

Sports

# India among favourites to win World Cup: Kapil Dev

## Yuvraj backs Pandya to give India a World Cup edge

**NEW DELHI:** Former captain Kapil Dev yesterday pegged India as one of the top three favourites to win the World Cup, which starts later this month, saying their pace bowling would come good in seaming English conditions.

India open their campaign against South Africa on June 5 in Southampton with an eye on clinching their third title in the 50-over showpiece event.

"Winning team looks like India, England and Australia and surprise package can be New Zealand," the Indian World Cup-winning skipper told reporters at a promotional event in New Delhi.

"India has the combination of youth and experience. They have the right balance in four fast bowlers, three spinners and two big names in Virat Kohli and (M.S.) Dhoni," he said.

India's pace battery is led by Jasprit Bumrah, the world's top bowler in the one-day format, and includes Mohammed Shami, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Hardik Pandya.

Bumrah has been hailed for his ability to bowl yorkers at the death, while Shami and Kumar have also impressed. "They are fantastic, very good. English conditions will help them. They can swing the ball," said Dev, known as "Haryana Hurricane" during his playing days for his pace.

"They have Bumrah and Shami who can bowl 145 (kmph) plus. So we have swing, we have pace. That's a very good combination to have."

Dev, who led India to their maiden World Cup in 1983 when his side beat two-time champions West Indies to take the trophy at Lord's, said it was the "belief" which separated winners from the rest.

Dev slammed comparisons between him and star all-rounder Pandya who has impressed with his power hitting in the team's middle order and skills as a medium-pace bowler.

The 25-year-old Pandya, who is set to play his first 50-over World Cup, has earned his place in the Indian XI with 731 runs and 44 wickets in 45 ODIs since making his debut in 2016.

"He is an upcoming player... Please do not pressure him. He is a young talent, let him play his cricket with his own free mind," said Dev.

When quizzed about the on-field chemistry

between former captain Dhoni and Kohli, Dev said both the players were crucial to India's World Cup hopes.

"Both the cricketers have done so well for India, unmatchable. First, all of them should understand that they are not playing for themselves but playing for the country."

All-rounders will play a key role at the upcoming 50-overs World Cup in England and Wales and India could have one of the best in Hardik Pandya, 2011 player-of-the-tournament Yuvraj Singh has told Reuters.

Yuvraj scored 362 runs and 15 wickets as India won the World Cup for the second time in 2011 and the 37-year-old believes the rules of this year's edition will make those players who can contribute with both bat and ball even more valuable.

A maximum of four fielders will be allowed outside the 30-yard circle between overs 10 to 40, making it difficult for captains to stack their teams with frontline batsmen and rely on part-timers to pitch in with the bowling. "It's a five-felder rule and part-timers don't get away with that kind of bowling, it's going to be tough to bowl the sixth bowler," Yuvraj told Reuters in an interview.

"But if you go with five (frontline) bowlers, then you know somebody has to bowl four to five overs maximum. If somebody is not bowling well, then someone has to chip in."

Yuvraj was confident seam-bowling all-rounder Pandya can execute the role he played eight years ago to perfection when the 12th World Cup kicks off on May 30.

"I was actually having this conversation with him," the left-handed batsman said of his Mumbai Indians team mate Pandya.

"I told him that 'you have a great chance of performing really well with the ball and bat', the kind of form he is in at the moment. Definitely, the way he is batting at the moment, it is phenomenal and I hope he carries that form."

"He has been bowling well in patches but as I said it is all about how you handle the pressure... I just hope that Hardik has an awesome tournament."

After going through the most difficult period of his fledging career in the past few months, during which



Kapil Dev



Yuvraj Singh

he had to deal with injury problems and controversy off the field, Pandya has been back to his best in the Indian Premier League.

The 25-year-old has been a vital cog in Mumbai's march to the final of the Twenty20 tournament, scoring runs at a breathtaking strike rate of almost 200 and also picking up 14 wickets with his medium pace bowling.

In his heyday, Yuvraj was one of the cleanest strikers of the ball in the game-as England's Stuart Broad found out when he was bludgeoned for six sixes in one over during the 2007 World Twenty20.

A veteran of three World Cups, Yuvraj is certain the wickets in England and Wales will allow a continuation of the trend towards high scoring at World Cups.

India's wristspin duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav have had lot of success in the recent past and Yuvraj implored the Virat Kohli-led side to include two spinners in their side during the quadrennial tournament.

