Focus on Rohit, Kohli as Team India lands in Dubai for Champions Trophy

A Bumrah-less India will open campaign against Bangladesh on Feb 20 in Dubai before the much-anticipated blockbuster against traditional rivals Pakistan on Feb 23

PTI, DUBAI: The Indian team made its touch down in the city on Saturday, hoping to bag the ICC Champions Trophy, starting from February 18, for the second time since 2013.

India had last won the ICC marquee event in England 12 years back under the legendary MS Dhoni.

The players and support staff trooped into a waiting bus, in line with the new BCCI diktat of travelling as a group, before proceeding to the designated team hotel.

Earlier, dressed nattily in a white T-shirt and black tracks, Rohit Sharma got down from his car, and walked towards his teammates at the departure lounge amid loud calls of 'Rohit bhai' and 'Rohit sir' by fans waiting near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport entrance in Mumbai.

Most of the squad members arrived in the team bus including head coach



Gautam Gambhir, vice-captain Shubman Gill and star batter Virat Kohli and the stars obliged some fans by signing autographs or waving at a few of them.

Soon, the team boarded an afternoon flight to Dubai amid heightened optimism of netting another global trophy after winning the T20 World Cup last June.

A Jasprit Bumrah-less India will open their campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 in Dubai before the much-anticipated blockbuster against traditional rivals Pakistan on February 23, and then the Men in Blue will take on New Zealand on March 2 to round off their league engagements.

The confidence -- of the fans and the team -- has been boosted by India's recent 3-0 ODI series whitewash at home over England.

Those supporters assembled at the Mumbai airport will be hoping that the icons, led by Rohit and Kohli, will pull off another triumph like they did in the West Indies last year.

Few months ago, Hardik



with the T20 World Cup trophy hoisted on his shoulders to join a sea of passionate fans on the streets near the Wankhede Stadium for an open bus parade.

If those scenes are to be repeated next month, then India will need some runs from Rohit and Kohli, who have copped heavy criticism after repeated failures in Test cricket.

But they replied in kind, as Rohit made a characteristically fluent hundred a 90-ball 119 in Cuttack ODI against England and Kohli his 73rd fifty in Ahmedabad. This might have brought them a temporary relief but a productive outing in the Champions Trophy is mandatory in the context of the duo's future in top-flight cricket.

With the emphasis firmly on hitting the next World Test Championship cycle from June and building a team for the 2027 50-over World Cup the Ajit Agarkarchaired selection panel will closely observe how the two veterans fare in Dubai.

Kohli needs 37 runs to become the third batter ever in ODI history to make 14,000 runs while Rohit is only 12 runs away from becoming the 10th batter to complete 11,000 runs. But without a trophy, those numbers will lose some heaviness around them.

A big promotion came young Gill's way when he was named the ODI vice-captain, and the batter who averages nearly 61 in the format will be keen to stamp his authority with a fruitful outing in the Champions Trophy.

The injury-enforced absence of Bumrah is an opportunity for the likes of Arshdeep Singh and Harshit Rana, while Varun Chakravarthy would want to prove himself as the surprise strike weapon.

A coming together of all these factors will determine whether India will touch back in Mumbai as a boisterous winning group sometime next month.

Till then fans can immerse themselves in joyous

Shreyas Iyer:

India's calming

element

sportspopup

Gulveer smashes 3000m indoor national record, targets Worlds NEW DELHI: Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist Gulveer Singh made a strong start to his season, shattering a 16-year-old national record in the men's 3000m indoor race at the BU David Hemery Valentine Invitational in Boston. The 26-year-old Army runner clocked 7:38.26, finishing second in the event

and surpassing the previous Indian record of 7:49.47 set by Surendar Singh in 2008. Surendar now serves as a coach. Buoyed by his impressive performance, Gulveer has now set his sights on securing automatic qualification for the 2025 World Athletics Championships in the men's 10.000m, where the entry mark is 27:00.00. "I'm elated to have clocked a good time in my season's first Indoor race in Boston," stated Gulveer, who won bronze in the 10,000m

Navneet earns India hard-fought 3-2 win

at the Asian Games, in an AFI release.

against England in FIH Women's Pro League BHUBANESWAR: A confident India began their campaign in the Women's Pro League with a 3-2 win against higherranked England at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium here on Saturday. Two of India's goals came from penalty corners with Vaishnavi Phalke scoring the opener in the sixth minute and Deepika smashing the winner in the 25th, while Navneet Kaur struck the winner with just one minute left in the game. Darcy Bourne (12th) and Fiona Crackles (58th) scored for England.

