



Pacer Mohammed Siraj could not hide his disappointment, while the India fans had their hands on their heads -- their reactions summed up what had transpired just moments before. On Day 4 of the fifth and decisive Test, India provided a reprieve to England batter Harry Brook when he was on 19. Brook picked out fine leg perfectly off a Prasidh Krishna delivery in the morning session, and Siraj also took the catch quite comfortably, only to have it nullified by stepping onto the rope for a six. Brook rubbed salt on their wounds by notching his 10th Test ton (98-ball 111), as England reached 317 for four at Tea, needing just 57 more runs to win the game and take the five-match series.

## Butler gets his players 'moving' in Vientiane

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler got his 'players moving' through the first practice session in Vientiane on Sunday morning, a day after reaching the Laos capital for the upcoming AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Bangladesh, pitted in Group H, will take on hosts Laos on Wednesday before playing against Timor Leste on Friday and wrapping up the campaign against favourites South Korea two days later.

After journeying on the previous day, Butler took his charges to training early in the morning -- his usual modus operandi -- in an effort to get them 'out of their comfort zone'.

"I always think it's important to get your first session under your belt, get the players moving. Get them out of bed and shake them out of the comfort zone and most importantly, get into work mindset and work ethic," the Englishman said in a video message shared by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

With two days left for the opening match, Butler, guided the team to SAFF U-20 Women's Championship title two weeks ago, will have another session with the ball on Monday before focusing on Laos the day before the match.

"There are one or two little injuries, one with fever. Other than that they trained well this morning. The girls know how I work. They always respond extremely well," Butler added.

The top teams from the eight groups along with three second-best finishers will join hosts Thailand in the final round, which will be held in April next year.



PHOTO: REUTERS

## FIH JUNIOR WORLD CUP Aikman wants to give opponents a hard time

SPORTS REPORTER

Dutch coach Siegfried Aikman has not set any specific targets for Bangladesh in the upcoming FIH Hockey Junior World Cup, but he is determined to make their pool stage opponents -- France, Australia, and South Korea -- work hard for their wins.

Aikman arrived in Dhaka on Thursday and signed a contract with the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) the next day. The agreement, effective from September 1 until the end of the Junior World Cup, marks a significant step for the Bangladesh U-21 side. The tournament will be held in India from November 28 to December 10.

Aikman, who previously guided Japan to gold in the 2018 Asian Games and has also coached Pakistan and Oman, expressed his enthusiasm about working with the young Bangladeshi squad.

"This is a good opportunity to work with Bangladeshi youth. I was asked many times before to come and contribute, but it didn't happen until now. This time, the federation is committed to developing the youth," Aikman said during his introductory press conference at the BHF headquarters on Sunday.

The 66-year-old coach praised the natural talent within the



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh ranks but pointed out the need for better preparation.

"Bangladesh have always had very skilful and talented players, but they haven't been well prepared to compete against top-tier teams. Now the challenge is to take them to the next level."

Although Bangladesh are making their debut at the Junior World Cup, Aikman emphasised on a realistic approach in a tough group.

"We must be honest about where Bangladesh currently stand. Australia are a hockey superpower. France reached the semifinals of the last World Cup, and their youth team did the same in Europe. South Korea are one of the strongest sides in Asia. So, our goal is to give them a tough time. If we can surprise one of them on a day they underestimate us, that would be fantastic. Now, it is

up to us to improve for the dream."

Aikman highlighted the importance of building stamina and introducing a fast-paced, two-touch playing style to cope with high-pressure games against possession-dominant teams.

"These players are highly motivated. Playing in a World Cup is a dream, and they are eager to change and improve. Change isn't easy, but if they are willing -- and they are -- then we can achieve something special."

Meanwhile, BHF general secretary Lt Col (retd) Riazul Hassan stated that one-third of the estimated Tk 5 crore budget for the Junior World Cup campaign has already been secured. As part of their preparation, the team will travel to Pakistan and Germany to play 10 matches ahead of the tournament.

## Faulty domestic yardstick fueling batting inconsistency

SPORTS REPORTER

While listing off issues plaguing Bangladesh batters in international cricket across formats, inconsistency has to be placed somewhere around the top.

