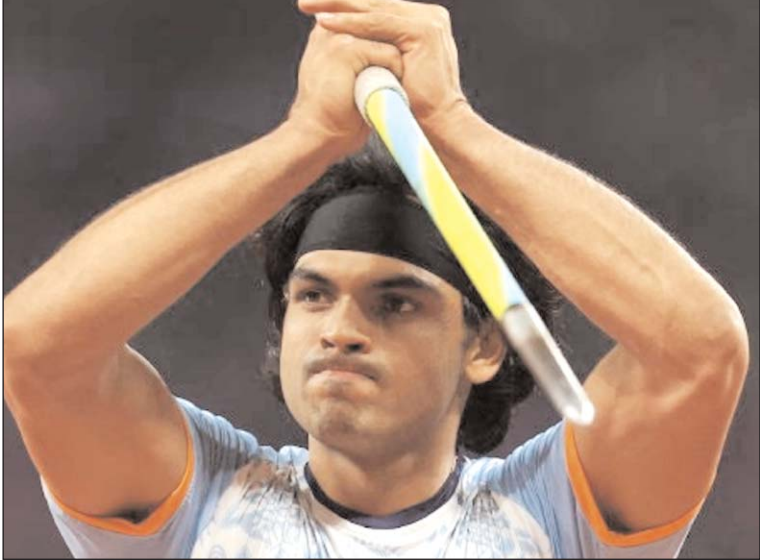


Neeraj Chopra issues statement after ‘integrity questioned’ and his ‘mother targeted’ by trolls over invite to Arshad Nadeem

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Neeraj Chopra said that the invitation to Arshad Nadeem for participating in NC Classic – javelin event to be organised in Bengaluru next month under the name of India’s Olympic champion – was extended before the events in Kashmir. Neeraj, who said he and his family have been subject to hate and abuse, said Arshad’s participation in the event was ‘completely out of the question’ after the events of the last 48 hours in Pahalgam, a terror attack which left 26 dead and several others injured.

“There has been so much talk about my decision to invite Arshad Nadeem to compete in the Neeraj Chopra Classic, and most of it has been hate and abuse,” Neeraj said through a statement posted on his social media channels. “They haven’t even left my family out of it. The invitation I extended to Arshad was from one athlete to another — nothing more, nothing less. The aim of the NC Classic was to bring the best athletes to India and for our country to be the home of



world-class sporting events. Invites had gone out to all athletes on Monday, two days before the terrorist attacks at Pahalgam. After all that has taken place over the last 48 hours, Arshad’s presence at the NC Classic

was completely out of the question.” Neeraj had addressed a press conference where he confirmed the initial list of participants in NC Classic, also confirming that the event had been moved to Bengaluru from his home

state in Haryana. During the conference, he had said invitations had been sent out to many top javelin throwers and Paris Olympic champion Arshad too was invited, although he hadn’t confirmed his participation then. Last night, the organisers confirmed the final list of international participants and Arshad’s name was absent.

Neeraj Chopra Classic 2025: Arshad Nadeem’s name missing, Sri Lanka’s Rumesh Pathirage added to elite field

“I usually am a man of few words, but that doesn’t mean I will not speak up against what I think is wrong. More so when it comes to questioning my love for our country, and the respect and honour of my family,” Neeraj said.

“My country and its interests will always come first. To those that are going through the loss of their people, my thoughts and prayers are with you. Along with the entire nation, I am both hurt and angry at what has taken place. I am confident that our country’s response will show our strength as a nation and justice will be served,” he added.

‘Once Virat gets in, very rarely does he...’: Former Aussie captain Aaron Finch lauds Kohli’s efforts for RCB

