

# PRAGG BEATS GUKESH TO CLINCH TATA CHESS

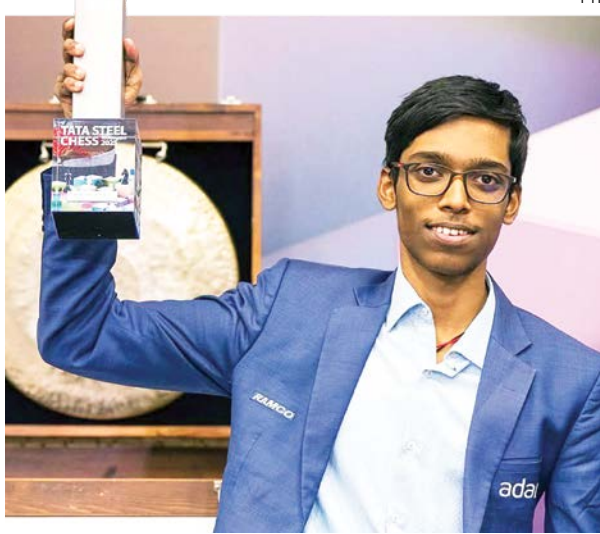
The teenager became the first Indian after Viswanathan to win the title

**PTI, WIJK AAN ZEE (NETHERLANDS):** The Indian juggernaut in international chess remained unstoppable as Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa fought through exhaustion and nerves to defeat world champion D Gukesh in a clash of compatriots to clinch the Tata Steel Masters title for the first time in his prolific career.

The bespectacled 19-year-old from Chennai, a city that has become the cradle of Indian chess, came from behind to upstage the 18-year-old world number three 2-1 in the tiebreaker of the event's 87th edition here on Sunday.

This was after both players ended up tied on 8.5 points after losing their 13th-round games. While Gukesh lost to fellow Indian Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa went down to Vincent Keymer of Germany.

In the tie-breaker, there was huge drama typi-



Indian prodigy R Praggnanandhaa poses with the trophy after winning the Tata Steel Chess Masters 2025 over World Champion D Gukesh, in Wijk aan Zee, Netherlands

cal of two young players looking to win each and every game they played in the tournament as they played the tie-break.

"I am still shaking, it was such a crazy day. I don't know how to express. I

didn't really expect to win. Somehow things went my way," Praggnanandhaa told the official tournament website after his triumph.

Asked if it was the most tense day of his chess career, which began when he was a

mere two years of age.

"Today is more special because I won the tournament. Definitely most stressful day," he responded.

The teenager became the first Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the title. Anand won it thrice (2003, 2004 and 2006) individually when it was called the Corus Chess Tournament, named on the title sponsor of that time. The legend also shared the honours twice (1989 and 1998) in its earliest form of Hoogovens Tournament.

Praggnanandhaa faced the Benoni with reversed colours in the first game of the tie-break and it seemed like he had equalised easily in the middle game.

However, Gukesh had other thoughts as he kept trying and won, thanks to a blunder by Praggnanandhaa that cost him a full rook.

In a must-win second game of the tiebreaker, Praggnanandhaa employed the Trompowsky opening, and this time Gukesh could claim a slight advantage with his black pieces.

## Samson fractures index finger, out of action for five to six weeks

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** Star wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson has fractured his index finger after being hit by a Jofra Archer scorching during the fifth T20 International against England in Mumbai and will be out of action for more than a month, side-lining him from the upcoming Ranji Trophy quarterfinals.

It is learnt that Sanju has returned to his home base Thiruvananthapuram and will only start training after completing his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy (NCA). he would need NCA's green light before returning to competitive action.

"Samson has fractured his right index finger. It will take him five to six weeks before he can resume proper nets. So there is no chance of him playing the Ranji Trophy quarter-final for Kerala (vs J&K) in Pune from February

8-12," a BCCI source in the know of things told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

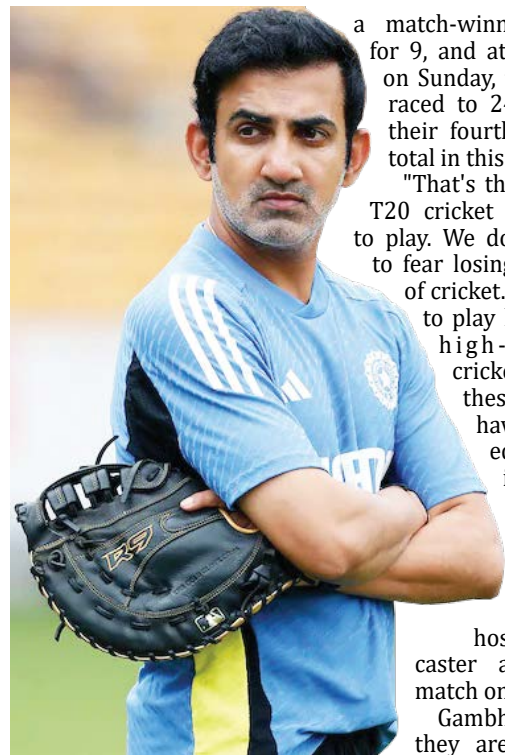
"In all likelihood, his comeback will happen in the IPL for Rajasthan Royals," he added.

