





India face Pakistan in World Cup battle royale

AFP, Manchester

Virat Kohli will have history on his side when India take on arch-rivals Pakistan in a World Cup blockbuster today -- a clash that is always more than just a game of cricket.

India cut off bilateral cricket ties with its neighbour after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, with authorities blaming Pakistani militants.

Pakistan toured India in 2012/13 for a series of ODIs and T20 matches but they have not faced each other outside of a multi-nation tournament since.

Tensions between the two countries soared earlier this year and some Indian fans and ex-players called for India to boycott the match at Old Trafford.

In February a suicide bombing in Indian-administered Kashmir claimed by a militant group based in Pakistan killed 40 Indian troops. India and Pakistan then carried out tit-for-tat air strikes.

On the pitch, India have won all six of their meetings against their neighbours in World Cups as they look to maintain their perfect record in Manchester.

India beat Pakistan in their most recent encounter at the Asia Cup in the United Arab Emirates last year. But at least Pakistan can look back for inspiration to the final of the 2017 Champions Trophy, when they thumped their fierce rivals by 180 runs.

"May there be peace and tranquility while the two Asian giants fight it out on the cricket field," former India captain Bishan Singh Bedi told AFP.

"And may the better team win without losing out on the etiquette of cricket."

Kohli plays down Amir duel

REUTERS, Manchester

India captain Virat Kohli swatted aside talks about a duel with Pakistan speedster Mohammad Amir and played down the hype around today's game.

There has been plenty of hype surrounding Sunday's sold out contest but Kohli refused to fuel it further. "I think the best way to approach

something like this... it's not going to last a lifetime for you, whether you do well or you don't," Kohli said. "Our tournament, whether we do

well as a team tomorrow or we don't, is not going to finish... So I think the focus always has to be on the larger picture." Kohli understands the fan sentiments

but said the players have learned to cocoon themselves from the elevated expectations.

"I can't tell the fans to think in a particular manner. For us, it has to be a professional approach to the game," said the 30-year-old. "We can't get emotional or over-excited with any occasion. Obviously the player's mindset is different from the fans and you can't mix these two.

"From fan point of view, looking at the atmosphere and frenzy around the game, I wouldn't say it is easy to think like a player but for the players it's very very crucial to be absolutely professional."

An interesting sub-plot will be the showdown between Kohli, the world's top ranked ODI batsman, and Pakistan's pace spearhead Amir who claimed five wickets against Australia in Taunton.

"You may not believe me but I see only the red or white ball, not the

bowler delivering it," said Kohli. "You should always be wary of the strength of an impact bowler. You should also have the self-belief to do well against any bowler.

"Also, the match won't be decided by my runs or his wickets. There are 10 players on each side, they also have to play well. I'm not entering any personal contest or competition," he added.

"You got to play well regardless of the bowler. Even part-timers will get you out if you are not playing well. I keep my game simple."

Kohli acknowledged Pakistan have "a lot of talent" in their ranks but preferred to talk about his own team instead.

The threat of rain looms large over Sunday's match as well and Kohli said weather would influence India's combination.

Kohli's side have lived up to their billing as one of the favourites along with holders Australia and hosts England, with two wins and a washout in three matches so far.

The number-two ranked side won their opener against South Africa and then beat defending champions Australia before a no result against New Zealand.

Pakistan, by contrast, are struggling

with just one win -- an upset against England, two

Kohli downplayed the

in, but said the "intimidating" atmosphere would bring out the best from his players.

"For Sunday, we know we're there when it comes to the mindset. Just about going out there and having a game plan, executing it," said Kohli. "As soon as you enter the field, it's calm and relaxed. The atmosphere from the outside, for the first time, it's a bit intimidating, but we'll look to execute well.

"It's been competitive for years. It's a marquee event all over the world, an honour to be a part of the big game. Brings out the best in all of us."

Pakistan skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed said his team needed to learn from their mistakes to get past a powerful Indian side.

because India are also a very strong team.

We will assess our performance and then we will plan," he said.

Passionate fans of both sides want local bragging rights even if their team ultimately goes on to lose the tournament.

"We want to win this match even if Kohli loses the Cup, we don't care," Harron Memon, an Indian fan in Nottingham, told AFP.

"We have always dominated India in cricket. Call it war or sport, we are certainly going to win it come Sunday," a Pakistan supporter wrote on Twitter.

The two teams have played each other in 131 ODI games, with Pakistan having a clear edge with 73 wins, despite their poor record against India at World Cups.

INFO ZONE

HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUP

INDIA		PAKIST
6	WIN	0
0	LOSS	6
0	TIE	0
0	NR	n

HEAD TO HEAD IN ODIS

INDIA		PAKIST
54	WIN	73
73	LOSS	54
0	TIE	0
4	NR	4

LAST MEETING

September 23 2018 at Dubai International Cricket Stadium India won by 9 wickets (with 63 balls remaining).