MUMBAI, APR 25: With his fifth half-century in this year’s IPL in Royal Challengers Bengaluru’s 11-run win over Rajasthan Royals at Chinnaswamy Stadium, Virat Kohli jumped to the number 2 spot in the list of highest run getters in this year’s IPL. With a total of 392 runs with an average of 65.33, Kohli is only behind Sai Sudarshan of Gujarat Super Giants, who lead the table with 417 runs in eight matches. Kohli remains the only Indian player to have won the Orange Cap twice in IPL history and with seven 500-plus aggregates in IPL history, Kohli remains one of the top scorers in the league. Former Australian captain Aaron Finch believes Kohli’s ability to score consistently gives Royal Challengers Bengaluru the right platform to play around. “Yes, I mean,



if you are offered 650, 700 runs at the start of the year, from one of your top-three batters. No matter whether your strike rate is 150 or 200, you would take that every single day because that just allows your team the platform to play around. That’s when you can put some cowboys in the middle order, ultra-high risk and they tried to do that with Livingstone and it hasn’t quite worked. Last year, Maxwell played that high-risk game as well and Patidar is looking to be overly aggressive as well. So it just allows you a platform, you know, once Virat gets in, very rarely does he get out at 30,” Finch said.

‘Even Mumbai had a bad start’: Moeen Ali confident about Kolkata Knight Riders’ playoff chances



MUMBAI, APR 25: Ahead of their all-important match against former skipper Shreyas Iyer’s Punjab Kings, Kolkata Knight Riders spinner Moeen Ali said that KKR could also turn around their season just like the Mumbai Indians. MI had a dismal start to the tournament but now find

ing. We need to have that same mindset. We’re halfway through, we have to win most of our games. This squad has shown it can go on a run. But it’s going to take a lot of determination and belief to do that,” Moeen said. He also reflected on KKR’s embarrassing loss against the Punjab Kings in their last match where chasing 112, Kolkata, who were cruising at 62/2 collapsed and lost eight wickets for just 33 runs.

It was literally a bad half an hour or 40 minutes. The guys have played Chahal many times and done well. He had a brilliant day, and we didn’t play him well at all. But you either go in thinking he’ll destroy you again, or you take him on with confidence. Hopefully, we do the latter. He’s a very, very good bowler, but before that game, he was also struggling a bit. Confidence can turn in one innings, so maybe it’ll turn our way this time,” the former England player said.

IPL 2025: MS Dhoni to play milestone 400th T20 in CSK vs SRH match, check full records

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Chennai Super Kings captain MS Dhoni will make a milestone 400th T20 appearance during the IPL 2025 match against SunRisers Hyderabad at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday.

The 43-year-old Dhoni will join a select club of T20 stalwarts as he makes a 400th appearance out in the CSK jersey. Dhoni continues to remain as the most successful captain in T20 cricket history, with 190 wins as skipper across 325 matches. Dhoni is also the most successful wicket-keeper in T20 cricket, with more than 310 dismissals to his name. The former India captain is also the most successful keeper in IPL history, and is only three dismissals short of reaching 200 dismissals in the league. Dhoni will become the fourth Indian player to reach 400 T20 matches in an appearances chart dominated by



Kieron Pollard’s 695 matches. Dhoni has also recorded the most appearances in IPL history since its inception in 2008, appearing in 272 games while notching up 5377 runs at an average of 38.96 and a strike rate of 137.87.

Dhoni is the third-highest active six-hitter in the IPL, only behind Rohit Sharma and

Federation Cup: Footballer-turned-sprinter Animesh Kujur rewrites national 200m record

MUMBAI, APR 25: “Ab bhook aur ho rahi hai (Now, I am feeling hungrier),” Animesh Kujur said after breaking the men’s 200 metres national record. An outstanding run around the bend and smooth sprinting down the straight made Animesh a class apart at the Federation Cup as he also qualified for next month’s Asian Championships. The ‘bhook’ the 21-year-old spoke about wasn’t in reference to his dinner plans. Rice and dal was his lunch hours before he lowered the national mark from 20.52 seconds to 20.40. Now Animesh wants to become the first Indian male runner to break the 20-second barrier. And he’s got the perfect role model. Even as a national school-level football striker, he was fascinated by Usain Bolt. “I want to become the first athlete (from India) to run below 20 seconds,” Animesh said. “I have liked Bolt from the beginning. Even when I was playing football and not into athletics, I knew Bolt was the fastest man in the world,” Animesh said. When he opted for the ‘Lightning Bolt’ pose after the official timings flashed on the giant screen, it didn’t seem hackneyed. The six-foot-two-inch sprinter has an air of lightness about him. He posed once again for the cameras, beaming because a monkey was off his back, finally breaking the national record. Martin Owens, Animesh’s coach at the Odisha Reliance Foundation High Performance Centre in Bhubaneswar, hugged and shook hands before lauding him. “It’s a pleasure to coach you,” he said. The fastest Indian man over 200 metres is the title Animesh had been gunning for. Animesh runs the 100 metres as well, and on Monday won the silver in the shorter sprint event, stopping the clock at 10.32 seconds.