Samson, who had a poor series against England and is not a part of the ODI set-up, was hit off the third ball bowled by Archer which was close to 150 clicks.

While he hit another six and four, the swelling increased once he was back in the dug-out. The scans showed a fracture.



## We want to play high-risk, high-reward cricket in T20s: Gambhir



**PTI, MUMBAI:** India head coach Gautam Gambhir said the team is ready to push the barriers in T20 Internationals with the adoption of a fresh "high-risk, high-reward" approach, and the target is now "to get 250-260 regularly" in the format.

That shift in mindset was evident in India's 4-1 mauling of England in the just-concluded five-match series.

In the fourth T20I at Pune, India kept attacking England despite losing wickets to eventually set

a match-winning 181 for 9, and at Mumbai on Sunday, the hosts raced to 247 for 9, their fourth highest total in this format.

"That's the kind of T20 cricket we want to play. We don't want to fear losing a game of cricket. We want to play high-risk, high-reward cricket. And these guys have adopted that ideology really well," Gambhir told the host broadcaster after the match on Sunday.

Gambhir said they are looking to post tall totals in the vicinity of 250 in every game, and he doesn't mind getting out for a low score in some matches while attempting to achieve the task.

"We want to try and get to 250-260 regularly. And in trying to do that, there'll be games where we'll get bundled out for 120-130. And that is what T20 cricket is all about.

"Unless and until you don't play that high-risk cricket, you won't get those big rewards as well. Most importantly, I think we're on the right track.

Come those big tournaments, we want to continue playing this way and we don't want to fear losing anything," he added.

"I think the ideology of this T20 team is based on selflessness and fearlessness, and I think in the last six months, these guys have done it day in, day out."

Gambhir used the breathtaking 54-ball 135 of Abhishek Sharma to further validate his point.

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## Self-belief, fearlessness is essential to increase outcome: Abhishek

**PTI, MUMBAI:** In a format as fickle as T20 cricket in which a batter is destined for more failures than success, India's newest power-hitter Abhishek Sharma has learnt quite early that self-belief and fearlessness are essential to increase the probability of a favourable outcome.

It has not yet been a full year since the Punjab batter arrived at the international stage on the back of high promise in domestic cricket, including an immensely successful IPL with Sunrisers Hyderabad in 2024.

But at only 24, Abhishek has begun threatening records which took several years for others to create.



Abhishek Sharma

His maiden T20I century was the joint-third fastest for any Indian (46 balls) in only his second match. On Sunday against England, his second T20I ton was the second fastest for any Indian (37 balls).

In between, he smacked a 28-ball century to claim the joint-fastest hundred for any Indian in the prestigious Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy.

What is the secret of such towering success at a young age, one would wonder. The answer is not too complex for Abhishek, who grew up partnering Shubman Gill for Punjab in the opening slot.

Yuvraj Singh's imprints on Abhishek's flourish are hard to miss but to his credit, he has reciprocated on the field all that the great Indian all-rounder has sounded to him in their countless sessions in myriad set-ups over the last few years.

## Abhishek's innings was as clean a ball striking as I have seen: Buttler

**PTI, MUMBAI:** England Captain Jos Buttler has heaped high praise on Abhishek Sharma for smashing a whirlwind 54-ball 135 in India's 150-run win in the fifth T20I here, describing the record knock as one of the finest examples of "clean ball striking".

Abhishek entered record books with the second fastest T20I century by an Indian batter off 37 balls and hit 13 sixes -- the most in an innings for any player from the country, powering the hosts to 247 for nine.

"Yeah, (we are) obviously disappointed (with the result), they (India) played a fantastic batting innings.



Jos Buttler

I think credit to Abhishek Sharma, I thought that's as clean a ball striking as I've seen, I thought he played fantastically well," Buttler told the media after India recorded their second biggest T20I win by runs on Sunday.

Buttler denied England were "shellshocked" from Abhishek's onslaught on his bowlers but said there were only two options for his side -- either to go boom or bust.