Spain defeat India 3-1 in FIH Men's

Pro League hockey
BHUBANESWAR: Spain took sweet revenge for their defeat against India in the bronze-medal match at the Paris Olympics, overcoming Harmanpreet Singh's side 3-1 in a FIH men's Pro League game here on Saturday. India put up a lackluster show in their first Pro League match this season, even as Spain showed loads of determination with Boria Lacalle (28th), Ignacio Cobos (38th) and Bruno Avila (56th) slotting home the goals after the hosts had taken the lead in the 25th minute through Sukhjeet Singh.

England opener Duckett declared fit ahead of Champions Trophy

LONDON: England received a timely boost ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy, with opener Ben Duckett being declared fit for the tournament, beginning on February 19. Duckett, who had sustained a groin injury while fielding during the third ODI against India in Ahmedabad last Wednesday, underwent scans, and the results confirmed that the injury was not serious. "Scans on a

left groin injury have confirmed that England men's batter Ben Duckett is fit and available for the ICC Champions Trophy," the England Cricket Board said in a statement. England endured a 0-3 whitewash against India in the ODI series following a 1-4 loss in the five-match T20I series, and they will begin their Champions Trophy campaign on February 22. "The England squad will arrive in Pakistan on 18 February ahead of their opening match of the tournament against Australia in Lahore on Saturday, 22 February," ECB said.

Joakim names 23-member India

squad for U-20 Youth Cup in Türkiye NEW DELHI: Indian U-20 women's team coach Joakim Alexandersson on Saturday named a 23-member squad for the Pink Ladies U-20 Youth Cup, a friendly tournament to be held in Manavgat, Türkiye, from February 19 to 25. India will face Jordan on February 19, Hong Kong on February 22 and Russia on February 25. All matches will be held at the Emirhan Sport Centre in the city of Manavgat in the Antalya district. The India U20 women had been training in The Sports School in Bengaluru in preparation for the SAFF U20 Women's Championship and the AFC U20 Asian Cup Qualifiers to be held in July-August 2025. The team will depart Bengaluru for Türkiye on Sunday. India's 23-member squad and support staff: Goalkeepers: Keisham Melody Chanu, Moirangthem Monalisha Devi, Ribansi Jamu. Defenders: Alina Chingakham, Nishima Kumari, Sahena TH, Shubhangi Singh, Thingbaijam Sanjita Devi, Toijam Thoibisana Chanu, Viksit Bara. Midfielders: Cindy Remruatpuii Colney, Kajol Dsouza, Kayenpaibam Anju Chanu, Khumukcham Bhumika Devi, Monisha Singha, Nameirakpam Arina Devi. Forwards: Babita Kumari, Deepika Pal, Khushbu Saroj, Lhingdeikim, Neha, Nongmeikapam Sibani Devi, Pooja. Coach: Joakim Alexandersson. Assistant coach: Nivetha Ramadoss. Goalkeeper coach: KK Hameed.

IPL 2025: Opening match set to feature KKR, RCB; final likely on May 25

NEW DELHI: The IPL 2025 is set to begin on March 22 with a match between title holders Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the Eden Gardens, also the designated venue for this year's final on May 25. The PTI has learned that this year too, Dharamsala and Guwahati will host a couple of IPL matches. Dharamsala will be the second home venue of Punjab Kings after Mullanpur, while Rajasthan Royals will set up their base in the North Eastern City apart from regular venue Jaipur. The BCCI is yet to release the schedule but it is expected that the governing body will announce the full list of venues and matches early next week. Five-time champions Super Kings, set to be led by Ruturaj Gaikwad, will open their IPL 2025 campaign on March 23 at their home ground MA Chidambaram Stadium against Hardik Pandya-led Mumbai Indians, who also owns five titles in the league.

Guardiola taunts Liverpool over Manchester City's 100-point record

LONDON: Pep Guardiola has taunted Premier League leaders Liverpool over their failure to match Manchester City's record 100-point tally. Guardiola's troubled side are trailing 16 points behind Liverpool after their bid for a fifth successive English crown collapsed in astonishing fashion. Liverpool are seven points clear of second-placed Arsenal as they chase

a 20th title, which would equal Manchester United's record. But even if Arne Slot's men go on to secure the trophy, they now cannot match the record points total set when City won the first of Guardiola's six titles in 2017-18. Responding to criticism of City's spluttering dynasty after Tuesday's 3-2 home defeat against Real Madrid in the Champions League play-off round first leg, Guardiola took a tetchy swipe at Liverpool. "We took all the records in England. Who would do 100 points now in modern football? I'm waiting," Guardiola told reporters on Friday.

SWOT: Australia, South Africa favourites to enter semi-finals from Group B

PTI, BENGALURU: Australia will be without their premier pacers but their envious pedigree in ICC tournaments make them favourites to progress to the semifinals of the Champions Trophy from Group B along with South Africa.

But they will face stiff challenges from England and Afghanistan. Here's the Group B SWOT analysis.

