

Grow Them Big

The Cultivation of Big-Size Fruits and Vegetables in China is an ancient tradition



In Chinese agriculture, the pursuit of larger fruits and vegetables has become a notable trend, driven by both consumer demand and cultural significance. Among the most impressive examples are the Chinese big-size bottle gourd, watermelon, and pomegranate, all cultivated to substantial sizes to cater to market preferences and traditional memory lingers.

Chinese Big-Size Bottle Gourd

The bottle gourd (Hu Lu) is a versatile vegetable that has been cultivated in China for centuries. Recently, farmers have focused on producing larger varieties, particularly in regions like Guangxi and Zhejiang, where the climate is favorable for their growth. The big gourd is not only held as a symbol of prosperity and longevity in Chinese tradition. While large gourds are prized for their symbolic meaning, the shift to bigger sizes can sometimes affect their flavor and nutritional content, with emphasis placed on size over taste.

Giant Watermelon in China

Watermelons are a summer staple in China, especially in regions like Xinjiang and Henan, which are known for growing some of the world's largest varieties. These giant watermelons, which can weigh over 20 kg, are highly sought after for their visual appeal and sweetness. They are often showcased in festivals and agricultural exhibitions. However, the focus on producing larger melons can

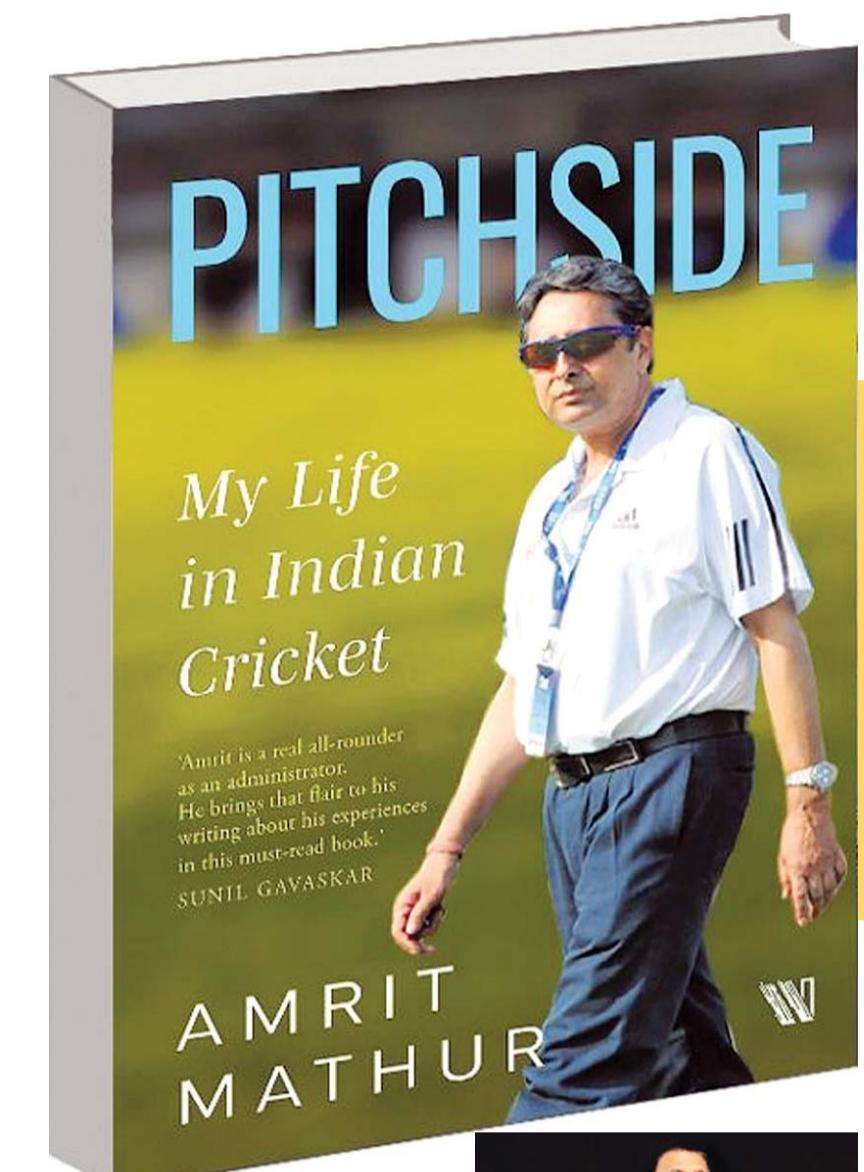


lead to issues like lower sugar content and flavor dilution, as rapid growth driven by fertilizers and genetically modified seeds sometimes compromises quality.

Big Pomegranates: Symbol of Fertility

Pomegranates, especially large ones, are widely cultivated in regions like Gansu and Guangdong. Known for their symbolism of fertility and prosperity, large pomegranates are seen as more auspicious and are often sold at a premium. Their cultivation involves selective breeding to produce bigger, juicier fruits. However, this focus on size can reduce genetic diversity and raise concerns about the environmental impact of intensive farming practices.

The emphasis on large fruits and vegetables in China, including the big-size bottle gourd, watermelon, and pomegranate, reflects both cultural traditions and market demands. While these oversized crops are visually appealing and commercially valuable, they come with challenges including environmental strain, reduced flavor quality, and potential biodiversity loss. Balancing size with sustainability and nutritional value will be crucial for the future of Chinese agriculture.



Asif Ullah Khan

