

# PV Sindhu, HS Prannoy advance at Asian Championships; Lakshya Sen exits

**NINGBO:** Lakshya Sen faced an early exit at the Badminton Asia Championships in Ningbo on Wednesday, crashing out to a 21-12, 21-19 defeat. Sen briefly resisted from 8-14 down to 16-16 in the second set, but was largely lacklustre.

Sen, the All England finalist, had been keen to do well at the Asians, but he looked rusty and error-prone, not finding his length whatsoever.

PV Sindhu, back on the court after missing the All England, showed the fight that keeps her in contention at the top level. Besides Satwik-Chirag who actually won the title in 2023, Sindhu came closest to making the Asian final, but had lost to Akane Yamaguchi at the penultimate step.

On Wednesday, she played the Malaysian Wong Ling Ching, ranked 38, and lost the first set 15-21. The comeback needed the In-

dian to perceptibly raise her foot speed and hitting pace to down a pugnacious opponent. The second set achieved parity fast enough, but in the decider, Wong simply hurried the rallies herself drawing out frustrated smash errors from Sindhu.

The Indian was clearly the better player, and led 17-13 but allowed her opponent to claw back into contention at 18-18. Wong dared to take the next point, and that infuriated Sindhu enough to bring in her power – rage at the crunch and muscle her way past the 22 year old.

Sindhu next plays All England champ Wang Zhi Yi, a player she defeated at the last World Championships in Round 2 next. While Sindhu spent 67 minutes, Zhi Yi was done with dismissing Chiu Pin-Chian 21-16, 21-12 in 46 minutes. The World No 2 has been on a high since

her Birmingham triumph at All England, but that is just the kind of tension Sindhu can put her under, playing in front of the home crowd. While Ayush quietened them on Wednesday, Sindhu can get going against Zhi Yi and wait for a similar soothing silence of the Ningbo crowd.

In another women's singles match, a slew of errors – 7 to be precise – to the backline, where Tanvi Sharma just couldn't keep the lifts or clears in bounds, ended her first outing at the Asian Championships.

Even coach Irwansyah was zapped at the complete listlessness as the Indian flatlined after leading 14-12 in the second against Malaysian Letshanaa Karupathevan, as Tanvi went on to lose the next 9 points in a row. Only a little while earlier, Irwansyah had watched Sindhu fight back, but the youngster seemed restrict-

ed in her movement as her high-quality shot making wasn't backed by lithe movements on the feet.

The Malaysian went on to win 21-19, 21-14, as Tanvi's tired shots in the end were nothing close to the sharpness required to close out sets, the way Sindhu did. Malvika Bansod too had found the going tough against Busanan Ongbamrungphan.

While Lakshya was joined on the fallen way side by Kidambi Srikanth who lost 21-18, 9-21, 11-21 to Loh Kean Yew, India's grand old shuttler, HS Prannoy prevailed. He scored a 24-22, 21-12 win over Vietnamese Nguyen Hai Dang. It was a typical slow start from Prannoy at 7-12 in the first, before he made the move at 18-20 with three straight points, and then sailed through the second. He plays Weng Hong Yang in a Malaysian Masters rematch.

# Molineux captaincy call will be judged on T20 World Cup

**NEW DELHI:** Australia's national selector Shawn Flegler has conceded that Sophie Molineux's back problem has created an "unprecedented" situation early in her captaincy career, but believes it's the correct appointment despite her injury history and remains confident she will be fit for the T20 World Cup.



Molineux, who has previously had extended periods on the sidelines with foot and ACL injuries, was named as Alyssa Healy's successor across formats earlier this year before taking charge in stages, beginning with the T20I series against India and then full-time for the tour of the West Indies following Healy's retirement.

However, by then Molineux had already been struck with a stress reaction in her back and was unable to bowl in the Caribbean, which Flegler termed a "setback", during which she played as a batter-only during the three T20Is and in the first ODI before being rested for the rest of the series.

Molineux's appointment came ahead of a period where T20 cricket will be a major focus: this year's World Cup is followed by the new Champions Trophy in 2027 and then the 2028 Olympic Games and next T20 World Cup.

