Rain ruins opening day after Victoria tear through SA top order

MELBOURNE: Heavy, unrelenting rain ruined the opening day of the Sheffield Shield final at the Junction Oval in Melbourne but not before Victoria ripped through South Australia's top order after winning the toss.

Scott Boland, Fergus O'Neill and Will Sutherland each took a wicket on a lively surface to leave South Australia 55 for 3 from 28 overs at lunch before rain ruined the remainder of the day. Boland, celebrating his 100th Shield appearance for Victoria, made the first breakthrough in the seventh over. He had been slightly wayward with the new ball including firing one down the leg side for four byes. But he found his rhythm from around the wicket and delivered a peach to remove

Mackenzie Harvey for the third successive time in two matches. He angled in and seamed away from a perfect length to scratch Harvey's outside edge as he was forced to defend.

O'Neill then pushed fuller to Henry Hunt at the other end and got rewarded. Hunt played an expansive cover drive but some late swing took the edge and Peter Handscomb made a sharp chance look simple at second slip.

Sutherland replaced Boland from the southern end and struck with his fifth delivery, nipping one back off the seam to hit Jason Sangha on the pad below

the knee roll. It was 50-50 whether it hit in line but the umpire was confident it did. That left South Australia 21 for 3 and in deep trouble.

But Nathan McSweeney and Alex Carey steadied. McSweeney looked in excellent touch striking four boundaries in his unbeaten 25. He unfurled back-to-back boundaries off Boland, pinging him through midwicket off the front foot before pulling him powerfully off the back. Carey was less assured, but he was equally busy to get South Australia safely to lunch.

But rain fell just as the players were emerging for the start of the second session. The rain was so heavy it created puddles on the outfield and it never ceased for the remainder of the day.

Jindal Panther clinch 10–9 extra-time win over Jaipur Achievers

NEW DELHI: Jindal Panther claimed a hard-fought 10–9 victory over Jaipur Achievers in an intense extra-time contest at the Northern India Polo Championship, held at the Jaipur Polo Grounds.

Jindal Panther started strong, building a 7–4 lead by halftime through coordinated play and efficient finishing. Juan Gris Zavaleta led the scoring with four goals, supported by Siddhant Sharma (3), Ramiro Zavaleta (2) and Naveen Jindal (1).

Jaipur Achievers mounted a strong comeback in the second half, overturning the deficit to take the lead with a high-tempo attacking display. Alejo Aramburu starred with six goals, while Sawai Padmanabh Singh added two and Daniel Otamendi contributed one.

Samba Police hold Volleyball tournament

EARTH NEWS SERVICE

SAMBA: A volleyball tournament organised by Samba Police under the Civic Action Programme (2025-2026) concluded successfully at Higher Secondary School, Gurha Slathia under the jurisdiction of Police Station Vijaypur. The event saw enthusiastic participation from eight teams across the district and attracted a large number of local spectators.

The final match was played between Team Rahya and Team Garota Mandi. Team Rahya emerged

as the champion of the tournament after defeating its opponent in an exciting contest. The winning and runner up teams were

awarded trophies by the Samba Police. SDPO Vijaypur, SHO PS Vijaypur and other Police officers were present on the occasion.

'Have some unfinished business at Asian Games': Mirabai Chanu

NEW DELHI: 2020 Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Mirabai Chanu has all the medals in her cabinet barring one, the Asian Games.

The continental medal has eluded the weightlifter from Manipur despite coming as close as fourth in the 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games.

Mirabai first competed in the continental showpiece at the age of 19, finishing ninth at the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon. She was later forced to withdraw from the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta due to a back injury that disrupted her preparations. Later in Hangzhou, a hip injury dashed her hopes after coming agonisingly close to sealing a podium finish. The setback had also side-lined her for nearly five months.

"The Asian Games is very important personally because I still have unfinished business there," Mirabai said on the sidelines of the Khelo India Tribal Games on Thursday.