The famed American film critic, Roger Ebert, once described nostalgia as a longing for lost innocence and an ache for youthful optimism. That sentiment finds a natural echo in *Pitchside: My Life in Indian Cricket*, in which Amrit Mathur, civil servant, cricket administrator, and writer, takes readers on a reflective journey through the evolving landscape of Indian cricket, not from centre stage but from the gallery, the corridors of power, and the quiet sides where memory lingers.

Mathur's book is less a conventional autobiography and more a tapestry of recollections, anecdotes, portraits, and personal encounters woven into a broader chronicle of how Indian cricket transformed from genteel amateurism into a high-octane commercial spectacle. At its heart, *Pitchside* is not merely about matches won or lost; it is about people, institutions, and a game that mirrors the shifting rhythms of Indian society.

In the chapter, *Opening the Account*, Mathur is popularly known, recalls Jaipur's cricketing nursery at the St. Xavier's School nets, where the formidable N. D. Marshall served as coach. Marshall Sahab, a member of India's historic 1932 tour of England under Col. C. K. Nayudu, epitomised old-school cricketing orthodoxy. A

fundamentalist of technique, he believed a batsman should play strictly within the classical 'V.' Any flamboyant stroke, the pull, sweep, or hook, invited his wrath, often delivered in sharp, Parsi-accented Hindi. Through Marshall, Mathur resurrects a vanished ethos of discipline, restraint, and reverence for tradition.

He also revisits the legendary

State Sports Council summer cricket camps at Mount Abu, a formative space for aspiring cricketers in Rajasthan. Anyone who attended these camps finds it hard to forget their encounters with the great Mushtaq Ali, who could, with a single stump hit fast bowlers out of the

pitch. Mathur reminiscences about this experience with fondness, and I know this nostalgia personally: my brother, Asif Ullah Khan, attended the camp alongside Mathur and still recounts those unforgettable moments decades later. In this sense, *Pitchside* functions not only as Mathur's memory book but as a collective archive of Indian cricket's grassroots past.

While the early chapters glow with warmth and reminiscence, the narrative gradually shifts to chart the dramatic transformation of Indian cricket. Mathur self-deprecatingly calls himself a 'concussion sub,' yet, his three-decade-long association with the sport places him at the heart of seismic changes, from cream-coloured flannels to coloured kits, from leisurely Test matches to the 'bang-bang' era of television deals, sponsorships, and franchise cricket.