‘Gukesh doesn’t need to prove anything to anyone’: Srinath rushes to Indian GM’s defence after poor run in Freestyle tour

MUMBAI, APR 25: Srinath Narayanan, one of India’s premier chess coaches, has come forward to defend the youngest and current World Champion D Gukesh after his poor run at the recently concluded Paris Freestyle Grand Slam Tour, where the 18-year-old finished second last in the field of 12 players. Coming to Gukesh’s defence, Srinath feels the Indian teenager has nothing to prove to anyone.

“Gukesh doesn’t particularly need to prove anything to anyone. I also haven’t noticed anyone mentioning that Gukesh won the World Championship by luck. As for Gukesh’s results in freestyle, I think 1-2 tournaments are far too early to draw any major conclusions,” Srinath said to The New Indian Express. “I don’t feel any particular attempt to downplay Gukesh



as the world champion in general. He is universally accepted as the world champion and there is no questioning that,” he added.

Gukesh has also been facing heat from the chess community after his winless run at the Weissenhaus leg of the Freestyle tour. Norwegian grandmaster Jon Ludvig Hammer questioned Gukesh’s



ability to hold onto his World Championship title for a prolonged period.

“Gukesh certainly has the ability to keep the crown. But it will definitely not be easy, and his next challenger could very well be one of his compatriots from India or from his age group. Him and his trainers will have the best idea on what he needs to do to

improve and defend his title,” said Srinath.

Gukesh became the youngest-ever world champion in history in Singapore last year after beating China’s Ding Liren in the 14-match final.

Once a Second of five-time World Champion, Magnus Carlsen, Hammer also implied that most of the top players were on par with Gukesh and the world title could keep passing on from one player to another, and that is not good for the sport. Srinath countered it by saying, “I don’t think a competitive rivalry will have any negative effect on the sport. For example, in tennis for a period of time we had Federer (Roger), Nadal (Rafael) and Djokovic (Novak) all closely at the top and the rivalry was brilliant to watch,” he said.

Couldn’t live ‘free, open life’ as openly gay woman in Russia: Daria Kasatkina on accepting Australian citizenship

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Former World No. 8 Daria Kasatkina, who was a part of the Fed Cup-winning Russian team in 2021, said in an interview with The Guardian that as an openly gay woman, she was left with no choice but to move away from her home country and accept citizenship in Australia if she wished to “live a free, open life.”

Russia criminalised homosexuality and began cracking down on pro-LGBTQ+ groups in 2022, only a few months after Kasatkina came out as gay. Travelling all over the world as a professional tennis player, the 27-year-old who is currently the World No. 14 said she had been considering having to take permanent residency in a different country for a long time.

“Honestly, it was one of my main reasons why I had to make this step and change my



nationality because if I wanted to live a free, open life as I wanted, unfortunately I couldn’t do it in Russia. I had to find another place. And I did,” Kasatkina said.

It was emotional and I was nervous, of course, because I didn’t know how the reaction

was going to be,” she added. “But the feedback was very good, honestly, from all the international media. It was great. Also, the feedback from Australia was good. After I realised that, I became much more calm.”

Kasatkina asserted that her

sexuality was the main reason for her decision, but Russia’s ongoing war with Ukraine was also impossible to ignore. “The war affected many things,” she says. “Also the political way of Russia. Before, it was not that bad. But after this trigger, it’s become much worse. So it’s all connected,” she said.

On potentially sending a message to the world, the 27-year-old said: “I think everyone has their own views, their own path. It is my life, and it was my decision on my life. It didn’t affect anybody except for me. So the only example which I want to give to people, it’s to take responsibility and action for your own life. And if you want to change something, you have to change something. If you feel great where you are, you have stay where you are. You just have to be responsible for your actions and for your own life. That’s all.”

