



India v Pakistan: Cricket's ultimate grudge match in the desert



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A billboard in Lahore features India and Pakistan's captains ahead of the Champions Trophy. The last time India and Pakistan clashed in a major ICC 50-over contest was in 2023, at the highly anticipated World Cup league match in Ahmedabad.

As a contest, it turned out to be a bit of an anti-climax - India, in dominant form, comfortably chased down a subpar Pakistan target, securing a resounding victory. And as Pakistani fans didn't get visas to travel to India, aside from the cricket team, the country's only notable presence was in the media centre.

Sunday's ICC Champions Trophy clash between the arch-rivals at Dubai International Stadium promises a vastly different atmosphere. The International Cricket Council (ICC) reported that tickets sold out within minutes - and with the UAE hosting more than 3.7 million Indians and nearly 1.7 million Pakistanis, a vibrant and well-represented crowd from both nations is all but guaranteed. But can a sea of green flags in the stands inspire Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan's men to defy the odds in this must-win clash against Rohit Sharma's India?

Pakistan can take comfort in their strong head-to-head record in UAE - 19 wins in 28 ODIs, plus a lone T20I victory in the 2021 World Cup in Dubai. Since Pakistan's glory days in Sharjah, the tide has shifted - apart from the occasional T20I win, India has largely dominated in the new millennium. Veteran cricket writer Ayaz Memon feels there is no reason to look at India-Pakistan clashes in the UAE through the prism of the past.

"There is no doubt that Pakistan enjoyed tremendous crowd support in the Sharjah days, with the local Pathan population making up the numbers. However, the team then boasted of the likes of Imran Khan, Javed Miandad, Saeed Anwar, Aamer Sohail and the two Ws [Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis]," Memon says