"We always sit down and think what more could we have done or how we could have stopped him, but some days I think you have to give a lot of credit to the opposition, I thought he played brilliantly well," Buttler said.

"Shellshocked's not quite the word, I think. It can be difficult sometimes when a player gets on a roll and they play as well as he did," Buttler said.

## Lewandowski earns Barca win, title hopes alive

**AFP, BARCELONA:** Robert Lewandowski's second-half strike helped Barcelona beat Alaves 1-0 on Sunday to cut the gap on La Liga leaders Real Madrid down to four points. The Catalans, third, capitalised with a narrow victory after the champions slipped up across town at Espanyol on Saturday.

Barcelona trail second place Atletico by three points before the Rojiblancos face Real Madrid in a tasty derby clash next weekend, which could allow Hansi Flick's side to make up more ground.

Lewandowski netted from a Lamine Yamal cross to settle a hard-fought match in which Alaves largely frustrated the hosts.

Flick's team struggled to get going in the early afternoon sunlight at the Olympic stadium. The Catalans created barely anything of note in the first half as Alaves resisted stubbornly.

One mazy Lamine Yamal dribble got home fans excited but there was little else to raise the pulse.



FC Barcelona's Polish forward #09 Robert Lewandowski (right) celebrates scoring their first goal during the Spanish league match against Deportivo Alaves at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys in Barcelona

Barcelona's Gavi and Tomas Conechny of Alaves were both taken off after an ugly collision of heads. Flick later confirmed Gavi was healthy. Lewandowski scuffed a shot narrowly wide and a low Pedri effort was comforta-

bly fielded by Alaves goalkeeper Jesus Owono.

Flick brought on Frenkie de Jong and Eric Garcia at half-time to try and speed up Barcelona's game in possession and the team looked sharper as a result.

Lewandowski sent a glancing header agonisingly wide of the far post soon before he broke the deadlock. The veteran Polish forward produced a poacher's finish from close range after Yamal sent a cross-shot spinning towards him at the back post after 61 minutes.

It was Lewandowski's 18th goal of the league campaign, stretching his lead on Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe as the division's top scorer to three.

Barca substitute Ferran Torres's curling effort was pushed away by Owono at full stretch as the Catalans tried to make the game safe.

### LA LIGA RESULTS

**Barcelona 1** (Lewandowski 61) **Alaves 0**, **Valencia 2** (Rioja 44, Guerra 68) **Celta Vigo 1** (Duran 65), **Osasuna 2** (Budimir 34, 74) **Real Sociedad 1** (Oskarsson 90+4), **Real Betis 2** (Isco 15, Perraud 45+2) **Athletic Bilbao 2** (Paredes 33, Sancet 69).

**Saturday: Getafe 0 Sevilla 0**, **Villarreal 5** (Perez 42, Gueye 64, Comesana 70, Barry 86, Suarez 90+1) **Valadolid 1** (Amallah 90+4), **Atletico Madrid 2** (Lino 26, Griezmann 90+3) **Mallorca 0**, **Espanyol 1** (Romero 85) **Real Madrid 0**. **Friday: Leganes 0 Rayo Vallecano 1** (Ciss 78)

## sportspopup

### Senior taekwondo official replaced at National Games after complaints of fixing

**DEHRADUN:** The National Games Technical Conduct Committee (GTCC) has replaced Taekwondo's director of competition after some officials were accused of fixing results in "10 of the 16 weight categories long before the competition" actually started. The GTCC has named S Dinesh Kumar as the new director of competition, replacing T Praveen Kumar after "strong recommendations" made by a three-member prevention of manipulation of competition committee (PMCC). GTCC Chairperson Sunaina Kumari said PMCC's recommendations had been accepted. "It is important that we take on board the recommendations of the PMC Committee and protect the integrity of the National Games Uttarakhand," said Sunaina.

### Rashford joins Aston Villa on loan after falling out of favour at Man United

**LONDON:** Marcus Rashford will look to reignite his career at Aston Villa after joining on loan for the rest of the season from Manchester United, where he has fallen out with recently hired manager Ruben Amorim. The move was completed late Sunday, with neither Premier League club disclosing any more terms surrounding the deal. The Press Association and other sections of the British media have reported Rashford was joining Villa with a view to a permanent transfer for 40 million pounds and that Villa was paying a loan fee as well as covering the majority of Rashford's salary, reportedly worth nearly \$400,000 a week.

### Mr Dependable Michael Bevan inducted to Cricket Australia's Hall of Fame

**MELBOURNE:** Former batter Michael Bevan, widely regarded as one of the greatest ODI finishers who displayed impeccable game awareness and mastered difficult run chases with minimal risk, has been inducted to Cricket Australia's Hall of Fame. "Congratulations to former Australian player Michael Bevan on his induction to the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame," Cricket Australia posted on X.