Kalinga Super Cup: NorthEast United demolish Mohammedan Sporting in Round of 16

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Striker Alaeddine Ajaraie scored a triple as NorthEast United FC thoroughly dominated and dismantled Mohammedan Sporting 6-0 in the Kalinga Super Cup on Thursday, sealing their place in the quarterfinals of the event. With Alaeddine Ajaraie among four different goal scorers on the scoresheet, NorthEast also issued a statement of intent for the other teams remaining in the draw. Jithin MS (3’) began the scoring early on before Ajaraie (18’, 57’, 90+2’) got into the act. Nestor Albiach Roger (42’) and Guillermo Fernandez Hierro (66’) scored the other two goals.

NorthEast United have had a penchant for scoring early in games this season and continued that trend, with a goal in the third minute. Jithin M.S. capitalised on some lacklustre Mohammedan defending to smartly volley Nestor Albiach’s cross from inside the six-yard box and give his side the lead.

Mohammedan slowly grew into the game and in the 12th minute, Lalremanga had the best chance for his side, after being played through on the right side of the box by a wavy Robi Hansasa run. The angle was acute and yet the winger took a shot which was parried to safety by Gurmeet in NorthEast’s goal.

NorthEast United smartly got a second in the 18th minute via the boots of the ISL’s top scorer, Alaeddine Ajaraie. Guillermo Hierro played a square pass to the Moroccan outside the box, and with just a body turn, Ajaraie left his marker for dead, before driving into the box and calmly finishing in the far corner.

Ajaraie looked to have repaid the favour with a perfectly weighted cross delivered to Guillermo in the box. The Spaniard’s header drifted just wide.

IPL 2025: How can Rajasthan Royals qualify for Playoffs after loss to RCB; scenario, remaining match schedule, points table



MUMBAI, APR 25: Rajasthan Royals’ hopes of keeping their IPL 2025 Playoffs chances alive took a massive blow on Thursday when the Riyan Parag-led side slumped to another poor defeat in a chase against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The 11-run defeat was a third successive match where

since the 2009-10 seasons.

While they are mathematically alive in the race, Rajasthan’s lifeline can extinguish at any moment in the league. With only five matches remaining, it is a non-negotiable that RR will need to win all matches to keep their faint chances alive. Rajasthan can only accumulate a best of 14 points from here. However, that is unlikely to be enough to make the Playoffs this time, with at least six teams in contention to overhaul that mark. Gujarat Titans, RCB and Delhi Capitals need only two wins to cross the 14-point mark from their remaining games, and Mumbai Indians, Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants require three apiece. Kolkata Knight Riders can also target the 16-point mark with four wins in their remaining eight matches, stubbing RR’s chances of qualification further down.

GI-PKL 2025: Marathi Vultures top points table with dominant win

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Tamil Lions, Punjabi Tigers, and Marathi Vultures registered wins in the men’s section of the ongoing Global Indian Pravasi Kabaddi League (GI-PKL) at the Gurugram University here on Thursday. Marathi Vultures sit atop the points table with 13 points, followed closely by Punjabi Tigers with 12, while Tamil Lions hold the third spot with 10 points.

Tamil Lions edged past Bhojpuri Leopards 35-33 in a thrilling men’s encounter. Despite Bhojpuri leading in tackle points (15) and executing three Super Tackles, Tamil Lions displayed superior raiding, including a crucial Super Raid, and held their nerve in the final moments to seal a narrow two-point win in a fiercely contested clash.

In the second match, the Punjabi Tigers put on a dominant display to defeat Telugu Panthers 47-39 in a high-



scoring encounter. With 20 raid points and a solid 19 tackle points, the Tigers kept control throughout the match.

They also secured six all-out points, overpowering the Panthers’ challenge. Despite Telugu’s strong raiding, Punjabi’s defense and consistency ensured a convincing victory in the men’s clash.

In the third match of the day, Marathi Vultures soared to a commanding 52-35 win over Haryanvi Sharks in a thrilling men’s contest. Dominating in raids with 33

points and backing it up with 12 tackle points and 6 all-outs, the Vultures controlled the game from start to finish. Despite a strong effort by the Sharks, Marathi’s all-round performance sealed a comprehensive victory.

Deputy Commissioner of Gurugram, Ajay Kumar, and Brigadier S.K. Sareen of the Indian Army graced the GI-PKL as chief guests. Both dignitaries felicitated the Players of the Match and applauded their spirited performances.