At 39, Sikandar Raza still breaking new ground—for himself and Zimbabwe



NEW DELHI: Sikandar Raza's journey from Sialkot to Zimbabwe was far from straightforward. It took him through unexpected detours that included dreams of becoming a pilot and earning a degree in computing from a university in Glasgow, before cricket finally took centre stage after his family moved to Zimbabwe.After a sombre few years in international cricket, followed by a life-threatening bone marrow infection in 2021, the all-rounder, now in the twilight of his career has reinvented himself as a bona fide globetrotter across T20 leagues worldwide. Last week, he added another milestone by becoming the first cricketer from Zimbabwe to make an appearance in the SA20.

In a professional career spanning close to two decades, the 39-year-old Raza has featured for a whopping 43 teams, 22 just in different leagues, and continues to shuttle between tournaments with ease. One such move was ahead of him after wrapping the ILT20 campaign with the Sharjah Warriorz as he was set to join the Paarl Royals in South Africa. The veteran, however, faced one of the biggest setbacks in his life as he lost his 13-year-old brother in Harare on December 29. It happened around the time he was scheduled to join his SA20 team for the ongoing fourth edition of the T20 tournament. Putting the personal tragedy aside, Raza made a strong statement by joining the Paarl Royals for the SA20 and has made an instant impact in his two outings so far.

"I think that part of my life will always be difficult," Raza said in a select media interaction after the Royals beat MI Cape Town on Sunday. "But I did say to my team as well, if I wasn't mentally, physically and emotionally ready, I wouldn't be here. 'The fact that I think that I can add value, I've decided to join you, and I will take nothing away from you.

I'll give as much as I can to the team, the energy, the experience, whatever you ask me to do, I'll do it'. So yeah, it's nice to be here," he further added.Every wicket he took in the backdrop of the table top mountain at Newlands was celebrated with renewed gusto. The slight arch of the back, arms spread wide and the feisty fist pump with gentle raise of the right knee happened not once but on four occasions as he ran through the MI unit with figures of 4/13.

A street-smart cricketer who offers a complete package in the shortest format, Raza has had outings in leagues like IPL, BPL, PSL and ILT20 and feels good performances by Zimbabweans opens up more doors for players back home.

"That is the whole idea, and that is the point as well. If you look at the last few years, whenever a Zimbabwean has gone to a league and done well, it has certainly opened doors for more Zimbabweans. I really feel blessed by the fact that I am the first Zimbabwean to play the SA20, and hopefully my performances can open doors for other Zimbabweans as well," said Raza.Raza is a story of grit, faith and belief in the game. The personal challenges, professional setbacks have only pushed him to do better.

"I remember there was a time when I used to look at the cricketers that used to do the circuit and I always used to say, Allah, when will my turn come? Now that my turn is here, I am grateful for every opportunity, for every team that have signed me, for every country I've been to. And I will not take anything for granted. I used to pray for times like this. Now that Allah has granted me this time, I will be forever grateful to Allah and to every single team that I've been part of," explained an emotional Raza.

While there are rare off days in an year for Raza the T20 freelancer and he chooses to spend them indoors. Limelight isn't something which excites him but the veteran does hope that his actions can inspire other Sikandars in Zimbabwe."To be honest with you, when cricket is done, I try and stay away from the limelight, from people. I just try and stay indoors. I don't like to hear or speak about myself, but if the conversations are happening, then Alhamdulillah, I feel very blessed. But having said that, hopefully my actions will inspire rather than hearing about what people think of me or what others are thinking about me. All I'm looking at is trying to keep doing the things I'm doing at the best of my ability, and hopefully my performances can inspire the other Sikanders in Zimbabwe and all over the world," said the all-rounder.In around a month's time, Raza will have the Zimbabwe jersey on for the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka. Having beaten Pakistan in the 2022 edition of the multi-nation tournament, the captain is geared up for the challenge and asserts how respect in world cricket is earned by good performances in the World Cup.

"Well, that's the idea because the World Cup is really crucial in every cricketer's life. And I always think for Zimbabwe to gain more respect in world cricket, World Cups play a huge part.

So we have the mindset to go there and try and do really well so that we can come back with our goals set high and so that our people back home can have their heads high as well," said Raza. Raza has had ideal preparation for the T20 World Cup with outings in the ILT20 and SA20, and would now hope that the rest of the group finds inspiration to punch above the weight when the T20 extravaganza gets underway next month.

