

CT 2025: India to play all matches in Dubai, including knockouts if team qualifies

NEW DELHI, DEC 24:

Four days after confirming that estranged neighbours India and Pakistan will not play in each other's territories at least till 2027, the International Cricket Council on Tuesday unveiled the official schedule of the Champions Trophy 2025 that runs from February 19 to March 9 with Pakistan hosting their first global cricket tournament since 1996, alongside the UAE which was confirmed as the neutral venue for matches involving India under the hybrid model.

The decision to host India's matches away from Pakistan, the official host country, was finalised after Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB chairman, met with Sheikh Nahyan Al Mubarak in Pakistan. Sheikh Nahyan is a senior UAE minister and also the head of the Emirates Cricket Board.

Accordingly, the Indian team will begin their Champions Trophy 2025 campaign against Bangladesh in Dubai on February 20, a day after the tournament officially kicks off in Karachi with a match between defending champions Pakistan and New Zealand.



The highly-anticipated match between arch-rivals India and Pakistan will be played on February 23 in Dubai before the Men-in-Blue take on the BlackCaps for their final group stage match on March 2 in Dubai.

The 19-day competition will feature eight teams, divided into two groups of four each. India, Bangladesh, New

Zealand and Pakistan form Group A while Afghanistan, Australia, England and South Africa are in Group B. The matches for both groups – apart from the India games – will be played across Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi.

A total of 12 group-stage matches will be played, followed by the semifinals and final. The tournament returns

to the cricket calendar for the first time since the last edition was staged in 2017.

The two semi-final matches will take place on March 4 and 5, and with both games being allocated reserve days, it's not impossible that they end up taking place on the same day, though Dubai is usually dry at that time of the year. The final is slated for March 9, with a reserve day.

The first semi-final will be played in the UAE, irrespective of India's involvement, while the second semi-final will be played in Lahore. The final will be slotted for Lahore, with the provision of holding it in the UAE if 2013 champions India make it to the title clash.

Commenting on the schedule, ICC Chair, Jay Shah said, "The ICC is delighted to release the schedule for the Men's Champions Trophy 2025, marking the tournament's much-anticipated return since 2017. The thrilling competition, in which eight teams battle it out to claim the iconic white jackets, will provide fans with 15 matches of unmissable entertainment."

'There has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for nomination': Manu Bhaker on Khel Ratna exclusion row



MUMBAI, DEC 24:

With the sporting world up in arms on Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker's name apparently not getting included in the list of Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna awardees, the shooter on Tuesday said that "there has been a lapse may be on my part" while filing the nominations. A day after the sports

ministry had to do damage control by insisting that the list of awardees is yet to be finalised, Bhaker took to social media to clarify her position on not being among those recommended for the country's highest sporting honour. "With regards to ongoing issue for my nomination for the most prestigious Khel Ratna award

— I would like to state that as an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country. I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination which is being corrected," Bhaker wrote on X.

The Haryana shooter said her aim is to perform for the country and it would not change whether she gets an award or not. "Awards and recognition keeps me motivated but are not my goal. Irrespective of the award I shall remain motivated to win more medals for my country. It is a request to everyone, please do not speculate on this," she said.

Bhaker had opened the Indian account in the Paris 2024 Olympics by winning a bronze in the women's 10-metre air pistol event, making her the first woman shooter from India to win a medal at any Olympics.

'Flashing outside off something he's going to have to resist': Matthew Hayden on how Virat Kohli can succeed in 4th Test



MUMBAI, DEC 24:

Former Australia batter Matthew Hayden said that Virat Kohli needed to curb his tendency to go for deliveries outside the off stump if he wanted to come back into form. Kohli, who was enduring a lean patch before com-

ing to Australia looked to have found his rhythm when he scored a century in the 1st Test. But since that knock, he has failed to spark to life in the series, scoring just 7, 11 and 3 in his next 3 innings. "There could have been magnificent wins, there could

have been losses, there could have been spinning conditions, I mean, you can list off a hundred different areas where Virat Kohli, over his magnificent career, would have batted. But in Melbourne, he's going to have a good batting track. What he does need to do is find a way to continue staying at the crease. Flashing outside the off-stump is something that he's going to have to resist. And I suggest – he gets in line with the ball a bit more and looks to play down the ground a little bit more" Hayden told.

Hayden also asked Kohli to take a page out of Sachin Tendulkar's iconic knock of 241 in Sydney in 2004 where the India legend, who was also suffering from a rough patch of form, avoided his trademark offside drives in the entire 613 minutes he was in the middle.

'Devastated': Nathan McSweeney says about his drop from Australia Test squad

MUMBAI, DEC 24:

Nathan McSweeney who opened for Australia in the first three Tests said he has devastated by the decision to axe him from the remaining two matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. McSweeney who made his debut at Perth has been dropped, with Sam Konstas set to play his maiden Test at the MCG on Thursday. McSweeney, originally a middle-order batsman, was included in the Test squad after Australia were unable to zero-in on a reliable partner to Usman Khawaja. In the six inning he batted, McSweeney had scores of: 10, 0, 39, 10*, 9 & 4 as Jasprit Bumrah repeatedly tested Australia's batting line-up.

