

SPORTS  
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# India's Kohli says World Cup will be a hit for runs

India feel confident before most challenging World Cup, says Indian captain Virat Kohli

AFP | Mumbai

Cricket fans should expect a run bonanza at the ICC World Cup in England and Wales starting this month, India captain Virat Kohli said yesterday.

Ahead of India's departure for the tournament, Kohli said local seaming conditions would likely favour batsmen.

"In ICC tournaments the pitches are going to be very good and it's summer in the UK. We expect high-scoring games," Kohli told a press conference in Mumbai.

England beat Pakistan 4-0 in a five-match warmup series with nearly every game seeing innings of 350 plus on grounds that will be used for the World Cup.

Kohli insisted, however, that World Cup pressure will bring down the totals.

"A bilateral series compared to a World Cup is very different, so you might see lot of 260-270 kind of games and teams successfully defending it because of the pressure factor," said the skipper of India -- one the fa-



Royal Challengers Bangalore team captain Virat Kohli gestures during an Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket match

avourites alongside England and Australia.

Two-time winners India, who start against South Africa in Southampton on June 5, feel they have a strong chance with a potent pace bowling attack led by Jasprit Bumrah.

"We go into the World Cup

feeling very balanced and a strong side. You saw in the IPL (T20 series), all the players that are in the squad are in great form and playing really well," said Kohli.

India have some worries over their spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal, who

were less impressive in the IPL. Chahal claimed 18 wickets for Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore, but Yadav struggled with his left-arm wrist spin for Kolkata Knight Riders.

"In hindsight if you look at it, like Kuldeep, who has had so much success, it's important to



India has won ICC World Cup twice

see a period where things don't go your way. And I am glad it happened during the IPL, rather than the World Cup," said Kohli.

"He has time to reflect and correct things and come into the World Cup even stronger. We know the skill set he possesses along with Chahal. They are two pillars of our bowling line-up."

The 10-team World Cup returns to a round-robin format and Kohli said consistency was the only way to make the semi-finals.

"Everyone has to be at their best game intensity from the first match onwards and you don't have any room for complacency.

## Dhoni stumps fans with painting ambitions

AFP | New Delhi

India's Mahendra Singh Dhoni fuelled retirement speculation yesterday after sharing his dream of becoming a painter, although his ambitions for a career change seemed far from serious.

The 37-year-old Dhoni, who is England-bound for the World Cup starting next week, displayed a few of what he said were his paintings in a video posted online on Monday.

"I wanted to share a secret with all of you. Right from when I was a kid I always wanted to become an artist," Dhoni said in the video.

"So decided I have played a lot of cricket and it's time for me to take up what I really wanted to become. And I started getting into painting."

The wicketkeeper-batsman said that he would soon hold an art exhibition as he wants to pursue his painting career "very seriously".

## Japan's Honda quits Melbourne Victory after one season

AFP | Melbourne

Japanese superstar Keisuke Honda yesterday announced he will leave Melbourne Victory this week after one season as he pursues new challenges.

The former AC Milan striker, one of the highest profile names in Asian football, was an instant hit with fans, with his early season form drawing rave reviews.

However, a hamstring injury kept him sidelined for nine matches mid-season.

"I am proud to have been a Melbourne Victory player and grateful for having the opportunity to play in Australia," Honda said in a statement.

## Bologna earn 'miracle' Serie A survival in six-goal thriller

AFP | Rome

Bologna coach Sinisa Mihajlovic hailed his team for pulling off a "miracle" to secure their top flight survival with a 3-3 draw at Lazio enough to keep the northerners in Serie A next season.

It was a vital point for Bologna who have been transformed since the arrival of Serbian coach Mihajlovic in place of Filippo Inzaghi, brother of Lazio coach Simone, last February.

"Nobody, or at least very few believed in us staying up a few months ago," said Serb Mihajlovic, a former Yugoslavia international player.

"I was one of the few. The

more that time went by, the more convinced I was that we were on the right road but it was still something of a small miracle."

The club were 18th with just two wins from 21 games when the former Serbia, AC Milan and Torino coach arrived, but since have won eight matches out of 16 and are now positioned 12th.

"Now, we're aiming to pull off a real masterstroke on Saturday (against Napoli) to finish tenth," he added.

Lazio are already through to next season's Europa League after their Coppa Italia win over Atalanta last Wednesday in Rome, and have nothing left to play for as they sit eighth.

## Firmino gives Liverpool fitness boost ahead of CL finale

AFP | London

Liverpool striker Roberto Firmino is on course to be fit for the Champions League final against Tottenham after returning to training during the club's break in Marbella.

Firmino missed Liverpool's last three Premier League matches due to a thigh injury.

But the Brazil international was able to take part in the first session of the squad's pre-final training camp yesterday, putting him in the

running to face Tottenham in Madrid on June 1.

Firmino was the first player to arrive on the south coast of Spain for some individual sessions with strength and rehabilitation staff.

Having fallen just short in the Premier League title race, Jurgen Klopp's 26-man group are spending six days in Marbella before returning to England to finalise preparations for their attempt to win Liverpool's sixth European Cup.

"Roberto Firmino today

trained alongside his teammates following a muscle strain that ruled him out of Liverpool's last three matches," a statement on Liverpool's website revealed.

"The Brazilian took part in the Reds' first session of their Marbella training camp yesterday morning as he works his way back to full fitness.

Roberto Firmino



Francesco Acerbi and Bastos of Lazio tackle on Roberto Soriano of Bologna as he shoots

## Kompany knew his City time was up after Leicester goal

Reuters | London

Vincent Kompany said he knew he "was done" at Manchester City as soon as he fired in the spectacular winner against Leicester City in their penultimate Premier League game of the season on May 6.

The Belgian called time on his 11-year stay at City on Sunday to become player-manager at Anderlecht - the club where he started his career almost two decades ago.

"The moment that ball against Leicester went 'top bins', I knew I

was done. I couldn't do anything better," the City captain said during a parade to celebrate the club's domestic treble.

City beat Watford 6-0 in Saturday's FA Cup final to become the first club to complete an English domestic treble.

The FA Cup triumph also ended up being 33-year-old Kompany's final game for City, with whom he won four Premier League titles, two FA Cups and four League Cups.

"I've given everything I could for this club. I can't tell you how proud of that I am. I have nothing left. I

have given everything," he added, sporting a t-shirt referencing striker Sergio Aguero's 'don't shoot' reaction to the Leicester goal.

Manager Pep Guardiola added: "We're going to miss him a lot. I'm going to miss him but he is going to see us in the future because he is coming back sooner or later.

"It's the best way to say goodbye after an incredible season together. He was a real captain, he helped us a lot. We're going to show him how we love him."

Vincent Kompany