AUSTRALIA

Strength: No other team has a better record in global events six 50-over World Cups, one T20 World Cup and two Champions Trophies make them the most fearsome white ball unit. They have a model ODI batting line-up, which can do the shapeshifting with the ebb and flow of the game. Skipper Steve Smith, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Jake-Fraser McGurk, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell etc can be a handful in any conditions.

Weakness: They will be without Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc, and that means the batters will have to do the heavy lifting in the tournament to give that extra cushion of runs to the

Opportunity: It's a chance to assert their dominance in 50-over format and the Antipodeans would not want to miss it, and that desire should be their driving force against a set of group mates who are not exactly firing.

Threat: They are coming into champions also have only one spinthe CT after a 0-2 defeat against Sri Lanka in the recent ODI series. The middling form of Labuschagne and McGurk will be a concern.

ENGLAND

Strength: On the paper, the Old Blighty have the most powerful white ball batting. If the likes of Jos Buttler, Phil Salt, Harry Brook, Joe Root and Liam Livingstone fire in unison, it will be a nightmare for bowlers.

Their leg-spinner Adil Rashid is in good form as he had shown in the recent series against India, and he will have an important role to play on pitches that may give apprecia-

ble help to tweakers. Weakness: But that aforementioned batting line-up came a cropper against Indian spinners, as England crashed to a 0-3 series defeat. Apart from Root and Buttler, none of the other batters looked comfortable

Opportunity: England have played in Pakistan in the not so distant past, and their first-hand knowledge of conditions might come handy. The overall form of Root and Buttler is encouraging as well.

Threat: Afghanistan, who have an array of spinners, will be a huge threat to England. The former world

ner in their line-up — Rashid, and will be hoping that Livingstone will support him with his mixed bag.

SOUTH AFRICA

Strength: After India, South Africa, perhaps, have the most varied line-up in the tournament. They have anchors like Temba Bavuma and Aiden Markram, and smashers such as Heinrich Klaasen and David Miller. They have a balanced bowling unit led by pacer Kagiso Rabada and spinner Keshav Maharaj. They should be able to tide over most of the circumstances.

Weakness: Despite all the said strength factors, they failed to enter the recent ti-series final, losing the crunch match to Pakistan, a reminder to that very deep and old wound. They might also feel the absence of pacer Anrich Nortie, who was withdrawn after an in-

Opportunity: It's a fine chance for them to add an ICC trophy to erase that 'C' tag around their necks, now as heavy as a five-pound millstone. Threat: Australia and Afghan-

istan can throw a spanner in the works. To avoid that, SA will require a better outing from their bowlers, who recently failed to defend a 350pls target against Pakistan.

AFGHANISTAN

Strength: They have a bunch of cricketers who have been playing together for a long time. Rashid Khan, Hashmathullah Shahidi, Gulbadin Naib and Rahmat Shah have seen and tamed many oppositions, including some traditional powerhouses.

They will also be playing in conditions closer to their home and it gives them a certain edge. Their march to the semifinals of the T20 World Cup 2024, is an underliner to their talent and confidence.

Weakness: They are coming into the CT without proper ODI match practice as their last 50-over appearance was against Zimbabwe in December, 2024. It may reflect in their outings here against superior opponents.

Opportunity: Afghanistan will play all their group matches in Karachi and Lahore, where spin has a vital role. The Afghans have a rich line of slow bowlers in Rashid, Mohammad Nabi and young tyros Noor Ahmad and Nangeyalia Kharote. Threat: Their middle-order bat-

ting of late has been dawdling, putting a lot of pressure on openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran to churn out runs consistently. They have been doing it for the last year or so, but they would certainly prefer some more help from the likes of Shahidi, Naib and Azmatullah Omarzai.

PTI, BENGALURU: Shreyas

Iyer is fidgety at the crease, almost Steve Smith-like. He keeps swinging the bat up and down against pacers, and walks across the stumps against the spinners. He often adopts different stances too.

It gives his batting a touch of restlessness. But behind that exterior disquiet, works a steady, calculative brain focused on finding run-making ways, and it will be India's biggest asset going into the Champions Trophy.

India will have varied threats to negate in the ICC showpiece's league stages spin from Bangladesh and New Zealand and pace from Pakistan.

In No. 4 Shreyas, India has the best possible candidate for that job.

Let's go through how the 30-year-old against spin in the ODIs, and he will face left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner and off-spinner Michael Bracewell while playing against New Zealand.

The Mumbai man will also have to negate a set of slow bowlers from Bangladesh like veteran left-arm spinner Mahmudullah.

Delhi Capitals huff & puff to 2-wkt win over MI

PTI. VADODARA: Delhi Capitals produced a splendid bowling effort before their batters, led by Niki Prasad. survived some anxious moments to register a narrow two-wicket win over Mumbai Indians in a last-ball thriller in the Women's Premier League, here, on Saturday.

