

## Saharuled out of Afghan Test, Karthik to replace him

NEW DELHI, JUN 2 /-/ India's wicket-keeper batsman Wriddhiman Saha was today ruled out of the historic one-off Test against Afghanistan after failing to recover from the thumb injury he suffered in this year's Indian Premier League.

The BCCI named Dinesh Karthik as Saha's replacement for Afghanistan's debut Test match to be held in Bengaluru starting June 14. "Mr Wriddhiman Saha has been ruled out of the one-off Paytm Test against Afghanistan to be held in Bengaluru from the 14th of June, 2018," BCCI acting secretary Amitabh Choudhary said in a statement. "He was under observation by the medical staff of the BCCI and the management has decided to give him adequate rest before the start of the England Test series. Saha's recovery period is expected to be around five to six weeks," he added. The 33-year-old stumper suffered the injury to his right thumb while playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in Qualifier 2 of the IPL against Kolkata Knight Riders on May 25 at the Eden Gardens. "The IPL Senior Selection Committee has named Mr Dinesh Karthik as the replacement for injured Saha," the BCCI statement further read.

Saha did not have the best of IPL this year, scoring just 234 runs in 14 games. Karthik, on the other hand, had a splendid IPL while leading Kolkata Knight Riders. He scored a mammoth 490 runs in 16 matches to guide KKR to a third-place finish.

Karthik will return to the Test side after a hiatus of eight years. He last played a Test for India way back in 2010 against Bangladesh in Chittagong. In 23 Tests he has played for India. Karthik has scored 1000 runs with a hundred and seven half-centuries. (PTI)

# I don't celebrate outrageously, says Chhetri

MUMBAI, JUN 2 /-/ Captain Sunil Chhetri starred in India's 5-0 win over Chinese Taipei by registering his third career hat-trick but the feat didn't invoke wild celebrations from the striker, who said that he is someone who doesn't like to "celebrate outrageously" on the field. The match against Chinese Taipei at the Mumbai Football Arena last night also marked 99th cap for Chhetri, who also scored his 59th international goal.

"I am very happy when I score. I do not take it for granted. I am very fortunate to score so many goals for my club and country. I am very happy from inside. It's just that I don't celebrate outrageously like Robin Singh, Chhetri said at the post-match press conference. Hosts India made a positive start to its campaign at the Intercontinental Cup with a rousing victory over Chinese Taipei. Admitting that he takes his goals very seriously, Chhetri said he would burst into wild celebrations if he could score against Bahrain in the AFC Asian Cup. A goal at the Asian Games, at the Asian Cup, a goal that might help us qualify against Bahrain are goals that might raise a more wild celebration. I will jump and hug and shout and come and hug somebody, Chhetri said.

"Right now though, Udanta (Singh) has scored his first goal today so I went up and said 'congratulations kid' and he

said '58 to go'. So I take my goals very seriously and the day I score against Bahrain and we qualify, trust me, I will jump" added the 33-year-old. Jeje Lalpekhlua set up Chhetri's first two goals last night and the skipper said he shares excellent rapport with the forward from Mizoram.

"We have played many games together. He (Jeje) is supremely talented. He is very experienced, knowledgeable and works so hard on his game. He is somebody who I respect a lot and is one of our best players. "So it is not difficult to combine with him and I have done my best to help him and he does the same," Chhetri said when quizzed about his partnership with Jeje. Asked how he feels about the possibility of many youngsters across India and the world looking up to him as a role model, Chhetri was modest in his reply. "I don't look at my career as someone to follow because I am busy working about my own stuff right now. I don't think I am at that stature (where) people, especially from other countries would follow me, if they do, then I am obliged and privileged," he said. "We are talking like this because we won 5-0. If we had lost then you would have abused me. Maybe in 30 years when I have retired we can think about this and how many people I have inspired or motivated," Chhetri signed off. Come Monday the 33-year-old will play his 100th international game against Kenya. (PTI)



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## Morocco into 2026 World Cup vote despite stadium, infrastructure fears

LAUSANNE, JUN 2 /-/ Morocco's bid for the 2026 World Cup was today advanced to a runoff against a bid from North America despite a FIFA evaluation report which classified the African bid's stadium, accommodation and transport as "high risk." A long-awaited report from FIFA inspectors made