"We were clear from the start that the T20 World Cup was the priority series

and we were going to make decisions around that," Flegler told reporters as the 2026-27 contracts list was announced.

"So, yeah, the stress reaction in the back during the Indian series, not ideal, but things do happen. We just made decisions around that and we decided we could either push through with it, take a big risk and see if she got through, or we just pull back a little bit.

"We decided to pull back, but we still thought it was important that she was around the group [in the West Indies]. She's on track for the T20 World Cup and that's what the goal was at the start. It's probably a fair point to say it's unprecedented. But we think, on balance, she was the candidate that was the best option for a number of reasons: her on-field experience and success that she'd had, her off-field connection and a vision for the team. "We'll be judged on that as time goes on, but we think it was the right decision at

the time. I think she's done really well in the games that she has captained and the way she's been around the group so far. I guess we'll see how that ends up in the T20 World Cup and how it goes in the future as well."

Flegler added that Molineux would not be considered for a non-bowling role at the World Cup. "We're certainly not looking at her as a batting captain," he said. "She'll be playing as a bowling allrounder to be available."

Flegler reiterated that the appointment ahead of Tahlia McGrath and Ashleigh Gardner, who are joint vice-captains with McGrath leading as a stand-in on the West Indies tour, had not been a hasty decision and that Molineux would have been close to the job previously if not for her injury layoffs. "These conversations took place over 12 months, essentially," he said. "Soph was picked as a 20-year-old initially and her leadership capabilities were recognised very early.

## Destiny's child... Give Vaibhav Sooryavanshi his India cap now, don't make him wait'

**NEW DELHI:** Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan wants selectors to stop waiting and hand Vaibhav Sooryavanshi his India cap – and after what the 15-year-old did to Jasprit Bumrah on Tuesday, it's hard to argue with him.

Sooryavanshi hit Bumrah on the very first ball he faced, then came back and hit him again off a slower one. He finished with 39 off 14 balls.

"Sooryavanshi is a destiny's child," Pathan said. "What he is doing at 15 in white-ball cricket, I don't think we have ever seen anyone do this."

Pathan said the youngster had been specifically waiting for this moment. "This 15-year-old wonder kid says – I am waiting for Jasprit Bumrah. I got out to him last year. I will come this year and hit him. And he hit Bumrah on the very first ball." What impressed Pathan most was that Sooryavanshi had actually forced Bumrah into doubt. "The way Bumrah had no plans visible, the way he moved to the slower one – Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has forced even Bumrah to think. In white-ball cricket, India has not found a bowler like Bumrah. He is a GOAT. And this feat has been achieved against him."

Pathan said the secret is in Sooryavanshi's mindset. "Whatever bowler comes in front, he does not watch his action, he only thinks too much. He only watches the ball.



## LG's Diary

Office of LG J&K @OfficeOfLGJandK

My humble tribute to the great revolutionary Shri Mangal Pandey on his Punya Tithi. His patriotic spirit, undying courage and selfless sacrifice for the motherland continue to guide us towards building a strong and prosperous Bharat.

Office of LG J&K @OfficeOfLGJandK - 1h  
Chaired the 2nd University Council Meeting of Cluster University of Srinagar at Lok Bhavan, earlier today.



● Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha today ordered termination of two more government employees over terror links. Terminated employees include Farhat Ali Khanday and Mohammad Shafi Dar.

● The Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, has prorogued the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory, formally winding up the Legislative Assembly session.

## CM's Diary

Omar Abdullah @OmarAbdullah

So the ceasefire allows a strait to reopen, a strait that was open & freely available to everyone to use before the war started. What exactly did this 39 day war achieve for the US? #UnjustWar

Office of Chief Minister, J&K @CM\_Jnk

Hon'ble MLA @mianmeherali called on the Chief Minister to apprise him of various issues concerning Kangan constituency. He informed the Chief Minister that the new 100-Bedded MCH Hospital at Kangan is nearing completion and will be ready for commissioning shortly.



Office of Chief Minister, J&K @CM\_Jnk

Hon'ble MLA Bani @RameshwarS58316 called on the Chief Minister along-with a delegation from his constituency.

