voice of sports

DUTY CALLS: At 40, football icon Chhetri is back

Coach Manolo's list of 26 players includes Sunil for the March FIFA's international window

PTI, NEW DELHI: Indian football icon Sunil Chhetri has decided to come out of his international retirement to help the national team in the FIFA friendly assignment scheduled this month, the sport's apex body in the country said on Thursday. Chhetri returns to the team, which he led for more than a decade, aged 40.

"Sunil Chhetri is back. The captain, leader, legend will return to the Indian national team for the FIFA International Window in March," the All India Football Federation (AIFF) wrote on its official 'X' handle.

Chhetri, who made his international debut in 2005 and left the scene as India's all-time top scorer and most-capped player, has been included in coach Manolo Marguez's list of 26 players for the March FIFA international window.

The move comes less than a year after he announced his retirement after a glorious career, leaving a huge void that is yet to be filled.

Having played at the top level until he was 39 years of age and ending his career as one of the game's leading scorers with 94 international goals, Chhetri's departure had made headlines with FIFA, world football's global governing body. leading the outpouring of tributes for the talisman.

FIFA had earlier in 2022 released a documentary on the long-serving Indian captain titled 'Captain Fantastic', it had three parts kick off, mid-game and extra time.

Chhetri is the fourth-highest goalscorer in men's football, after Cristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi and Ali Daei. Chhetri had called it a day after the FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait in Kolkata on June 6 last year.

The Blue Tigers will play a friendly match against Maldives on March 19 in preparation for the opening match of the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Qualifiers Final Round against Bangladesh on March 25.

Marquez said, "The qualification for the Asian Cup is very crucial for us. Given the importance of the tournament and the matches ahead, I discussed with Sunil Chhetri about making a comeback to strengthen the national team. He agreed, and so we have included him in the squad."

Since his retirement, he had continued playing for Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League. He has so far scored 12 goals from 23 matches this season to become its highest Indian goal-scorer. Shillong's Jawa-

Nehru

harlal

Stadium will

host the Indian senior men's team's two matches that they will play during the FIFA international window this month. India have been

placed in a qualifying group alongside Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Singapore for the Asian Cup. In the tournament's previous edition, India had a disappointing run, failing to progress past the group stage after losing all their matches.

INDIA'S 26-MEMBER SQUAD FOR MARCH 2025 FIFA INTERNATIONAL WINDOW

GOALKEEPERS: Amrinder Singh, Gurmeet Singh, Vishal Kaith. **DEFENDERS:** Asish Rai, Boris Singh Thangjam, Chinglensana Singh Konsham, Hmingthanmawia, Mehtab Singh, Rahul Bheke, Roshan Singh, Sandesh Jhingan, Subhasish Bose. MIDFIELDERS: Ashique Kuruniyan, Ayush Dev Chhetri, Brandon Fernandes, Brison Fernandes, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Lalengmawia, Liston Colaco, Mahesh Singh Naorem, Suresh Singh Wangjam. FORWARDS: Sunil Chhetri, Farukh Choudhary, Irfan Yadwad, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Manvir Singh

India have real clarity on how they want to operate in Dubai: Kane nal clash against the Rohit in how they want to oper-

land batting mainstay Kane Williamson reckons India have "real clarity" on how they want to operate in Dubai, having played all their Champions Trophy games at the same venue but his team will also be reasonably well-prepared for the tournament finale due to Wednesday to set up a fi-

PTI, LAHORE: New Zea- its limited past familiarity with conditions.

Williamson did not specifically say that India had an advantage of playing at one venue, choosing to compare it to New Zealand's understanding of conditions in Lahore, where they beat South Africa on

Sharma-led side in Dubai on Sunday.

New Zealand had played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa.

"I suppose having played there on a number of occasions; there's real clarity in cricket," he added.

ate," said Williamson when asked if India go into the final with an advantage of knowing the conditions.

"A little bit like our opportunity here, having played a number of times at this venue as well and I think that's part and parcel

Having scored a hun- India once there." he said. dred in the semifinal, Williamson is high on confidence and looking forward to the final. "It is what it is (India play

all games in Dubai). Our focus is the next match, the location of that match, the opposition, they're all factors. Obviously, we played in the group stage.

"The conditions are different, so it's important that we try and take away some of those positives and be nice and clear in how we're trying to operate come two or three-days' time in the final," he said referring to New Zealand's loss to India

sportspopup

Bangladesh's Mushfigur Rahim retires from ODIs

We're ready

for scrap:

NZ skipper

PTI, DUBAI: New Zealand

skipper Mitchell Santner

on Thursday acknowl-edged India's familiarity

with the slow pitch here at

the DICS, but said his side

is ready for a "scrap" in the

The Kiwis arrived here

Champions Trophy final.

on Thursday evening ahead of the ICC show-

piece's title clash against

games here in Dubai and

know that surface. Obvi-

ously, the surface will dic-

tate a little bit of how we

want to operate. It might

be a little bit slower than

what we got in Lahore. It

might be more of a scrap,

but we're down to scrap,"

Santner said after touch-

However, Santner said

New Zealand can take

some solace from their ex-

perience of playing against

India during the group

On that instance, India

had beaten New Zealand

by 44 runs in a Group A

match that only carried an

good side. I think we'll

be better for the run we

had the other day against

them. We've had a bit of a

roll on. Hopefully, it con-

The Antipodeans had to

shuttle between Pakistan

and Dubai for their last

group match, semifinal and

But the left-arm spinner

"It's just the general feel

said the team has adapted

to a busy schedule in the

of this tournament, moving

around a lot. It's all part of

the challenge. I think we've

and Dubai. I think the guys understand it's part

of it these days. As long as

you're ready to go for the game, it's fine," he said.