"the amount of new infrastructure required for the Morocco 2026 bid to become reality cannot be overstated." The Bid Evaluation Task Force considers it its duty to emphasize the significant overall risk, on a compounded basis, of a bid that has so many facilities (from stadiums and training sites to major

earlier Friday that Morocco's bid would not be cleared to advance to the Morocco vote on the eve of next month's World Cup. The North American bid had long been seen as the overwhelming favourite but has faced increasingly stiff competition from Morocco in recent months. While the North American bid has an array of gleaming, large capacity stadiums and an established transport and tourism infrastructure, Morocco's bid relies heavily on the country's passion for football. It's relatively compact size and its proximity to Europe. Africa has only hosted the global showpiece once before, in South Africa in 2010. But although the FIFA evaluation report released Friday leaves Morocco's bid on the ropes, it is not necessarily a knockout blow. In 2010, a FIFA evaluation committee flagged Qatar's bid for the 2022 World Cup as a "health risk" for players, spectators, officials' over-ferocious heat in the Gulf state in June and July. Qatar duly won the vote in a shock result in Zurich; FIFA later moved the tournament to November and December 2022. The corruption-tainted nature of the 2010 vote prompted FIFA to overhaul its bidding process for the World Cup. When the previous 24 members of the FIFA executive committee used to determine World Cup races, now the hosts will be decided by a vote of 207 individual FIFA member nations. Under the revised bidding rules, designed to

weed out substandard bids, the Task Force in theory had the power to dismiss Morocco's bid, which would have left the bid from the United States, Canada and Mexico without a rival in the vote. The 2026 World Cup will be the first to be expanded to 48 teams, posing a severe test for the hosts. FIFA President Gianni Infantino is believed to strongly support the North American bid because the three countries involved backed him for the presidency in 2016 when he took over after the resignation of Sepp Blatter, who is being investigated in Switzerland for alleged corruption.

North America's bid however has been battling to allay concerns that the vote could essentially become a referendum on the popularity of US President Donald Trump, insisting that geopolitics should not be a factor in the race. In April, Trump appeared to warn that nations who did not support the bid may face political repercussions. North American bid leaders countered by urging FIFA voters to ignore the "politics of the moment" and have promised to deliver a record \$11 billion (9.25 billion euros) profit. Morocco has unsuccessfully bid four times before, in 1994, 1998, 2006 and 2010. Out of a total of 211 FIFA member nations, the four in competition do not have a vote. Morocco has asked FIFA to bar states with US ties, such as Guam and the British Virgin Islands, from voting.



public yesterday left the US-Canada-Mexico bid as the clear front-runner after giving it a rating of four out of a possible five according to its criteria. Morocco received only 2.7 out of five, but advanced to the June 13 vote in Moscow despite flags being raised over several critical components of the bid. A FIFA summary of the bid task force's findings warned that

transport infrastructure and accommodation projects that would need to be built or completely renovated," the summary stated. In the 20 categories rated by FIFA in the report, the North American bid was rated as "low risk." Morocco was deemed low risk in seven categories, with others classified as medium or high risk. The report's release followed intense speculation

## With one eye on India Test, Afghanistan face Bangladesh in three T20s

### ■ Afghanistan understand rigors of Test cricket on June 14: Phil Simmons

DEHRADUN, JUN 2 /-/ Afghanistan will take on Bangladesh in a three-match T20 series starting on Sunday, dividing their focus ahead of the historic Test debut against India in two weeks time.

While the dates of Afghanistan's inaugural Test against India was announced back in January, the series against Bangladesh at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium was only confirmed last month. The scheduling has left Afghanistan with no choice other than to have joint preparations for the Test and T20s. The teams for contrasting formats have been training in batches with the five-day squad training in the morning and the T20 lot in the evening. Only five players - captain Asghar Afghan, Mohammad Shahzad, Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Zadran and Mohammad Nabi - figure in both the squads. Coach Phil Simmons said he would have liked more practice games ahead of the India challenge but with modern-day scheduling, he has to get the best out of what he has. "It has been difficult with the T20 and Test squads training at the same time. But it is getting a bit easier as we are coming up to the game. "That is how tours are planned now. You usually have Test matches first and then limited over series or vice versa. "We just have to work around that," said Simmons, who has been working hard with both the squads ever since they arrived at their "second home

ground 10 days ago. Afghanistan were earlier training in the heat of Greater Noida and then the players are much more comfortable in the conditions here, including the stadium which will become India's 51st international venue on Sunday. However, the tight security cover has made it almost impossible for them to explore the Uttarakhanda capital. The fact that they are training while fasting in the holy month of Ramadan has made the players' task all the more challenging. Though eight players from Afghanistan are ahead of Bangladesh in the rankings, there is not much separating the two teams. They have faced each other in the shortest format only once and that was back in the 2014 World T20 where Bangladesh beat Afghanistan by nine wickets. The team from the war-torn nation has come a long way since that tournament and is now capable of surprising even the top teams in the shorter formats. While star spinner Rashid Khan will usually have Test matches first and then limited over series or vice versa. "We just have to work around that," said Simmons, who has been overseeing joint preparations at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium. "The team has been gradually improved in every format they have played, including four-day cricket. However, the fact that they have not got a taste of Test cricket makes the job in the more challenging. "The good thing is that they have played four-day cricket (winning ICC Inter-

