

## Afghan refugees celebrate Champions Trophy debut amid Deportation concerns



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Afghan refugees in Pakistan gathered at a café in Islamabad on Friday to cheer for their national cricket team as they played in the Champions Trophy for the first time. However, the celebration quickly turned to concerns over the looming threat of deportation.

Pakistan, the host of the prestigious tournament, is currently undergoing a major repatriation drive targeting approximately four million Afghan refugees who have sought refuge in the

country over the past 40 years, especially following the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

While Afghan fans outside the stadium in Karachi celebrated their team's match against South Africa, those in Islamabad voiced fears after the government began deporting Afghan refugees from the capital and Rawalpindi in January.

Rahil Talash, a human rights defender who fled Afghanistan three years ago, shared her concerns, stating, "People who came after 2021 only came for safety, because their lives were in danger." She described heightened anxiety since the recent deportations began.

Although Pakistan's Foreign Office denies allegations of harassment, calling the deportations part of a broader 2023 campaign, refugees like Marzia Delawar and Parwin Askari, both of whom have had to live with the fear of being forced out, continue to face uncertainty.

Amid these pressures, Afghan refugees remain hopeful of a better future, but the shadow of deportation looms large as they balance their passion for cricket with fears for their safety.

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