KEY PLAYERS





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INDIA		i Moha	PAKISTAN Mahammad Am	
	Virat Kohl	Mohammad Am		
	59.47/166.25	Bat/Bowl Ave	18.68/29.91	
	92.93/160.2	Bat/Bowl Strike Rate	81.05/37.5	
	50	50s	2	
	41	100s	0	
	183	HS	73*	
	6.22	Econ	4.77	
	1/15	BBM	5/30	
	10943/4	Runs/Wickets	355/70	
	82	Last Match	5/30, 0	

defeats and a washout. frenzy and excitement

surrounding the high-octane clash, with more than a

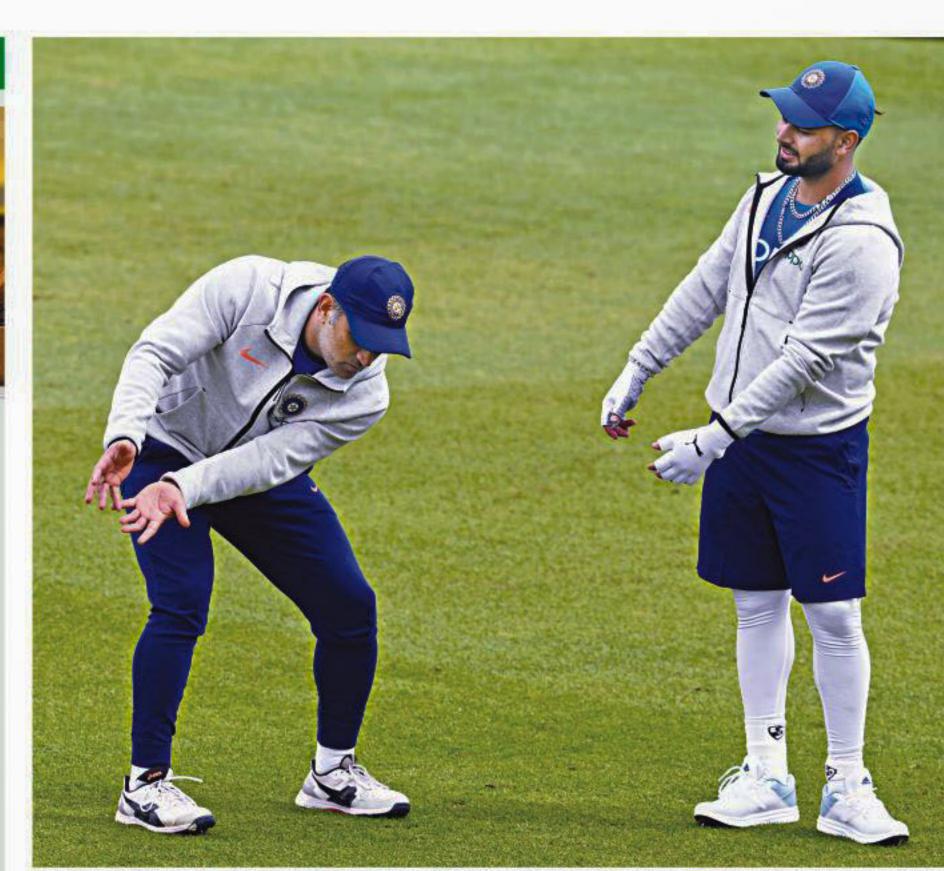
"We have to overcome our mistakes



Australian skipper Aaron Finch continued his fine form, smashing a maiden hundred in the World Cup against Sri Lanka. Finch registered his 14th ODI hundred and was eventually dismissed on his career best 153 runs. His 132ball stay featured fifteen fours and five sixes and also took him to the top of the highest run-getters list in the World Cup with 343 runs in five games



at an average of 68.60.



MS Dhoni will certainly play a role on the pitch with batting and in terms of tactical input against Pakistan today and was already getting into the groove, handing out wicketkeeping pointers to Rishbh Pant in training yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

billion people set to tune 'It's a final before the final'

AGENCIES, MANCHESTER

On the eve of India-Pakistan match in the World Cup, Inzamam-ul-Haq, the chief selector of Pakistan, said that the match between the two sides was a 'final' before a final. Whenever India and Pakistan take

on each other in the World Cup, it's a final before a final. People are always excited about this match. The stadium has a capacity of 24,000 but 8 lakh people applied for the tickets. So, that gives you an idea of how big this match is," Inzamam told ANI.

Pakistan have never been able to defeat India at the World Cup but Inzamam said past performances do not matter when these two sides take the field. It will all come down to how the team plays on the match day, he said.

"Past performances do not matter and it all depends on who is better on the match day. I hope Pakistan will come out triumphant and I hope people get to enjoy a good quality game of cricket. Pakistan have won just one match in the tournament so far. I hope the fortunes change for the team," Inzamam said.



Pakistan has never defeated India in the World Cup, so the pressure will definitely be there. . It's a big match, the pressure will always be there. If you perform well in this match, it gives you high satisfaction. I urge people to treat this match just as a

match," he added.

Inzamam also labelled India skipper Virat Kohli as one of the greatest players to come out of India and said the Indian team were well balanced, but he backed his bowling attack to challenge them.

"Pakistan's 's strength has always been the bowling. In the Champions Trophy, our bowlers were exceptional. So far our bowlers have not been able to scalp early wickets in the tournament, but the ability is definitely there so I hope for the best," Inzamam said.

When asked on who he expected to reach the final of the mega-event, Inzamam said: "Pakistan for me will be one finalist in the tournament. England has a quality team. Australia and India also have good teams," Inzamam said. Inzamam also refused to criticise

the ICC for the weather. "Games getting washed out can

hamper the team's chances in the World Cup. But it is unfair to blame the ICC in this whole matter. I hope teams get a fair chance of playing their brand of cricket," Inzamam said.