Satish Sharma applauds BIG JKPL for promoting youth, sports in J&K



■ SAROOR

JAMMU: Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Information Technology, Transport, Youth Services and Sports, Satish Sharma, today lauded the organisers of the BIG Jammu & Kashmir Premier League (BIG JKPL) 2025–26 for creating a vibrant and professional sporting platform for the youth of Jammu & Kashmir.

The Minister was speaking after attending the grand finale and prize distribution ceremony of the BIG JKPL at the University of Jammu Ground, where Royal Goodwill Cricket Club emerged champions after a thrilling final.

Satish Sharma felicitated the winning and runner-up teams and congratulated the players for displaying exceptional sportsmanship, discipline and competitive spirit.

Addressing the gathering, Satish Sharma said that the Omar Abdullah-led government is committed towards strengthening the sports infrastructure, encouraging youth participation and nurturing grassroots talent across Jammu & Kashmir. He emphasized that tournaments like BIG JKPL provide local players an opportunity to showcase their talent on a big platform and open pathways for professional careers in sports.

The Minister also appreciated 92.7 BIG FM and its partners for organising a high-quality league that attracted massive public participation and brought together young cricketers from different parts of the Union Territory. He said that such events not only promote physical fitness but also instil values of teamwork, discipline and unity among the youth.

Satish Sharma further said that his department will continue to support initiatives that promote sports and youth engagement. He added that the government aims to make Jammu & Kashmir a hub of sporting excellence.

The BIG JKPL 2025–26 concluded on a high note with huge crowds and an electrifying finale, reflecting the growing popularity of cricket and sports culture in the region.

Waltair crowned champions of All India Ashok Das Memorial Cricket Tournament

VISAKHAPATNAM: The East Coast Railway Sports Association (ECORSA), Waltair Division, lifted the All India Ashok Das Memorial Cricket Tournament title after defeating ECOR-Khurda Road in an exciting final at Jajpur, Odisha. Batting first, ECOR-Khurda Road were bundled out for 106 runs. Prasanth Sahoo top-scored with 35, while Abhishek Yadav contributed 20.

The Waltair bowling attack was impressive, led by Jairam (3 wickets), with Somesh and Lovaraju picking up two wickets each.

In reply, ECOR/Waltair chased down the target comfortably. Kasi Prasad starred with a brisk 35, Kishore remained unbeaten on 32, and Deepak chipped in with 21.

Suryakanth Pradhan was the standout bowler for Khurda Road, claiming two wickets.

The victory underlined Waltair's dominance throughout the tournament, which featured eight teams, and further enhanced East Coast Railway's standing in national railway sports.

Waltair Divisional Railway Manager Lalit Bohra congratulated the champions, saying the win was a fine example of teamwork and fitness among railway employees.

The players were felicitated by the DRM in the presence of Sports Officer & Senior DFM Haranadh, General Secretary N. Usha, and other cricket dignitaries.

Aman Rao double century headlines Vijay Hazare group clash

BENGALURU: In a performance that has left cricket fans across the country stunned, USA-born Hyderabad batsman Aman Rao on Tuesday produced a sensational double century in just his third List A match, guiding his side to a massive total of 352 for 5 against Bengal in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Rao, who was recently picked up by Rajasthan Royals in the IPL auction, converted his maiden century into a 200 not out, showcasing exceptional temperament, skill, and maturity against a high-quality attack featuring Mohammed Shami, Akash Deep and Mukesh Kumar.

Altogether 120 of the runs came off these frontline bowlers, reflecting his dominance over experienced opponents. Rao finished with a six off the last ball of the innings, underscoring his aggressive yet calculated approach. This innings marks only the second double century of the VHT season, after Odisha's Swastik Samal, and cements Rao's name as one of the tournament's most exciting emerging talents.

Hyderabad's massive total immediately put Bengal under pressure, with Siraj producing a fiery spell of 5–0–32–3, ripping through the top order and leaving Bengal reeling at 73 for 4.

Even in the event of a Bengal victory, minimising the margin of defeat will be crucial for net run rate, as the Group B knockout race remains tight, with Uttar Pradesh already qualified and Vidarbha and Bengal competing for the second spot. Rao's innings not only tilted the match but also influenced the tournament's broader qualification scenario.