"Obviously, in Pakistan

been to every place here."

the final in a short span.

"We've come against a

academic interest.

tinues," he added.

last few days.

ing base in the city.

stage

"They've played all their

Îndia on March 9.

DHAKA: Veteran Bangladesh wicketkeeper batter Mushfiqur Rahim has retired from ODI cricket with immediate effect. He made the announcement on social media. "I am announcing my retirement from the ODI format as of today. Alhamdulillah (Thank God) for everything. While our achivements may have been limited

on a global level, one thing is certain: whenever I stepped onto the field for my country, I gave more than 100 per cent with dedication and honesty," Rahim wrote on his official Facebook page. "The last few weeks have been very challenging for me, and I have come to realise that this is my desting Rahim made his ODI debut almost 20 years ago and ended up representing the country in 274 ODIs, aggregating 7795 runs at an average of 36.42. Only Tamim Iqbal (8357 runs) has scored more ODI runs than him for Bangladesh. He has also played 94 Tests and 102 T20s. Rahim has already retired from the shortest format but in the longest format, he is on course to become first from his country to play 100 Tests.

Reiffel, Illingworth to be on-field umpires for Champions Trophy final

DUBAI: Australia's Paul Reiffel and England's Richard Illingworth will be the on-field umpires, while Sri Lanka's Ranjan Madugalle will be the match referee for the Champions Trophy final between India and New Zealand, here, on Sunday. Reiffel, 58, a former Australian fast bowler with more than 200 Test and ODI wickets, was one of the on-field umpires during South Africa's semifinal against New Zealand in Lahore. Illingworth, 61, a former England left-arm spinner, was part of the action in India's last-four clash against Australia in Dubai. List of officials: On-field Umpires -- Paul Reiffel and Richard Illingworth; Third Umpire -- Joel Wilson: Fourth Umpire -- Kumar Dharmasena: Match Referee -- Ranjan Madugalle.

Will need to adapt on unknown Dubai pitch: Ravindra

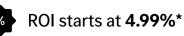
LAHORE: Dashing New Zealand opener Rachin Ravindra feels adapting to the conditions will be key to succeed on an "unknown" Dubai surface in the Champions Trophy final against India on Sunday. "We don't quite know what the Dubai pitch is. We saw in our (group) game against India the ball turning but the other day didn't turn so much. We found ourselves adapting and playing according to situations, which we will need to do on Sunday again. "We will see in the next couple of days and hopefully it's a good cricket wicket," said Ravindra after an emphatic 50-run win over South Africa in the semi-final here. "You get out pretty much every time you bat. Hopefully I can bat for a longer period of time and continue to play well for my team," he said. He is also aware about the expectations from the side in any big ICC event. "Whenever you approach a tournament, you expect hopefully to be among the top four teams and lucky enough we have been consistently good over a period of time." "We are happy with our preparation, coming here early, we can see we are cooking reasonably well. Trust and ability around the group is great."

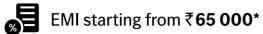
We are still evolving as a team: South Africa coach after another knockout punch

LAHORE: Yet another knockout stage heartbreak at yet another ICC event. But perennial bridesmaid South Africa remains on the right track two years before the ODI World Cup at home, feels the team's head coach Rob Walter after its semifinal exit from the Champions Trophy here. "You know, in the wins, we managed to put some significant partnerships together. We had guys contributing significantly with the bat. From a bowling point of view, I think our biggest development was our accuracy. We were able to be very accurate as a seam unit," said Walter. The 2027 ODI World Cup will cohosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.









Special **Celebratory** Benefits**





Scan the QR code to know more

Counto Motors: Goa: Tel: 0-9552580048, 0-9112222226, 0-9112222227 (CIN: U45201GA1985PTC000624)

Mercedes-Benz India Pvt. Ltd. (CIN: U34102PN1994PTC083160) Toll Free no.: 0008000501888. Email: cs.ind@cac.mercedes-benz.com, Website: mercedes-benz.co.in.

Accessories, colors and fitments shown may not be a part of standard specifications. For technical specification of the model available in India, please refer to the product brochure or contact the nearest Mercedes-Benz Franchise Partner The Mercedes-Benz GLC meet Bharat Stage VI emission norms. ***Year-end depreciation benefits are subject to its applicability as per the Income Tax Act. **Special celebratory benefits of up to ₹ 200 000/- as per applicability of terms & conditions. Finance is at the sole discretion of the financier Mercedes-Benz Financial Services India Pvt Ltd (MBFSI) (CIN U67190TN2010FTC077890). STAR Agility+ is an optional financial scheme offered by the financier. The availability and applicability of the scheme are subject to the terms and conditions of the financier. *EMI is subject to change. *ROI is subject to change and applicable to selective models.