### Head wins Allan Border medal, Sutherland receives Belinda Clark honour

**MELBOURNE:** Star batter Travis Head was named the winner of the prestigious Allan Border Medal for the top Australian men's cricketer, while young all-rounder Annabel Sutherland was awarded the Belinda Clark Medal at the Australian Cricket Awards held here on Monday. For Sutherland, it was a first Australian Cricket Award, which came just days after her maiden Test century at the MCG, becoming the first woman to make a ton on that ground. The 23-year-old all-rounder began the 12-month voting period with an impressive 210 against South Africa at the WACA and later scored her third Test century -- a brilliant 163 in the Ashes.

### Tickets for India's Champions Trophy matches go on sale

**DUBAI:** The tickets for India's three group-stage Champions Trophy matches and the first semi-final scheduled to take place in Dubai began on Monday evening, the ICC announced. This edition of the Champions Trophy is scheduled to be held across Pakistan and Dubai from February 19. India will be playing their games in Dubai. The tickets, start from AED 125 (INR 2,900 approx), was available for purchase starting 5.30 pm IST. "Tickets for the much-anticipated final, set to take place on Sunday, March 9, will be released following the conclusion of the first semi-final in Dubai," the ICC said.

### GOAN FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

#### Lourdes Soccer: Maina SC in last eight

**RAIA:** Maina SC defeated Sao Jose de Areal SC 2-1 to enter the quarter-finals of Lourdes Soccer inter-village football tournament organised by Ambelim SC, at Ambelim ground, on Monday. Manuel Castanha and Ryan Fernandes scored for Maina SC, while Alvaro Moura reduced the margin for Areal SC.

#### St Anthony's SC move into quarters

**RAIA:** St Anthony's Sports Club, Marna-Siolim, defeated Velsao Sports and Cultural Club 4-1 to enter the quarter-finals of 17th All Goa Inter-Village Seraluim Panchayat Cup football tournament organised by United Sports Club of Seraluim at Seraluim panchayat ground. St Anthony's SC played like a well-oiled machine and created in roads right from the word go. They scored their first goal through Vishak Dhargelkar in the 19th minute. Seven minutes later, Dalesh Pednekar scored the second goal to give St Anthony's SC the lead 2-0 at half time. Velsao Sports & Cultural Club pulled one back after the Marna goalkeeper failed to make clean collection and Jesus D'Sa who was around just tapped it in to make it, 2-1. St Anthony's SC then scored their third goal in the 58th minute through Jonathan Pereira and then just a minute later they nailed the coffin by scoring the fourth goal when the Velsao goalkeeper came out of the box and failed to clear the ball and allow Sonu Mandenkar to score the fourth goal.

### FC Goa held by RFYC, Dempo SC take top position in RFDL Zonal Group Stage

**MAPUSA:** League leaders FC Goa were held by Reliance Foundation Young Champs to a 1-1 at the Sirsaim ground, on Monday. The Gaur's in-form starlet Jovial Dias had put his side ahead courtesy of a 14th minute penalty kick. But Vanlalchhanchhuah equalised for the Reliance Foundation Young Champs in the 39th minute as they went on to earn a hard-fought point. It was a fiercely fought battle between the two teams with three players receiving their marching orders. In the 75th minute, FC Goa were reduced to 10-man with Malswamtuanga receiving a red card, while RFYC's Shallin Nair Melath also received a second yellow card in the 78th minute as he walked off the pitch. In the dying seconds of the game, RFYC saw another player being sent off as substitute Sinjith AS made his way back to the dressing room in the third minute of added time. Dempo SC cruised past Maharashtra Oranje FC 3-0 to register a convincing victory at the Duler Stadium, here. Arnold Antonio Oliveira had given the Golden Eagles lead in the 38th minute. In the 65th minute, a sudden turn of events saw both sides reduced to 10-man each with Pratham Ghatnur and Sairon Albuquerque -- skippers of Maharashtra Oranje and Dempo SC respectively being sent off for violent conduct. Velanco Elisson Rodrigues stepped from the bench for the latter to score a second-half brace and give his side a crucial victory. In the morning match at Duler Stadium, Mumbai City FC also picked up a comfortable 2-0 victory against Sesa Football Academy. Second half goals from Mohammed Kaif and Mohammed Jaffer Altaf Mansoori ensured the Islanders registered three points. As it stands, Dempo SC lead the points table with 17 points, closely followed by FC Goa at 16 points, while Mumbai City FC stand third with 11 points. The top three teams from the Zone will qualify for the RFDL National Group Stage.