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Bangladesh in global events A HISTORY OF MEDIOCRITY



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Bangladesh's relationship with the ICC Champions Trophy has been paradoxical from the get-go. For instance, the inaugural edition in 1998, when the tournament was called the Wills International Cup, took place in Dhaka amidst tremendous fanfare and Bangladesh were lauded for getting this tournament off to a perfect start. But even though Bangladesh was the facilitator, the hosts were not represented in the field as the Tigers, who were an associate nation at that time, were not eligible to participate as the tournament was reserved for only Test-playing nations. After being a silent spectator in 1998, Bangladesh's on-field journey in the Champions Trophy began in the second edition in 2000 but it has been far from a smooth ride. In five appearances in total, the Tigers have won just two out of 12 games and have a paltry win percentage of 16.667 in the

Champions Trophy, lower than the other two ICC limited overs' tournaments – ICC ODI World Cup (32.65 percent) and the ICC T20 World Cup (26.667 percent). So, statistically, the Champions Trophy is the worst ICC tournament for the Tigers. However, if looked at from a different perspective, Champions Trophy could also be termed as the best ICC tournament for Bangladesh as their biggest ever success in a major men's ICC tournament at the senior level came at this very event. In 2017, the previous edition of the competition, Bangladesh got pummeled by hosts England by eight wickets in the group stage and were saved by the rain against Australia in a match they were on track to lose. But then the Tigers pulled off a memorable five-wicket win over New Zealand in Cardiff in their last group phase match, courtesy of a mammoth 224-run partnership between Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah. And that one win was enough for them to qualify for the semifinal of a marquee ICC event for the very first time. However, reality came crashing down in the knockout match as India thrashed Bangladesh by nine wickets in the semifinal. If Bangladesh reaching their



biggest success in statistically its weakest ICC tournament does not seem paradoxical enough, there is also the fact that the win over the Kiwis that catapulted the Tigers to the semifinals was essentially their first win in the main competition of the Champions Trophy as their previous win, which had come against Zimbabwe in the 2006 edition, was in the qualifying round. Bangladesh's other significant achievements in major ICC events is the quarterfinal finish in the 2015 ODI World Cup and reaching the

Super Eight of the T20 World Cup last year. For a country that has been a Test-playing nation for quarter of a century, where cricket has been played since the 1800s, which has hosted first-class cricket and Test matches even before independence, which has an incredible fan base and has a cash-rich board at the helm, these paltry results are simply not acceptable. Over the years, many theories have been spewed to explain these poor results. From the lack of infrastructure, poor playing

conditions at home, unlucky draws in major events and even elaborate conspiracies – there has never been a shortage of excuses. But when fans see a country like Afghanistan galloping to the top of white ball cricket, these excuses seem laughable. The difference in mentality between Bangladesh and Afghanistan became clear as daylight during the two team's virtual quarterfinal clash in last year's T20 World Cup. To reach the semifinals, Bangladesh needed to chase down 116 in 12.1 overs but instead of striving to make history, the Tigers tried to complete a meaningless win, while the Afghans played like bravehearts, won the bout and punched their ticket to the semifinals. The way that the Tigers went about their business against Afghanistan exemplifies their mentality – going for the face-saving option instead of having a go at unprecedented success, which perhaps any other team would have opted for. This line of thinking is the result of mediocrity that has seeped into the fabric of Bangladesh cricket. Until this stench of mediocrity evaporates, it's tough to be optimistic about Bangladesh's prospects in major events.

A rivalry that goes way beyond cricket

NABID YEASIN

When the Prime Minister of a nation makes a serious statement about sports, it is clear that the underlying causes go beyond the game itself – that the tension arises from something much larger on a broader scale. “The real challenge now is not only to secure the Champions Trophy but also to defeat our archrivals, India. The entire nation stands firmly behind them,” Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said a few days before the start of the Champions Trophy 2025. The statement from Pakistan's

nations closer despite their many differences, has been intertwined with politics for decades. Even long before the cricketers of the two bordering countries step onto the field, it sends the cricketing world into a frenzy. It ceases to be just about the battle between Imran Khan and Kapil Dev, Shoaib Akhtar's searing pace against Sachin Tendulkar's elegance, the two Ws (Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis) versus the long and celebrated Indian batting lineup, or the modern-day comparisons of Virat Kohli and Babar Azam. The excitement and anticipation seep into the souls of players, fans, and stakeholders across these cricket-



both India and Pakistan will play in neutral venues for any tournaments hosted by either nation in the 2024–2027 event cycle. Unfortunately, amid all this, the biggest casualty has been cricket itself. Playing all their matches in Dubai, India will stand to benefit in terms of reduced travel. While the cricket's governing body curates pitches in ICC events, the conditions of the UAE and the three different venues in Pakistan might require significant adaptations from the teams travelling between these venues. The same will apply to Pakistan during the 2025 Women's ODI World Cup in India and the 2026 Men's T20 World Cup, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka. For now, this resolution appears to be the only way to make these politically strained rivals agree on something, even if it comes at the expense of the quality of cricket and ICC events. The history, the politics, and the uproar seem destined to continue, but at least the next phase of it will have cricket in store. On February 23, one of the most-watched sporting events in history will unfold at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium, as defending champions Pakistan take on India finally after so many phases of negotiations and years of unending tensions.

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premier might sound like a request usually heard from the fans of the two neighbouring countries who detest even the notion of a defeat against each other. But nothing that concerns India and Pakistan is ever only about the matter at hand – in this instance, cricket. In fact, cricket, often seen as a potential bridge to bring the two

obsessed nations. However, the rivalry's darker side often escalates into mob violence and militant activities – the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) bore the brunt of it when a group of militants attacked their Bombay headquarters in 1999, just days before Pakistan were scheduled for their first Test tour of India in 12

years. Among the damages was the 1983 World Cup trophy, the first ever won by Kapil Dev's men. That Pakistan tour went ahead as both the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and BCCI deemed it prudent to ensure that cricket was not harmed by external factors. Hence, it was no surprise that questions arose about whether India would travel to Pakistan as soon as the latter was announced as the sole host for the Champions Trophy back in November 2021. For Pakistan, securing the hosting rights of a major ICC event for the first time since the 1996 World Cup – co-hosted with India and Sri Lanka – was only the beginning of a long negotiation process. Talks stretched on for months, with the fate of the entire tournament hanging in the balance until just two months before its scheduled start. While India ended up getting what they wanted, playing all of their matches at a neutral venue in Dubai, the PCB also secured some ground in the negotiations. Pakistan will still host at least 12 of the 15 Champions Trophy matches across its three designated venues – Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Lahore – except, of course, for those involving India. The recent resolution, mediated by the ICC, includes an agreement between the two boards stating that