However, it is not going to be easy for the experienced weightlifter who will be featuring in both Commonwealth and Asian

Games in a space of 40 days and different weight categories.

"I will keep my weight within 48kg till the Commonwealth Games, but within two months of it, there are Asian Games, which is in 49 kg, so I will have to switch back," noted Mirabai. "First of all, maintaining this weight is very tough. Earlier, I used to compete in the 49 kg category, so the adjustment has been challenging. Now, for the 48 kg category, I have to be much more careful and disciplined with my weight management. I need to control my diet more strictly than before. I have to eat less and carefully balance my protein and carbohydrate intake. Even if I feel like eating something, I

have to avoid it because it can increase my weight. So overall, maintaining this weight is very difficult, and every athlete feels the same at this level," she explained further.

Mirabai had a brilliant start to the season with record-breaking lift in the 48kg category. She lifted 89kg in the snatch — her best effort despite competing in a weight class below her usual 49kg division. She followed it up with a successful 116kg lift in clean and jerk, which stands as the national record in the women's 48kg category. Apart from the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games, Mirabai Chanu will also focus on the Asian Weightlifting Championships and World Championships this year.

Why did Max Verstappen eject journalist from Japanese Grand Prix press conference

NEW DELHI: Red Bull's Max Verstappen ejected a journalist from his Japanese Grand Prix press conference due to an issue between the two at last year's season finale in Abu Dhabi. After Verstappen entered the room, he refused to engage with the media until the aforementioned journo left the room. "One second – I'm not speaking before he's leaving," the 28-year-old said which prompted the journo to ask if he was serious. In response, Verstappen asked him to 'get out' and after he had left, said, "Now, we can start."

The controversy between the journalist and Verstappen stemmed from a question that the the former had asked the racer last year at Abu Dhabi on whether he regretted his incident with George Russell of Mercedes at the Spanish Grand Prix.

In that race, the Red Bull star had been penalized for appearing to deliberately drive into Russell's car. He was subsequently docked 9 points and plummeted from 5th to 10th.

"You forget all the other stuff that happened in my season. The

only thing you mention is Barcelona. I knew that would come. You're giving me a stupid grin now. I don't know. Yeah, it's part of racing at the end. You live and learn. The championship is one of 24 rounds. I've also had a lot of early Christmas presents given to me in the second half, so you can also question that," Verstappen had responded to Richards' query back then.

The rest of Verstappen's press conference proceeded without incident. The 28-year-old cut a relaxed figure as he fielded questions about his recent participation in a sports

car race at Germany's Nurburgring Nordschleife and an outing in a Japanese Super GT car at the Fuji racetrack. Verstappen, eighth in the overall standings after a sixth-place finish in Australia and retirement in China, has had a difficult start to the season.

Frank, forthright and fiercely competitive, he has been among the strongest critics of the sport's new power unit rules.

"This is the reality that we are in now," he said on Thursday. "You just have to accept that at the moment."

Kylian Mbappe dismisses reports of Real Madrid diagnosing the wrong knee

NEW DELHI: Kylian Mbappe has denied reports stating that his club Real Madrid had examined the wrong knee late last year which led to the France forward's injury getting aggravated. The news had been first reported on the football show 'After Foot' on French broadcaster RMC Sport in which it was stated that the medical staff at the club had initially scanned his right knee instead of the left one.

"The report that said that they (examined) the wrong knee is false," Mbappé said at a press conference ahead of France's World Cup warmup against Brazil. "I am maybe responsible indirectly for this situation, because when you don't communicate on what's happening, it opens doors to others' interpretations."

The report had said that Real Madrid's medical staff ran an MRI scan on his right knee, while Mbappe had actually injured his left knee in a game against Celta

Vigo in December. Since the story broke, it has been corroborated by other organisations like The Athletic.

The report also pointed out that Real Madrid's medical staff had examined Mbappe's knee and declared him fit. The severity of the injury in his left knee was later confirmed when Mbappe underwent a second check up in Paris.