In Group D, Delhi secured a comfortable victory over Railways, with Ishant Sharma and Harshit Rana contributing key breakthroughs. Saurashtra continued their dominant form with a massive 111-run win over Services, posting 349/5 and bowling out the opposition for 238.

Group B saw Gujarat crush Odisha by 233 runs. Gujarat scored 333/6 before dismissing Odisha for 100, while Uttarakhand narrowly defeated Sikkim by 6 wickets, chasing 223 with 223/4. Baroda also strengthened their position with a 76-run win over Jammu & Kashmir, setting a total of 332 and restricting J&K to 256.

In Group A, Karnataka remained unstoppable, defeating Rajasthan by 150 runs. The team posted 324/7, with Mayank Agarwal and Karun Nair anchoring a dominant batting display, before bowling Rajasthan out for 174.

Jharkhand fought hard to edge past Madhya Pradesh by 2 wickets, reaching 278/8 against a target of 277, keeping their qualification hopes alive. Kerala continued their resurgence with an 8-wicket win over Puducherry, chasing 247 in just 29 overs to strengthen their contention for the second qualifying spot.

Group C saw Punjab narrowly overcome Goa by 6 wickets, finishing on 212/4 in a tight chase of 211, while Tamil Nadu beat Tripura by 54 runs, posting 259/6 and restricting the visitors to 205.

Shrachi Bengal Tigers qualifies for final after beating SG Pipers in sudden death

RANCHI: Shrachi Bengal Tigers once again held their nerve to edge past SG Pipers 0-0 (7-6 SO) in a gripping Women's Hero Hockey India League 2025-26 encounter, prevailing in sudden-death shootout after a goalless draw in regulation time.

In a remarkable repeat of their previous meeting, the contest followed an identical script, with the match once again going down to sudden death and the Tigers emerging victorious to secure a crucial bonus point and confirm their place in the summit clash.

Notably, it was a dead rubber for the Pipers, who had qualified for the Women's Hero HIL 2025-26 Final even before coming into this match courtesy of their notable lead at the top of the points tally.

The opening quarter of the match witnessed an end-to-end contest as both SG Pipers and Shrachi Bengal Tigers went head-to-head with early attacking exchanges.

The Tigers earned a penalty corner inside the opening three minutes but were unable to make the opportunity count. SG Pipers then took control of possession, moving the ball swiftly and creating multiple circle entries to test the Tigers' defence. Despite the early momentum and chances at both ends, neither side could break the deadlock, as the first quarter ended goalless at 0-0. However, the Pipers' goalkeeper Bansari Solanki was in fine form, producing multiple brilliant saves to deny the Tigers. Despite sustained pressure and prolonged spells around the Pipers' circle, the Tigers were unable to find a breakthrough, with the score remaining goalless at 0-0 at the half-time break.

A New UV laser sends messages in trillionths of a second

Devices that work with ultraviolet light in the UV-C range (100–280 nm) are becoming increasingly important across many fields, including super-resolution microscopy and optical communications. Scientists are especially interested in UV-C light because it scatters strongly in the atmosphere, a property that makes it useful for non-line-of-sight communication. This means data could be sent even when a clear line of sight is blocked, such as in cluttered or obstructed environments. Despite these advantages, progress has been slow because researchers have lacked practical components that can reliably generate and detect UV-C light.

In a study published in Light: Science & Applications, researchers led by Professor Amalia Patané (University of Nottingham) and Professor John W. G. Tisch (Imperial College London) report a new system that can both create and detect extremely short UV-C laser pulses. Their approach combines an ultrafast UV-C laser source with highly sensitive UV-C detectors made from atomically-thin (two-dimensional) semiconductors (2DSEM).

The laser source relies on carefully matched nonlinear optical processes. By using cascaded second-harmonic generation inside nonlinear crystals, the system produces UV-C pulses that last only femtoseconds, less than 1 trillionth of a second. These flashes of light are then detected at room temperature using photodetectors made from the 2DSEM gallium selenide (GaSe) and its wideband gap oxide layer (Ga_2O_3). Importantly, all of the materials involved are compatible with scalable manufacturing methods. To demonstrate what the system can do, the team built a free-space communication setup.

This new building material doesn't emit carbon – it traps it

Researchers at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) have developed a new carbon-negative building material that could reshape approaches to sustainable construction.

Described in the high-impact journal Matter, the advance introduces enzymatic structural material (ESM), a construction material that is strong, long-lasting, and recyclable, and is made using a low-energy process inspired by biological systems.