"I feel we need to go with our strength," Yuvraj added at an event to launch MoneyGram's microsite

through which fans would be able to send wishes to their teams for the World Cup.

"Our strength is that our spinners have been successful against South Africa, Australia and England and we should go with that. I would say go with our four best bowlers and fifth is Hardik."

The format for the May 30-July 14 tournament has also seen a change from the previous years with all 10 teams playing each other before the top four advance to the semi-finals.

Recalling India's exit from the 2007 World Cup in West Indies when the side departed at the group stage having lost two out of three matches, Yuvraj felt the new format would allow teams a shot at redemption.

"Playing everybody and nine games will definitely be tougher (but) it's actually going to work in both ways," he said.

"It's tougher, yes, but you also have an opportunity to bounce back. We lost the 2007 World Cup and suddenly we felt that we needed more games. Those times there was no opportunity to bounce back." — Agencies

## Cricket showcases plight of globe's street children

**CAMBRIDGE:** Bangladeshi youngsters singing "We want our rights" was the backdrop to the inaugural Street Child Cricket World Cup, bringing together teams from across the world to raise awareness of the plight of marginalised children.

Eight mixed-sex teams competed in the university city of Cambridge over the weekend, with the action moving to the home of cricket at Lord's for finals day on Tuesday, where India South were crowned champions.

But it was difficult even getting the players to Britain for the event, with teams representing countries as far-flung as England, Mauritius and Nepal. Bangladesh's team leader Forhad Hossain had to go to court to be recognised as the legal guardian of the children so they could obtain passports.

Both Zimbabwe and Democratic Republic of Congo were no-shows due to the lengthy visa process. The tournament is the brainchild of John Wroe, the CEO and co-founder of Street Child United, a British charity that uses sport to change the negative perceptions and treatment of "street-connected" children.

It is the first to be hosted in Britain-there have been three football versions in South Africa, Brazil and Russia. Nizam, 15, was wrapped in a Bangladeshi flag and sported a bandana with his country's colours on it, showing his patriotism despite a life on the margins.

It still pains him that he ended up on the streets col-



**LONDON:** The winner's trophy is held aloft as Team India South celebrate winning the Street Child Cricket World Cup Final against England at Lords Cricket Ground in London on May 7, 2019. Bangladeshi youngsters singing "We want our rights" was the backdrop to the inaugural Street Child Cricket World Cup. —AFP

lecting garbage aged seven after a disagreement with his mother-his father had remarried-and he told AFP he has no contact with either her or his three older surviving siblings.

However, now he is on the right path and is attending school thanks to the efforts of Hossain and the organisation he founded-LEEDO (Local Education and Economic Development Organisation). "I have 54 brothers and sisters," said Nizam, referring to the other children who live in the LEEDO Peace Home.

"I spend my free time now going round the bus, ferry and train stations talking to the homeless children who congregate there and trying to motivate them to

be part of the Schools Under the Sky project."

Hossain said he and his fellow LEEDO workers have rescued around 2,000 children over the past four years.

Nizam, who hopes to become an art student, is keen to use the platform gained from performing at the World Cup to lobby politicians when he returns home.

"The politicians don't talk with the children, they only have time for politics and not social causes," he said. "When I go back I will try and communicate with policymakers and ministers and influence them to try to make a law for children of the paths," added Nizam, who prefers the term to street children. —AFP

## Australia paceman Jhye Richardson out of World Cup

**SYDNEY:** Australian fast bowler Jhye Richardson was ruled out of the World Cup yesterday after failing to recover from a dislocated shoulder, with namesake Kane Richardson replacing him. He picked up the injury during Australia's series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates in March, but was included in the squad for the World Cup in England starting later this month.

But recent tests showed he would not be ready in time. "This is obviously very disappointing news for the team and for Jhye, who has been exceptional throughout his rehabilitation process," said team physiotherapist David Beakley.

"After his most recent assessment and attempting to bowl in the nets, it was clear that Jhye was not progressing as fast as required. "Therefore, in consultation with selectors, we made the decision to withdraw him from the squad."

Kane Richardson was called up to replace him, with long-time pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood, who has been out of action since January with a back injury, overlooked. When the squad was announced last month, chief selector Trevor Hohns said the focus was on having Hazlewood ready for the Ashes Test series in England which begins in August.

