its long-awaited World Test Championship at a meeting in New Zealand this week, it was reported yesterday. The sport's governing body has argued for years that a Test championship is needed to boost the five-day format's popularity as crowds and television viewers flock to the big-hitting Twenty20 version of the game. But squabbling over formats and fears that some nations will be disadvantaged have twice stymied efforts to launch a league structure since 2010. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that plans for a nine-nation Test championship were now well advanced and the ICC was set to give the concept a green light on Friday at a meeting in Auckland.

It said the first edition of the competition would run over a two-year cycle beginning in 2019, culminating in a final between the top two teams at Lord's. Cricket Australia chief executive James Sutherland said the league competition would give Test series a broader international "context", making them more than stand-alone bilateral contests.

"You're also creating structure in such a way that you no longer have games without meaning. They are all part of a league championship," he told the Herald. Purists view Test cricket as the pinnacle of the sport but it has struggled, particularly in Asia, as lucrative T20 competitions such as the Indian Premier League have caught the public's imagination. A recent innovation designed to reverse the trend is the introduction of day-night Test matches, which moves playing sessions to more spectator-friendly hours.

The idea of four-day Test matches has also been floated, although traditionalists oppose the move. The Herald reported that the ICC will also look at a major shake-up of one-day international fixtures at the Auckland meeting. It said a 13-nation ODI league was being considered, which would operate on a three-year cycle with results affecting World Cup qualification. Under the plans, the number of ODIs in a series would be capped at three, ending the lengthy five-match series that are currently part of the international fixture list. — AFP