Mbappe said he has "very clear communication" with Real Madrid. The 27-year-old said on Monday

in Paris that his knee feels fine. He was used as a substitute in Real Madrid's last two matches as he works his way back into form.

"There was a lot of frustration, a lot of anger, and then also some anxiety at one point," Mbappé told French media late Monday at a promotional event. "I had reached a stage where I didn't know what was wrong with me. I didn't go through that period in the best way. I wasn't the happiest player in the world.

BCCI announces Phase 2 fixtures of IPL 2026; CSK, MI to clash twice

NEW DELHI: The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday unveiled the second phase schedule of the 2026 edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL), with the remaining 50 league matches set to be played from April 13 to May 24 across 12 venues in the country.

The phase will begin in Hyderabad with Sunrisers Hyderabad taking on Rajasthan Royals, while one of the most anticipated rivalries of the tournament will see Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians meet twice during this stretch. The two five-time champions will clash in Mumbai on April 23 before renewing their rivalry in Chennai on May 2.

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru will not travel to Chennai this season, as their only meeting with CSK takes place earlier in the tournament at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on April 5. RCB will also stage two matches in Raipur later in the season, facing Mumbai Indians on May 10 and Kolk-

ata Knight Riders on May 13.

The scenic Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA) Stadium in Dharamsala returns to the IPL calendar as well. The venue will host the fixture between Delhi Capitals and Punjab Kings on May 11, the same match that had been halted there last year due to cross-border tensions between India and Pakistan.

Punjab Kings will play two more matches in Dharamsala, taking on Mumbai Indians on May 14 and Royal Challengers Bengaluru on May 17.

Overall, matches in this phase will be staged in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Jaipur, Dharamsala, Raipur and New Chandigarh.

Punjab Kings will split their home fixtures between New Chandigarh and Dharamsala, while Rajasthan Royals will host four matches in Jaipur after ending their assignment in Guwahati during the first phase.

International cricket returns to Bengaluru in busy 2026-27 season

BENGALURU: Nagpur, Chennai, Guwahati, Ranchi and Ahmedabad will host the five Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, which will end a busy 2026-27 home season for India, in which they are set to host as many as four bilateral tours. The four teams touring are West Indies (three ODIs and five T20Is from September 27 to October 17), Sri Lanka (three ODIs and three T20Is from December 13 to 27), Zimbabwe (three ODIs from January 3 to 9) and Australia (five Tests from January 21 to March 3).

Zimbabwe's visit will be their first for a bilateral series in India since 2002.

The season will also mark Bengaluru's return to hosting international cricket for the first time since the stampede last June that

led to the loss of 11 lives outside Chinnaswamy Stadium. The ground will host the fifth T20I against West Indies on October 17 and the second ODI against Sri Lanka on December 16.

Bengaluru is one of five venues that will host two international matches over the season. The others are Guwahati (second ODI against West Indies and third Test against Australia), Hyderabad (fourth T20I against West Indies and second ODI against Zimbabwe), Ranchi (second T20I against West Indies and fourth Test against Australia) and Ahmedabad (third ODI against Sri Lanka and fifth Test against Australia).

Guwahati, which hosted its inaugural Test in November 2025, is set to host a Test match for a second consecutive season.

Scientists just broke the Solar Power Limit everyone thought was absolute

Solar energy is widely seen as a key tool in reducing reliance on fossil fuels and slowing climate change. The Sun delivers a vast amount of energy to Earth every second, but today's solar cells can only capture a small portion of it. This limitation comes from a so-called "physical ceiling" that has long been considered unavoidable.

In a study published today (March 25) in the Journal of the American Chemical Society, researchers from Kyushu University in Japan, working with collaborators at Johannes Gutenberg University (JGU) Mainz in Germany, introduced a new approach to overcome this barrier. They used a molybdenum-based metal complex known as a "spin-flip" emitter to capture extra energy through singlet fission (SF), often described as a "dream technology" for improving light conversion.

This method achieved an energy conversion efficiency of about 130%, exceeding the traditional 100% limit and pointing toward more powerful future solar cells.