And eventually has been left out of the squad for the last two Tests as the batsman joined his Big Bash side Brisbane Heat for whom he scored an unbeaten 79 on Sunday. "Devastated. I get the dream come true and then didn't quite work out the way I wanted," the 25-year-old told.

"It's all part of it and I'll get my head down and get back in the nets and work really hard, and hopefully be ready to go for my next opportunity. It's the game we are in. If you don't take your opportunity, and you are not performing as well as you want to, your position's never safe," he added. "I missed out a few times with the bat. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to take my opportunity but will work really hard to make sure, if the opportunity comes around again, I am definitely ready." Sweeney's exclusion has already brought criticism with former captain Michael Clarke criticising the decision. "No matter who they picked in that opening position, they had to give him the series," Clarke said on his Beyond23 podcast.

'I think he had his point but': R Ashwin on time he got a pasting from then-India coach Ravi Shastri in 2018

NEW DELHI, DEC 24:

Recently-retired India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin revealed in a chat about the time when he got a pasting from then-India coach Ravi Shastri. In a podcast with Sky Sports, host Nasser Hussain asked Ashwin about the masterclass with Ian Ward in 2018 where they discussed his variations, including the carrom ball. "I got a real pasting from Ravi Shastri for doing that masterclass. I'm sure you've heard about that from him. I think he had his point but somehow inside me I never felt insecure about it. I think there's two things in the game, right? One is to be able to deliver what you have and the other is to be able to respond to what you throw down the other end and I always believed and I had the courage to say here's what I have to dish out," Ashwin



said. "Let's see if you've got it in you to come at me and very few times I found that the batters have not had the courage to come at me for that and I think it's all it also plays a very deep mental game. Probably it's a battle I have in my own head but all

that aside I've never been shy of sharing what I've got because for me every time I shared I found a question inside me so when I shared and I got a question I had this unique capability to be able to take that question on board and find answers for it," he added.

Son of tailor from Banda in UP, Arsh Mohammad fulfills father's badminton dream becoming newest national doubles champion

NEW DELHI, DEC 24:

Arsh Mohammad, 19, who emerged National doubles champion, was born in one of India's most under-developed regions, Banda in Uttar Pradesh. The municipality of Bundelkhand receives special grants reserved for 'backward' regions. His father Ashfaq Ahmed runs a tailoring shop stitching bespoke suits called 'New Fashion Tailors'. Ashfaq always nursed his passion for badminton, and eventually packed off his son to train in the sport.

Amidst the unchanging, perpetual ambient sound of the ticking of the sewing machine needle, the whirring of the pulley wheel and the monotonous tapping of the foot pedal, Ashfaq's cherished distraction was badminton – for fitness and recreation. Beautifully cut, crisply ironed three-piece suits would line the shelves, even as the young Arsh took a liking



for the fast pace and hand-speed of doubles shuttle.

An U13 title at Tezpur in Assam, and stagnant singles results, would help him make up his mind about choosing doubles. "Interest in singles dipped, and my coach Anwar Ali in Banda and my father whole heartedly supported my

decision even before I turned 15 to play doubles," he had once said.

It was a strictly middle class household, though Ashfaq never deprived his son of anything. "He ensured I never felt the pinch. He'd say – tum bas jaakar khelo. I'll handle everything." His coach though not

equipped to guide him in the doubles game, didn't force him to cling onto a singles career, and Arsh would soon find himself at the Gopichand Academy in Noida, focussed on doubles. His ability to learn quickly and soak up the doubles attitude, would fetch him summons to the Hyderabad main centre. A bunch of good results with Sanskar Saraswat, would get him into the Asian U17 India team, and a good run in Thailand would leave the pair with a silver.

Arsh was thus one of the bustling band of doubles specialists keen on pushing through in the men's doubles event, buoyed by achievements of India's highest ranked shuttlers currently – World No 5 Chirag Shetty & Satwiksairaj Rankireddy. "In fact Chirag is my idol for his defense and consistency. I also love Hendra Setiawan, he's so calm and composed.

BGT: 'Good players always return to the runs', McDonald confident of Khawaja regaining form

NEW DELHI, DEC 24:

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald has thrown his support behind top-order batter Usman Khawaja to retain his form in the last two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after an underwhelming start to the series against India.

Khawaja, who turned 38 last Wednesday, has scored just 55 runs across the opening three Tests and has reached 50 in only one of his past 17 innings for the national side. The Australian coach, however, is confident that Khawaja's preparation indicates a sizeable score is imminent, despite his recent struggle for form.