Right from Bangladesh's nascent days in international cricket, one good innings would all but guarantee a batter's place in the side for a few games, a tendency that is still prevalent, and because of that, players never really needed to strive for consistency.

According to Bangladesh Tigers programme coach Sohel Islam, scoring runs consistently is a "habit" which needs to be drilled into the players at the domestic level, but that is hardly done in Bangladesh as players often receive a lot of hype for achieving very little.

"I feel that culture is very important regarding how we rate players. If you look at India where domestic cricket is very competitive, a hundred or two is not a big deal there. Here, one big score satisfies the players, coaches and the media," Sohel told the media yesterday.

"Scoring big runs back-to-back is a matter of habit. It can't be that you score two hundreds in



a match but then in the next innings you don't score," he added.

In June, Najmul Hossain Shanto struck back-to-back tons in Galle during the first Test against Sri Lanka but produced scores of eight and 19 in the second, which highlights the inconsistency of established batters.

Sohel feels that batters need to develop the hunger to keep scoring big runs.

"We have talked to Shanto and that he should have scored more runs in the next Test after back-to-back hundreds... We are trying to get out of this situation and trying to change their mindset. The runs you scored yesterday is in the past, the determination you have on the first day and the commitment that you scored the runs with has to be continued.

"We are not trying to measure players by just numbers. What impact and what scenario he is performing in should also be important," he added.

Often, batters with high averages in domestic cricket have not performed well in international cricket or in 'A' team fixtures -- case in point Anamul Haque Bijoy, who struck 700 runs at an average of over 50 in the last National Cricket League (NCL).

Last NCL, Khaled Ahmed was the only top pacer to have played five matches in the first-class competition which meant batters did not face steep challenges across a whole innings against most oppositions.

Sohel pointed out this particular facet and said, "If the opposition has two quality bowlers, you know that if you can survive them you can bring things under your control. In countries with quality domestic cricket, you will find that four of the five bowlers are good and they threaten for a long period."

## 'Went into games knowing we would struggle'

AGENCIES

Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim opened up about the anxiety he experienced last season, admitting he would often travel to matches fearing the worst for his team.

Speaking to reporters at the Chicago Fire's training ground during United's pre-season tour of the United States, Amorim reflected candidly on what was the club's worst campaign since their relegation in 1973-74. United finished 15th in the Premier League -- their lowest since 1989-90 -- and ended the season with a crushing Europa League final loss to Tottenham in Bilbao.

Amorim, who replaced Erik ten Hag in November 2024, managed only seven wins from 27 league matches. During a particularly difficult stretch, United lost four consecutive matches and won just three out of 11.

"It's not how I returned to my house after the games, it was how I left to go to the games, because I felt that sometimes we will struggle," Amorim said.

"All the struggles we had in games, I felt it before. That was the hardest part. To go to the games and know that we are not going to be competitive, I was really frustrated."

"All the credit I had when I arrived was used last year. Now we have to perform. If I have the feeling before the game we are going to be competitive, then we'll be OK. I just don't want

to return to that feeling."

Amorim, however, says his perspective has since shifted.

"I have a less romantic view of the job now," he added, acknowledging his evolving mindset. "But I see things that make me believe better days are ahead."

He was repeatedly questioned for refusing to compromise his tactical philosophy, even amid poor results.

"Sometimes, when you are losing, you might think let's change the standards a little bit for them [the players] to be with me," he said.

"I didn't and they saw it. Now they understand when I say something, I will do it."

"I don't treat players as babies. If you don't train the right way, I have footage to show you. And I show you in front of everybody."

To instill discipline and uphold team values, Amorim has appointed a six-man leadership group: Bruno Fernandes, Harry Maguire, Tom Heaton, Diogo Dalot, Lisandro Martinez, and Noussair Mazraoui. Their role is to ensure standards are met in the dressing room and to handle minor issues.

United will return to training at Carrington on Wednesday, with four players -- Alejandro Garnacho, Jadon Sancho, Antony, and Tyrrell Malacia -- continuing to train separately. "The market is open. I'm just working with the players that I think are going to stay."



Brazilian players jubilantly lift the trophy, celebrating their ninth Women's Copa America title after a thrilling 5-4 shootout win over Colombia in Quito on Sunday, with Marta's stoppage-time heroics setting up the dramatic victory as they prepare to host the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup.

PHOTO: AFP