## Badminton to test synthetic shuttles at smaller grade and junior tournaments with sustainability aims

**NEW DELHI:** Just last year, the falling popularity of duck meat had coincided with badminton shuttlecock manufacturers struggling for raw material to make shuttles. It had led to a twofold rise in prices of certain shuttle stocks.

A year on, BWF has clearly brought forward its plans to introduce synthetic shuttles that mimic the look and feel of the feather ones.

BWF approved use of synthetic shuttlecocks at selected tournaments. These include synthetics made by VICTOR and YONEX, and will be used at BWF Grade 3 tournaments and Junior International tournaments.

The federation said this initiative was part of BWF's long term approach to "evaluating synthetic feather shuttlecocks for potential use at the elite level."

The federation had been working equally with VICTOR, a Taiwanese sporting major and badminton equipment market leader YONEX to assess the quality and performance of synthetic shuttlecocks in higher level competitive settings, with a particular focus on ensuring that flight and playing characteristics align with current competition standards.

BWF specified the approved products for use during this trial phase as:

- VICTOR New Carbon Sonic Max Synthetic Shuttlecock (SC NCS MAX 12)
- YONEX CROSSWIND 70 Synthetic Shuttlecock

BWF will trial will include the stocks of manufacturer performance data, alongside feedback from players, technical officials, and event organisers, it said.

"This information will support BWF's ongoing assessment and inform future decisions regarding the potential use of synthetic shuttlecocks at top tier tournaments," the BWF said. Duck feathers are used to make relatively cheaper shuttles. Geese feathers are reserved for the elite ones because of their stronger stem, durability and lack of wobble. China's cost-efficient factories harvest these feathers after the meat is consumed. But birds only reared for meat are unlikely to be reared exclusively for feathers.

Last year, national head coach India, Pullela Gopichand had said the issue is broader than just the immediate price rise, even existential. "The dependency on goose feathers, which we have, is a problem we need to address as a sport. The growth of the sport across three populous nations, India, China and Indonesia, has ensured that there is demand for raw material of goose feathers, which has gone up a lot.



Office of Chief Minister, J&K @CM\_Jnk

Chief Minister chaired a meeting on Heritage Promotion and Cultural Tourism in J&K, to review measures for conservation and adaptive reuse of heritage assets to promote tourism.

The Chief Minister stressed on strengthening institutional mechanisms and developing heritage-based tourism circuits to position J&K as a cultural tourism destination



Office of Chief Minister, J&K @CM\_Jnk

Hon'ble MLA Chenani @BalwantMankotia called on the Chief Minister along-with a delegation from his constituency.



## Scientists uncover the secret 'Glue' that helps soil hold water

**N**ow, scientists at Northwestern University have identified the underlying molecular process that explains why this happens, showing how organic matter improves water retention even under extremely dry, desert-like conditions.

The researchers found that carbohydrates, which are common in plants and microbes, act like a kind of molecular adhesive. They use water to form connections between organic materials and soil minerals. These microscopic links help trap moisture that would otherwise evaporate. The findings offer new insight into how soils stay hydrated during drought and may even help explain how water has remained locked inside rocks for billions of years, including on Mars and in meteorites.

The study was published in the journal PNAS Nexus.

"The right amount of minerals and organic matter in soils leads to healthy soils with good moisture," said Northwestern's Ludmilla Aristilde, who led the study. "It's something everyone has experienced, but we haven't fully un-

derstood the physics and chemistry of how that works. By figuring this out, we could potentially engineer soil to have the right chemistry, turning it into long-term sponges that preserve moisture."

Aristilde, an expert in how organic materials behave in environmental systems, is an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern's McCormick School of Engineering. She is also affiliated with the Center for Synthetic Biology, the International Institute for Nanotechnology, and the Paula M. Trienens Institute for Sustainability and Energy. Sabrina Kelch, a recent Ph.D. graduate, and postdoctoral researcher Benjamin Barrios-Cerda, both from Aristilde's lab, are the study's first and second authors.

To carry out the research, the team combined a widely found clay mineral (smectite) with three carbohydrates: glucose, amylose, and amylopectin. Glucose is a simple sugar, while amylose and amylopectin are more complex starch-based polymers made of linked glucose units. Amylose

forms long, straight chains, while amylopectin has a branched structure.