He

recalls his memory book but as a collective archive of Indian cricket's grassroots past.

Mathur also dispels another long-standing myth, that Pataudi and Salim Durrani did not get along.

In fact, Pataudi, who rarely indulged in ranking or comparing players, once listed five or six names when asked to identify the best Indian team: handed the baton to Mathur with a simple instruction:

"Make sure Salim Durrani's name is there."

The anecdote reveals a generosity of spirit and fairness that defined Pataudi's cricketing ethos.

One episode that highlights how Tiger Pataudi remained a purist until his final years comes from Mathur's memory of taking him to Farooq Shah's IPL match. The booming, high-decibel music during over breaks and intervals felt like sheer torture to Pataudi. Within half an hour, he called Mathur and asked him to get his car, unable to endure what he saw as the sensory excess and cultural assault inflicted by this modern, carnival-like version of cricket.

While Mathur pays glowing tributes to Dalmiya as something of a mentor, he shies away from revisiting the most controversial chapter

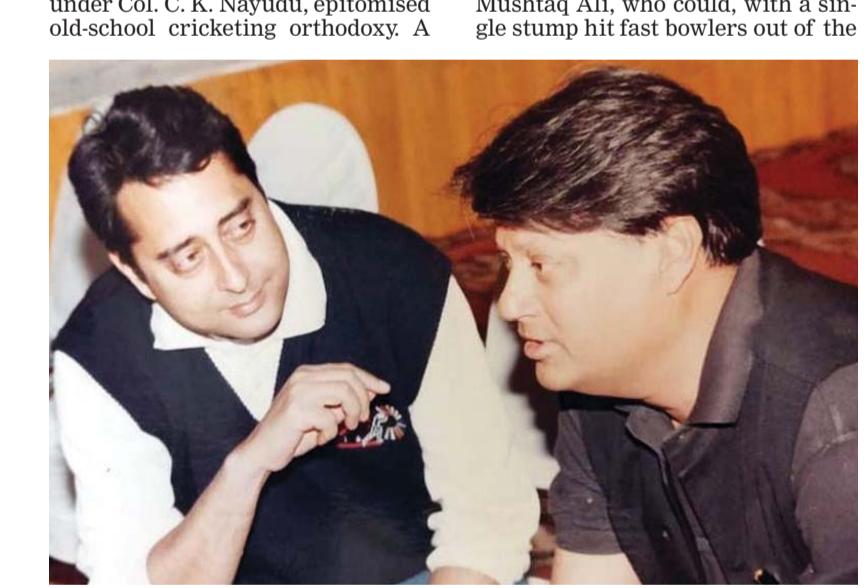
of Dalmiya's career, the dramatic

Shashi Tharoor.