Under the leadership of Nima Rahbar, the Ralph H. White Family Distinguished Professor and head of the Department of Civil, Environmental, and Architectural Engineering, the team created ESM by harnessing an enzyme that converts carbon dioxide into solid mineral particles. These particles are then bonded together and allowed to cure under gentle conditions, making it possible to shape the material into structural components within a matter of hours. In contrast to conventional concrete, which depends on high temperatures and extended curing times, ESM can be produced quickly while significantly reducing environmental impact.

"Concrete is the most widely used construction material on the planet, and its production accounts for nearly 8% of global CO_2 emissions," said Rahbar. "What our team has developed is a practical, scalable alternative that doesn't just reduce emissions—it actually captures carbon. Producing a single cubic meter of ESM sequesters more than 6 kilograms of CO_2, compared to the 330 kilograms emitted by conventional concrete."

ESM's rapid curing, tunable strength, and recallability make it especially promising for real-world applications such as roof decks, wall panels, and modular building components. Its repairability could cut long-term construction costs and drastically reduce the volume of material sent to landfills each year.

"If even a fraction of global construction shifts toward carbon-negative materials like ESM, the impact could be enormous," added Rahbar.

This innovation has potential value for industries ranging from affordable housing and climate-resilient construction to disaster relief, where lightweight, quickly produced structural materials can accelerate rebuilding efforts. Because ESM is produced with low energy and renewable biological inputs, it also aligns with global goals for carbon-neutral infrastructure and circular manufacturing.

The Law Society: Current laws are fit for the AI era

As ministers push to loosen rules to speed up AI adoption, The Law Society argues that lawyers just need to know how current laws apply.

The Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) recently launched a call for evidence on a proposed 'AI Growth Lab'. This cross-economy sandbox is designed to accelerate the deployment of autonomous technologies by granting "time-limited regulatory exemptions" to firms. The government's position is that many regulations are outdated, having been designed before autonomous software existed, often assuming that decisions are made by people rather than machines.

Ministers believe that if the UK can move faster than its global competitors, it can secure a defining economic advantage, with a potential £140 billion boost to national output by 2030. Their preliminary analysis specifically flags legal services as a sector where removing "unnecessary legal barriers" could generate billions in value over the next decade.

Yet, the legal profession – supposedly the beneficiary of this deregulation – isn't asking for exemptions. In its formal response, the Law Society made clear that the existing framework is robust enough. The friction lies not in the rules themselves, but in the lack of certainty surrounding them. While two-thirds of lawyers already use AI tools, confusion remains the primary brake on deeper integration.

Ian Jeffery, CEO of The Law Society, said: "AI innovation is vital for the legal sector and already has great momentum. The existing legal regulatory framework supports progress. The main challenges don't stem from regulatory burdens, but rather from uncertainty, cost, data and skills associated with AI adoption." Rather than a regulatory overhaul, the profession is asking for a practical roadmap.

Firms are currently navigating a grey area regarding liability and data protection. Solicitors need definitive answers on whether client data must be anonymised before it is fed into AI platforms, and they require standardised protocols for data security and storage.

The questions get thornier when errors occur. If an AI tool generates harmful legal advice, it is currently unclear where the buck stops (i.e. with the solicitor, the firm, the developer, or the insurer.) There is also ambiguity about supervision requirements, specifically whether a human lawyer must oversee every instance of AI deployment.

Such concerns are particularly acute for "reserved legal activities" like court representation, conveyancing, and probate, where practitioners need to know if using automated assistance puts them in breach of their professional duties.

The government has tried to reassure the public that the sandbox will have "red lines" to protect fundamental rights and safety. However, The Law Society remains wary of any move that might dilute consumer protection in the name of speed.

"Technological progress in the legal sector should not expose clients or consumers to unregulated risks," Jeffery stated. "Current regulation of the profession reflects the safeguards that Parliament deemed vital to protect clients and the public. It ensures trust in the English and Welsh legal system worldwide."

The body is willing to collaborate on a "legal services sandbox," but only if it upholds professional standards rather than bypassing them. For The Law Society, the priority is maintaining the integrity of the justice system in the AI era.

"The Law Society strongly supports innovation provided it remains aligned with professional integrity and operates in a solid regulatory environment," Jeffery explained. "The government must work with legal regulators and bodies to ensure adherence to the sector's professional standards. Any legal regulatory changes must include parliamentary oversight."