Opting to bowl, DC bundled out MI for 164 in 19.1 overs, with Nat Sciver-Brunt's commanding unbeaten 80 and Harmanpreet Kaur's quickfire 42 off 22

balls anchoring the innings. Chasing the target, Shafali Verma's blistering 43 off 18 balls gave DC a flying start, as they reached 60 for no loss. However, MI staged a sensational comeback. almost derailing the chase. Alice Capsey (16), Annabel Sutherland (13), and Sarah Bryce (21) kept DC in the hunt before Niki Prasad (35), showed great temperament under pressure to steer them closer to the target.

WPL SCOREBOARD

Mumbai Indians: Yastika Bhatia b Pandey 11, Hayley Matthews c Lanning b Pandey 0, Nat Sciver-Brunt not out 80, Harmanpreet Kaur c Prasad b Sutherland 42, Amelia Kerr run out 9, Sajeevan Sajana c Bryce b Sutherland 1, Amanjot Kaur b Capsey 7, Sanskriti Gupta c Lanning b Mani 2, Jintimani Kalita run out 1, Shabnim Ismail run out 0, Saika Ishaque b Sutherland O. Extras: 11. Total: 164 all out. Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-32, 3-105, 4-129, 5-133, 6-146, 7-156, 8-159, 9-160. Bowling: Shikha Pandey 4-0-14-2, Alice Capsey 2-0-25-1, Arundhati Reddy 4-0-40-0, Minnu Mani 4-0-23-1, Annabel Sutherland 3.1-0-34-3, Radha Yadav 2-0-26-0. Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning b Ismail 15, Shafali Verma c AB Kaur b Matthews 43, Jemimah Rodrigues c H Kaur b Kerr 2, Annabel Sutherland b Nat Sciver-Brunt 13, Alice Capsey c Ismail b Kerr 16, Niki Prasad c Kerr b Kalita 35, Sarah Bryce c Kalita b Matthews 21, Shikha Pandey run out 2, Radha Yadav not out 9, Arundhati Reddy not out 2. Extras: 7. Total: 165 for 8. Fall of wickets: 1-60, 2-60, 3-66, 4-76, 5-109, 6-140, 7-147, 8-163. Bowling: Shabnim Ismail 4-0-18-1, Saika Ishaque 3-0-43-0, Nat Sciver-Brunt 4-0-38-1, Hayley Matthews 4-0-32-2, Amelia Kerr 4-0-21-2, Sajeevan Sajana 1-0-10-1.

Player-of-the-Match: Niki Prasad

World No.1 Sinner accepts 3-month ban to end doping drama

AP, LONDON: Top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner accepted a three-month ban in a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency and said Saturday the agreement ends a case that was "hanging over me" since his two positive doping tests nearly a year ago.

WADA, which was seeking to ban the three-time Grand Slam champion from the sport for at least one year, had challenged a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency not to suspend Sinner for what the ITIA judged was accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid last March.

Sinner's explanation — that trace amounts of Clostebol in his doping sample was due to a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger had been accepted.

The timing means the 23-year-old Italian won't miss any Grand Slam tournaments. The French Open, the season's next major, starts May 25.

"This case had been hang-

had a long time to run with a decision maybe only at the end of the year," Sinner, who won the Australian Open in January, said in a statement. "I have always accepted that I am responsible for my team and realize WADA's strict rules are an important protection for the sport I love. On that basis I have accepted WADA's offer to resolve these proceedings on the basis of a three-month sanction."

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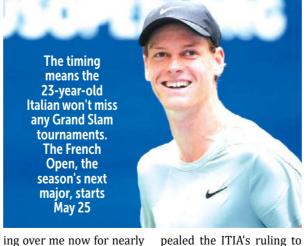
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Montreal-based WADA had originally ap-



pealed the ITIA's ruling to a year and the process still the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, Switzerland. It has formally withdrawn the appeal. "WADA accepts the athlete's explanation for the

cause of the violation as outlined in the first instance decision. WADA accepts that Sinner did not intend to cheat, and that his exposure to Clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit and took place without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage," it said in

Saturday's announcement. "However." the WADA statement continued, "under the code and by virtue of CAS precedent, an athlete bears responsibility for the entourage's negligence. Based on the unique set of facts of this case, a three-month suspension is deemed to be an appropriate outcome. As previously stated, WADA did not seek a disqualification of any results, save that which was previously imposed by the tribunal of first instance."

WADA added that the International Tennis Federation and ITIA, "both co-respondents to WADA's CAS appeal, neither of which appealed the first-instance decision, both accepted the case resolution agreement?"

On Friday, Sinner posted a video on Instagram of himself training in Doha at the Qatar Open, which starts next week. He was also scheduled to play in an exhibition in Las Vegas next month.

The suspension is from February 9 to May 4. Sinner could return at his home tournament, the Italian Open in Rome, which starts May 7.