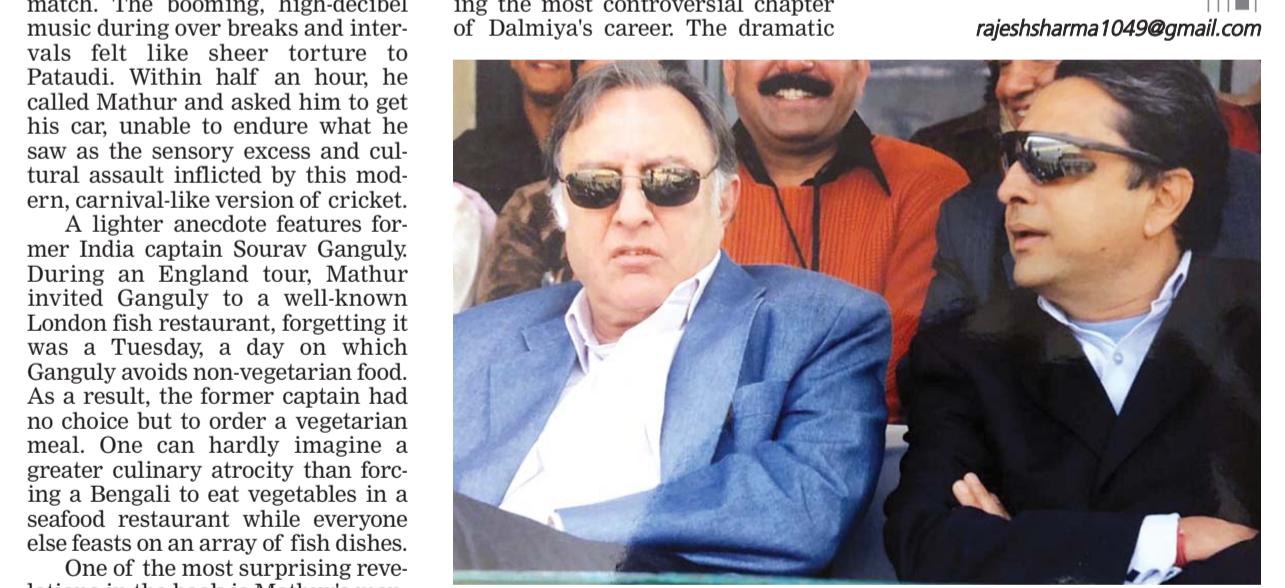
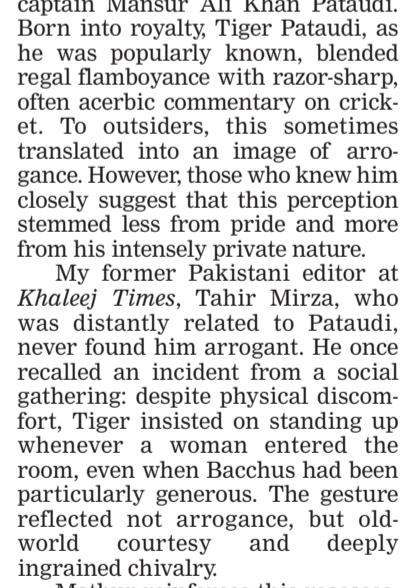
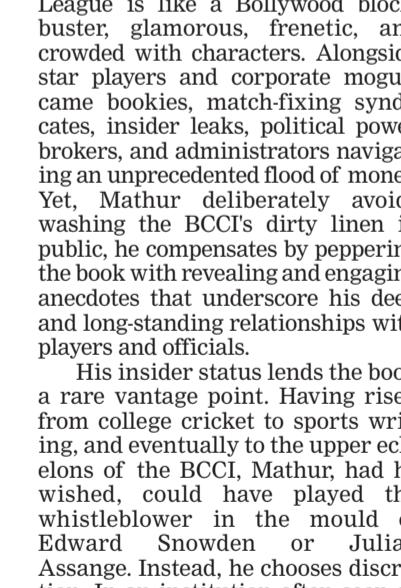
Jagmohan Dalmiya speaking Marwari.

Amrit Mathur with Sachin Tendulkar.

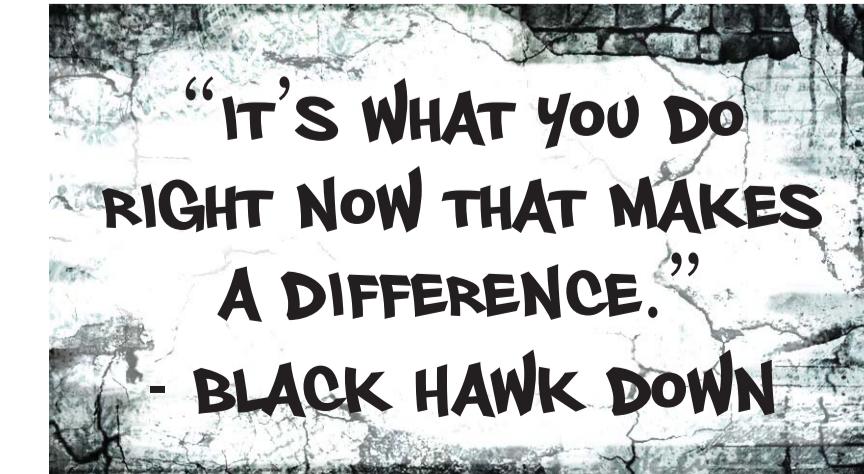
Amrit Mathur with Tiger Pataudi.