"I think he's fine, Usman's not a concern. Batting in recent times obviously has been quite difficult with a ball-dominating bat. But his method is clear, the way he's been preparing is clear and good players always return to the



runs. I'm sure that will be the case over the next couple of Test matches," McDonald told.

McDonald also backed Labuschagne, who ended his poor run of form with an assertive knock of 64 during Australia's ten-wicket victory at the Adelaide Oval, saying he performs at his best when he adopts a proactive approach at

the crease.

"We're pretty much on the record about when he (Labuschagne) is at his best, he's showing intent, he's busy at the crease and we saw that in Adelaide. He can be quite annoying at the crease and we want to see an annoying Marnus on Boxing Day," said the head coach.

McDonald admitted that Australia's batting lineup has shown inconsistency in the first three Tests, delivering mixed performances at the crease and placing significant pressure on the team's pacemen.

"Both batting lineups have struggled and I think that's a credit to both bowling lineups. The surfaces have probably also lent themselves to the ball dominating the bat (in this series). That's no different to the previous summers we've had here," McDonald said.

"India's got a dangerous batting lineup but I think there'll be a recalibration somewhere in the next couple of Test matches for both batting lineups," he added.

With the series tied 1-1 after the three Tests, the fourth match is scheduled to take place at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on December 26.

ICC rankings: Smriti Mandhana's stunning form takes her to a career-best rating in T20Is



MUMBAI, DEC 24:

Smriti Mandhana, who cracked half-centuries in all three T20Is against the West Indies, is up to second position in the batting chart for the shortest format with a career-best 753 rating points, the ICC said. Mandhana, who has been in stunning form across both the white-ball formats in 2024, is now at the second spot in both

ODI and T20I rankings, being Laura Wolvaardt and Beth Mooney respectively. With her half-century against West Indies in the 2nd ODI in Vadodara on Tuesday, Mandhana has scored 50+ in six straight international outings, starting with a century in Perth against Australia in the third and final match of that series. In the bowling rank-

ings, India's new-ball bowler Renuka Singh Thakur has moved into the top 20 for the first time after a match-winning haul of five for 29.

Australia all-rounder Annabel Sutherland's match-winning efforts in the ICC Women's Championship series against New Zealand have helped her make rapid gains in the ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings.

The 23-year-old has attained career-best positions in all three lists after being adjudged Player of the Match in the second and third ODIs that Australia won after the first match was abandoned without a ball being bowled.

Her scores of 105 not out and 42 in the two matches have helped her shoot up 11 places to 18th position in the batting rankings while her haul of three for 39 in the third ODI has lifted her three places to 17th position in the bowling rankings. She has also moved up to seventh from ninth in the all-rounders' list after being named the Player of the Series.

My knee is fine, let's not worry about who bats where: Rohit Sharma



NEW DELHI, DEC 24:

Ahead of the Boxing Day Test, India skipper Rohit Sharma on Tuesday dismissed fears about the knee injury he suffered during practice, saying it was fine while keeping the suspense over his batting position. Rohit had got hit on the left knee during the training session at the MCG on

the opener's spot but KL Rahul's impressive 77 in India's win at Perth prompted a rejig of the batting order with the skipper moving down to No 6. The change though has not been fruitful for Rohit as he has managed 10, 3 and 6 runs in the last three innings, while Rahul has encashed on the opportunity by notching up a fine 84 in the first innings at Brisbane in the third Test.

The skipper said, he would do whatever is best for the team. "Let's not worry about who bats where. Something that we need to figure and not something I would be discussing here. We will do what is best for the team," Rohit On Kohli's form, and his supposed shortcoming outside off-stump. Rohit said, the stalwart will find a way out of the slump. Kohli scored a century in the second innings of the Perth Test, which India won after being dismissed for 150 in the first essay.

He was expected to reclaim

Mohammed Shami not deemed fit for consideration for remaining Border Gavaskar Tests

MUMBAI, DEC 24:

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday stated that even though pacer Mohammed Shami has completely recovered from his heel problem, he was still not been deemed fit for consideration for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

According to the BCCI medical team, Shami's left knee has exhibited minor swelling due to increased joint loading from his bowling workload due to him bowling 43 overs in the Ranji Trophy match for Bengal against Madhya Pradesh in November and then playing in all nine games of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT).

"The swelling is on the expected lines, owing to the increased bowling after a prolonged period," the BCCI statement read.

"Based on the current medical assessment, the BCCI Medical Team has determined that his knee requires more time for controlled exposure to bowling loads. Consequently, he has not been deemed fit for consideration for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy," the statement continued.

"Shami will continue to undergo targeted strength and conditioning work under the guidance of the medical staff at BCCI's Centre of Excellence and build his bowling loads needed to meet the demands of the longest format of the game. His participation in the Vijay Hazare Trophy will depend on the progress of his knee," it added.

Shami, who last featured in a Test during India's World Test Championship final defeat to Australia in June 2023, recently made a successful comeback after a year's break due to a knee injury.