national Cup twice). But it still doesn't tell them how tough Test cricket is. I don't think that is something I can teach them. That is something they have to understand when they play. "We have just tried to make sure that they understand that Test cricket is twice as difficult. After the first Test match, they know this level is so much higher and what they need to do to get to that level. "The 55-year-old said the players are still going through their business and are not showing emotions on playing their first-ever Test. "The reaction is still not there. It still has not sunk in yet. Emotion will hit them



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more mental. Because you got to have played to understand how mentally tough it is to play for five days," he said. "All we can try is to make sure their technique is as tight as possible. It will be much tougher for the batsmen than the bowlers who do get a second chance after being hit for a boundary. "Simmons said he had heavily on their spin department to be competitive against India. The squad has proven performers in the likes of Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Zadran, who both excelled in the IPL. Zahir Khan is another spin option alongside Hamza Hotak. "The boys who played IPL are exceptional professionals. They know how to get ready for the Test match," said Simmons. Asked whether the likes of Rashid and Mujeeb can deliver in red-ball cricket where the batsmen are not under any pressure to score off every ball as they are in T20s, Simmons said: "It is about them. Rashid and Mujeeb showing patience too long with our batsmen. Rashid did well against Ireland in four-day cricket last year. He got wickets. He played in practice games against England and he got wickets." Simmons said Rashid's lack of experience will not stand in his way to success in the longest format as the leg-spinner has a "30-year-old mind in a 15-year-old body". "Rashid is 19 but he has got the mind of a 30-year-old. He knows exactly what is expected of him. Mujeeb (17) is younger but we will have to see how he copes with it," the coach said.

## Olympian Paramjit named face of the IAAF Global Run - Delhi

NEW DELHI, JUN 2 /-/ Former Indian quarter miler Paramjit Singh was today named as the City Captain by Athletics Federation of India (AFI) for the IAAF Global Running Day, to be celebrated on June 6.

Paramjit, who represented India at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and was part of India's 4x400m relay team which won the silver medal at the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games, is one of the 24 prominent athletes from around the world selected to promote the IAAF's global initiative. "It is really a unique initiative from IAAF to bring people together like this from various backgrounds and different cultures from around the world. Running is the simplest activity one can adopt to stay active and fit. I congratulate IAAF for coming up with this concept where everyone is welcome to run together and celebrate the Global Running Day. I welcome everyone in Delhi to join us on June 6 and become a part of this unique event," said Paramjit, an officer with Central Reserve Police Force. Promoted to

"Let's Outrun the Sun" 1-mile run, the first of its kind 24-hours IAAF event will kick-start from Auckland, New Zealand coming Wednesday, Sydney (Australia), Tokyo (Japan), Beijing (China) and the 1998 Bangkok Asian Games. "Running is accessible to everyone, it is fun, it is competitive," said IAAF president Sebastian Coe. "It can be social, it can be solitary. It is testing, it is personal but most of all it builds strength, stamina, fitness and health. It is the mother of all sports. On Wednesday 6 of June, we want as many people as possible to celebrate Global Running Day - the biggest annual celebration of running."

## Sharapova thrashes Pliskova to set up potential Serena clash

PARIS, JUN 2 /-/ Maria Sharapova set up a potential last-16 clash with Serena Williams by crushing sixth seed Kseniya Pliskova 6-2, 6-1 in the French Open third round on Saturday.

The five-time Grand Slam champion produced another stellar performance since returning from a doping ban, cruising to a totally one-sided win in her first match on Court Philippe Chatrier for three years. "I knew I had to play well against a tough opponent. I managed to stay aggressive and I played smart as well," said Sharapova, who delighted a half-full Chatrier by thanking them for their support in French. The Russian, winner in Paris in 2012 and 2014, is seeded at a major for the first time since testing positive for meldonium two years ago. A fired-up Sharapova powered 18 winners past her fellow former world number one Pliskova, with the Czech never threatening any resistance in a match which lasted just 59 minutes. She will next face either 23-time Grand Slam champion Williams or German 11th seed Julia Goerges, who play later on Saturday in the fourth round. Sharapova and Serena have met 21 times, with the American leading the head-to-head record 19-2 after 13 consecutive wins dating back to 2004.