"We decided to use carbohydrates as a type of organic matter because it exists everywhere," Aristilde said. "Cellulose, which is the most abundant biopolymer on Earth, is made of glucose, and plants and microbes secrete different, simple to complex carbohydrates into soil. We also selected carbohydrates because they have simple chemistry to avoid complicating our results with certain side reactions."

The researchers used molecular simulations, quantum mechanical calculations, and lab experiments to study how clay, water, and carbohydrates interact at the nanoscale. Their results showed that hydrogen bonds play a central role in helping these materials retain water.

Hydrogen bonds are weak attractive forces that allow water molecules to cling together, forming droplets or flowing streams. The team found that water molecules can also bond at the same time to both clay surfaces and carbohydrates.

## Microsoft open-source toolkit secures AI agents at runtime

**A** new open-source toolkit from Microsoft focuses on runtime security to force strict governance onto enterprise AI agents. The release tackles a growing anxiety: autonomous language models are now executing code and hitting corporate networks way faster than traditional policy controls can keep up.

AI integration used to mean conversational interfaces and advisory copilots. Those systems had read-only access to specific datasets, keeping humans strictly in the execution loop. Organisations are currently deploying agentic frameworks that take independent action, wiring these models directly into internal application programming interfaces, cloud storage repositories, and continuous integration pipelines.

When an autonomous agent can read an email, decide to write a script, and push that script to a server, stricter governance is vital. Static code analysis and pre-deployment vulnerability scanning just can't handle the non-deterministic nature of large language models. One prompt injection attack (or even a basic hallucination) could send an agent to overwrite a da-

tabase or pull out customer records.

Microsoft's new toolkit looks at runtime security instead, providing a way to monitor, evaluate, and block actions at the moment the model tries to execute them. It beats relying on prior training or static parameter checks.

Looking at the mechanics of agentic tool calling shows how this works. When an enterprise AI agent has to step outside its core neural network to do something like query an inventory system, it generates a command to hit an external tool.

Microsoft's framework drops a policy enforcement engine right between the language model and the broader corporate network. Every time the agent tries to trigger an outside function, the toolkit grabs the request and checks the intended action against a central set of governance rules. If the action breaks policy (e.g. an agent authorised only to read inventory data tries to fire off a purchase order)

the toolkit blocks the API call and logs the event so a human can review it.

Security teams



get a verifiable, auditable trail of every single autonomous decision. Developers also win here; they can build complex multi-agent systems without having to hardcode security protocols into every individual model prompt. Security policies get decoupled from the core application logic entirely and are managed at the infrastructure level.

Most legacy systems were never built to talk to non-deterministic software. An old mainframe database or a customised enterprise resource planning suite doesn't have native

defenses against a machine learning model shooting over malformed requests. Microsoft's toolkit steps in as a protective translation layer. Even if an underlying language model gets compromised by external inputs; the system's perimeter holds.

Security leaders might wonder why Microsoft decided to release this runtime toolkit under an open-source license. It comes down to how modern software supply chains actually work.

Developers are currently rushing to build autonomous workflows using a massive mix of open-source libraries, frameworks, and third-party models. If Microsoft locked this runtime security feature to its proprietary platforms, development teams would probably just bypass it for faster, unvetted workarounds to hit their deadlines.

Pushing the toolkit out openly means security and governance controls can fit into any technology stack. It doesn't matter if an organisation runs local open-

weight models, leans on competitors like Anthropic, or deploys hybrid architectures.

Setting up an open standard for AI agent security also lets the wider cybersecurity community chip in. Security vendors can stack commercial dashboards and incident response integrations on top of this open foundation, which speeds up the maturity of the whole ecosystem. For businesses, they avoid vendor lock-in but still get a universally scrutinised security baseline. Enterprise governance doesn't just stop at security; it hits financial and operational oversight too. Autonomous agents run in a continuous loop of reasoning and execution, burning API tokens at every step. Start-ups and enterprises are already seeing token costs explode when they deploy agentic systems.

Without runtime governance, an agent tasked with looking up a market trend might decide to hit an expensive proprietary database thousands of times before it finishes. Left alone, a badly configured agent can rack up massive cloud computing bills in a few hours.