Solar cells generate electricity when photons from sunlight strike a semiconductor and transfer their energy to electrons, setting them in motion and producing an electric current. This process can be visualized as a relay, where energy is passed along particle by particle.

However, not all sunlight contributes equally. Low-energy infrared photons lack the power to excite electrons, while high-energy photons, such as blue light, lose excess

energy as heat. Because of this imbalance, solar cells can only utilize roughly one-third of incoming sunlight. This restriction is known as the Shockley–Queisser limit and has posed a major challenge for decades.

"We have two main strategies to break through this limit," says Yoichi Sasaki, Associate Professor at Kyushu University's Faculty of Engineering. "One is to convert lower-energy infrared photons into higher-energy visible photons. The other, what we explore here, is to use SF to generate two excitons from a single exciton photon."

Under typical conditions, one photon produces just one spin-singlet exciton after excitation. With SF, that single high-energy exciton can split into two lower-energy spin-triplet excitons, potentially doubling the usable energy. While materials like tetracene can support this process, efficiently capturing the resulting excitons has remained difficult.

"The energy can be easily 'stolen' by a mechanism called Förster resonance energy transfer (FRET) before multiplication occurs," Sasaki explains. "We therefore needed an energy acceptor that selectively captures the multiplied triplet excitons after fission."

To solve this problem, the researchers turned to metal complexes, which can be precisely engineered at the molecular level. They identified a molybdenum-based "spin-flip" emitter that can effectively collect the energy produced during SF.

RPA matters, but AI changes how automation works

RPA (robotic process automation) is a practical and proven way to reduce manual work in business processes without AI systems. By using software bots to follow fixed rules, companies can automate repetitive tasks like data entry and invoice processing, and to a certain extent, report generation. Adoption grew quickly in many sectors, especially in finance, operations, and customer support.

In recent years the technology has matured. While RPA is still used, business processes can become more complex. Many systems handle unstructured data, like messages and documents. Rule-based automation struggles to handle these inputs, since it depends on predefined steps and structured formats. RPA works best in stable environments where processes do not change often. When conditions change or inputs vary, bots can fail or need updating, adding maintenance overhead and reducing the value of automation over time.

Gartner has pointed to more adaptive automation systems on the market, designed to handle variation and uncertainty, combining automation with machine learning or language models, allowing them to process a broader set of inputs.

AI has changed how companies think about automation, as systems

from vendors already known in the RPA space, like Appian and Blue Prism, can now interpret context and adjust their activities, especially relevant for tasks that involve text or images.

Large language models' ability to summarise documents and extract important details, and respond to queries in natural language offers automation in areas previously difficult to manage. McKinsey & Company research suggests generative AI could automate decision-making and communication work tasks, not routine data handling.

The change does not replace automation, but rather modifies it. Rather than building chains of rules, businesses could use AI to handle variations in input media. Automation becomes more flexible, with systems able to adjust to different inputs without reconfiguration.

That's the theory. AI systems produce inconsistent outputs, and their behaviour is not predictable. Firms can combine AI with existing automation tools, using each where it fits best. Getting the balance right – intelligent automation – is a hot topic at industry events and on the

pages of the RPA and AI media outlets.

Despite these changes, RPA remains relevant in many settings. Tasks that involve structured data and stable workflows still benefit from rule-based automation. Common examples include payroll processing and compliance checks, as well as system integrations.

In these circumstances, RPA's predictability can be an advantage. Bots follow defined steps and produce consistent results, which is useful in regulated environments. Financial reporting and auditing processes, for example, frequently require strict control and traceability.

Rather than being replaced, RPA is often used with AI. Automation workflows may begin with AI systems that interpret input, then pass structured data to RPA bots for execution. The combination allows companies to extend automation without discarding existing systems.

Vendors that built their business around RPA are adapting to this change. Blue Prism, now part of SS&C Technologies, has expanded its focus to include what it describes as intelligent automation. This approach combines RPA with AI tools capable of processing more complex inputs.