He was instead named in Australia's one-day A squad, which will play games in England while the World Cup is on. —AFP

## Afghanistan eye World Cup semis with Naib at helm

**NEW DELHI:** Senior Afghanistan players have accepted the leadership change ahead of the World Cup as they target a semi-final spot in the 50-over showpiece event, chief selector Dawlat Khan Ahmadzai said Tuesday.

Gulbadin Naib replaced Asghar Afghan as Afghanistan's one-day skipper after the Ahmadzai-led selection panel named different captains for each formal last month. Star players Rashid Khan, who was named Twenty20 captain, and Mohammed Nabi soon took to social media to criticise the move that comes just ahead of the World Cup starting May 30.

But Ahmadzai insisted the team stands united after having understood the need for the captaincy overhaul. "The team members, including Rashid and Nabi, are now happy for Gulbadin," Ahmadzai told reporters in New Delhi.

"He is not a new man. He has been playing for 17 years and has captaincy experience at the first-class and U-19 level. "Gulbadin has said he'll make use of Asghar's experience (at the World Cup). They are a united front now. Changes do happen, like Sri Lanka did with their captaincy," the former fast bowler added.

The 28-year-old Naib, a medium-pace bowler who bats in the middle order, has played 52 ODIs and 38 T20 internationals since making his debut in 2011 for the war-torn nation. Since beating the odds to compete at the 2010 World Twenty20 in England, Afghanistan have qualified for all major international tournaments and recorded their first Test victory against Ireland last month.

The minnows are perceived as a dangerous team, having beaten former champions Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup last year as well as forcing a tie with giants India. Ahmadzai believes the young cricket nation, which played their first 50-over World Cup in Australia four years ago, can make the last four in the 10-team event.

"There was no Rashid or Mujeeb (ur Rahman) in 2015 so this time we are aiming for a semi-final berth. With the team composition we have, we can definitely surprise a few teams," said Ahmadzai. "We have identified teams we can beat but obviously I can't tell you which teams."

Fit-again Hamid Hassan has returned to bolster the team's pace attack and Ahmadzai said the team would benefit from the veteran's presence. "Hamid Hasan is back into the fast bowling attack and that is a big boost. He has been a great fast bowler for Afghanistan and will lead the pace attack alongside Dawlat Zadran," said Ahmadzai. Afghanistan begin their World Cup campaign against defending champions Australia in Bristol on June 1. —AFP

## Flintoff backs Stokes to 'steal the show' for England

**LONDON:** Andrew Flintoff believes Ben Stokes can "steal the show" for England in a home season featuring both the World Cup and the Ashes. For the first time since the inaugural men's World Cup in 1975, England are staging arguably the two biggest events in their calendar-the one-day showpiece and a Test series against arch-rivals Australia in the same season.

For a multi-format cricketer such as Stokes, a dynamic pace-bowling all-rounder of a similar kind to the now-retired Flintoff, it could be a career-defining summer. Stokes, however, has yet to hit the heights he showed before being acquitted of affray by an English court last year following an incident outside a Bristol nightclub in the early hours of the morning.

Flintoff believes Stokes' bowling confidence may have been set back by being hit for four successive sixes by the West Indies' Carlos Brathwaite in the last over of a 2016 World Twenty20 final in Kolkata that England had been poised to win.

But Flintoff said that was partly a consequence of Stokes' willingness to take responsibility at key stages. "With Ben he's just different," Flintoff told reporters in London on Tuesday. "As a batter he can bat three, he can bat four-his bowling's getting better all the time."

"The World T20 probably knocked his confidence a little bit. That can happen, bowling at the death," added Flintoff at an event to publicise the official song of the World Cup, "Stand By" by Loryn and Rudimental.

"He's always in the big moments of a game. He seems to be that lad who lifts the team." Former England captain Flintoff's career also featured its fair share of off-field controversy, with the 41-year-old saying this could take a toll on a player's form.

"I think since what happened the year before last, it's always hard sometimes," he said. "You've just got to find your feet again. You're playing for the team but you're also playing a little bit for acceptance as well-for the crowd, for the people coming to watch you."

"I think he has come through the other side and I think we're about to see the best of Ben Stokes. Or I hope so, because I genuinely love watching him." Flintoff, a central figure with both bat and ball when England regained the Ashes on home soil in 2005, said the season ahead would be the ideal stage for Stokes to shine.

"World Cup, Ashes-it's all to play for," he insisted. "As a character and player like Ben, you wouldn't be surprised if he just steals the show. "We can (then) all forget about 2005 and move on with ourselves!" — AFP