Amrit Mathur with Madhavrao Scindia.



THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



Protecting Stripes and Wildlife

International Zebra Day, observed every January 31, is dedicated to raising awareness about the conservation of zebras and their natural habitats. These strikingly striped animals are not just iconic symbols of African wildlife but also play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance. The day encourages wildlife enthusiasts, conservationists, and the general public to learn about the threats zebras face, including habitat loss and poaching, and to support protection initiatives. Schools, zoos, and wildlife organizations often host educational programs, photo exhibitions, and campaigns to celebrate these magnificent creatures and inspire global efforts for their survival.

#STORMS

The Catatumbo Lightning Storms



The Everlasting Storm in Catatumbo, Venezuela: Nature's odd Phenomenon



acts with cooler air descending from the mountains, creating a series of updrafts and downdrafts that produce the necessary conditions for frequent electrical discharges.

3. High Humidity: Venezuela's tropical climate contributes to high humidity, which increases the likelihood of thunderstorms. The moisture-laden air, when mixed with the temperature differences between the lake and the mountains, contributes to the intensity and frequency of the lightning strikes.

4. Electromagnetic Activity: Another theory points to magnetic fields and their interaction with the region's atmospheric conditions, which could potentially increase the frequency of lightning activity.

Impact on the Environment and Climate

The Catatumbo Lightning plays an essential role in the region's environmental processes. For one, the lightning storms are believed to contribute to the nitrogen cycle by breaking apart nitrogen molecules in the air. This process allows the nitrogen to be converted into a form that can be used by plants, promoting biodiversity and the growth of vegetation in the region. Furthermore, the intense thunderstorms are thought to play a role in the weather systems across the broader region, potentially influencing rainfall patterns in surrounding areas. Some scientists believe that the lightning could even have an impact on the global carbon cycle, making it a subject of great interest for environmental studies.

Nestled in the north-western region of Venezuela, the Catatumbo River is home to one of the most unique and awe-inspiring natural phenomena on Earth: The Catatumbo Lightning Storms. Often referred to as the 'everlasting storm,' this extraordinary meteorological occurrence has captured the fascination of scientists, travelers, and nature enthusiasts for decades. Here's a deep dive into what makes this storm so remarkable, its history, and its impact on the region.

What is the Catatumbo Lightning?

The Catatumbo Lightning

The Catatumbo Lightning is a series of electrical storms that occur almost continuously over the Catatumbo River, a river that runs through the northern part of Venezuela and flows into Lake Maracaibo. This phenomenon is characterized by frequent, intense lightning strikes that appear to 'dance' across the sky, illuminating the dark night, and can occur up to 260 days a year. The phenomenon is so consistent that it is sometimes referred to as a 'lightning factory.'

What Causes the Phenomenon?

The exact cause of the Catatumbo Lightning is still not fully understood, but scientists have several theories. The key factors appear to be the geography, atmospheric conditions, and air currents in the region:

1. Geography and Topography:

The Catatumbo River Basin is located near Lake Maracaibo and the surrounding mountains create a perfect storm-producing environment. The region's topography, with its highlands and valleys, traps warm, moist air coming from the Caribbean Sea and cool air from the Andes mountains. This creates a unique atmospheric system that promotes the formation of thunderstorms.

2. Wind Currents:

Warm air rising from the lake inter-