

## 'We have to find a Bangladeshi way of playing cricket'

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has recently renewed their contract with former West Indies batting all-rounder Phil Simmons as head coach of the national team till the next ICC 50-over World Cup in 2027. In an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan**, Simmons talked about his motivation behind taking up the job for a long term, his assessment of the Tigers' performance in the Champions Trophy and his vision with the side in the coming years. The excerpts are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** How would you rate your first six-month stint with the Bangladesh team before the contract renewal?

**Phil Simmons (PS):** It was excellent. The players in front of me, the support I got from the board and cricket operations, it was all really good. There was no reason for me not to extend my contract.

**DS:** Many top coaches are opting to only take up franchise jobs, what prompted you to take a long-term job with the Bangladesh team?

**PS:** I enjoyed the short tenure with these players. Their attitude of wanting to win, wanting to work hard and wanting to practice hard were why I wanted to extend my contract.

**DS:** Many of the long-serving seniors have retired now, so you will have to depend more on other players as you begin your new tenure. How do you view it?

**PS:** The thing is the senior players will move on at some point. Now, the young players are going to come in and fill up the places of the seniors who have left. We need to be thinking about the 2027 World Cup. You have just lost two of your well-known players – Mushfiqur [Rahim] and Mahmudullah. So, we have to look at who is going to fill those spots. If we can start from now, it will give the replacements a chance to form their own identity in those spots.

**DS:** How do you rate Bangladesh's performance in the Champions Trophy? What actually went wrong?

**PS:** I think we just didn't bat well. That's one of the biggest takeaways. We can work on how we can score consistently and play risk-free from overs 11 to 35. Because we have done well in the Powerplay and death



overs but we need to make sure we do well in those middle overs as well. That's where all the strong teams are doing really well.

**DS:** The Tigers will play two ICC events – 2026 ICC T20 World Cup and 2027 ICC World Cup – during your next tenure. What will be your plans in those meets?

**PS:** I think planning has to start from now. We have to start putting things together, decide how we want to play T20 first of all and then 50-overs cricket. We need to figure out what is the best way for the Bangladesh team to play in order to win tournaments. The T20 planning will start with the Asia Cup. After that, we will assess what are the things that need to be changed and we will make them in time. So, there is a lot to be done.

**DS:** Bangladesh's international schedule is jam packed in the coming months. What is your opinion on player rotation to keep players injury-free?

**PS:** I think from a batting perspective, it will be difficult. I don't really believe in too much rotation in batting. You need to make sure players get time in the middle. However, from a bowling perspective, we have a good number of fast bowlers whom we can rotate and we actually need to rotate as we will be playing a lot of matches from the end of next month till the BPL later this year. We need to rotate our fast bowlers to keep them physically strong and improve their skills.

**DS:** What is your biggest dream with Bangladesh team in the coming days?

**PS:** My thoughts are that we can get a lot better than we are in all three formats. We have young players who are hungry to do well in all three formats. We have to find a Bangladeshi way of playing cricket.

## SHORT CORNER

**Chapal replaced as archery's general secretary**

Bangladesh Archery Federation's long-serving general secretary Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapal has been replaced from the position of general secretary of the ad-hoc committee by international judge and organiser Tanvir Ahmed. The move came after the five-member Search Committee threatened to quit if Chapal was kept in the position in the new committee. Chapal, however, has been retained as the No. 1 member in the new 19-member ad-hoc committee.

**Tamim back home after heart attack**

Former Bangladeshi cricket captain Tamim Iqbal returned home Friday, days after suffering a massive heart attack during a local match. "After observing his health condition, we have decided to discharge him today," Shahabuddin Talukder, a doctor at Evercare Hospital told reporters.

**Ancelotti to go on trial for alleged tax fraud**

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti will go on trial next week for allegedly failing to declare income to Spain's tax office, the Madrid court which will hear the case said Friday.

\*Read full stories on *The Daily Star* website



**Novak Djokovic** turned on the style to take his place in the last four of the Miami Open with an impressive 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) win over American Sebastian Korda, becoming the oldest man to reach a Masters 1000 semifinal on Friday. A victory at Miami would be a landmark 100th singles title for the 24-time Grand Slam champion.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Saudi Arabia's \$500m takeover of cricket and its many implications

### ASHFAQ UL-ALAM

On June 10, 1990, Bangladesh took on Fiji in an ICC Trophy group stage match in Rotterdam, Netherlands.

The team led by Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu, the current chief selector, came out victorious by three wickets with Akram Khan, current director at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), scoring an unbeaten 42 in a 190-run chase.

Even in defeat, some Fiji players came off well in that game, one of them being all-rounder Neil Maxwell, who made 36 with the bat and picked up a wicket with the ball.

Maxwell, who had represented Australia at age level and played first-class cricket for New South Wales and Victoria, represented Fiji, the country of his birth, in the ICC Trophy three more times in 1997, 2001 and 2005. Later he moved on to sports marketing, becoming an agent for many top international cricketers and even becoming the CEO of IPL franchise Kings XI Punjab for a time.

Now, the former Fiji all-rounder is spearheading a new global Twenty20 cricket league backed by Saudi Arabia's SRJ Sports Investment which could potentially change the power dynamics of world cricket and further devalue Bangladesh's position in the global cricketing ecosystem.

**What is the Saudi League?**  
Franchise T20 leagues are literally dime a dozen with almost every Test playing nation having a league of its own. Even countries that don't have ICC full membership like the UAE, Canada, the USA and Nepal have their own T20 leagues.

So, if Saudi Arabia, a gulf nation which has aggressively invested in golf, motorsports, football, esports, MMA, chess and snooker in the last few years with its 'Vision 2030' in mind, wants to splash up to USD 500 million out of their USD 1 trillion Public Investment Fund (PIF) for a new cricket league, what's the big deal?

The big deal is that this proposed new league, which is still in the planning stage, is not trying to carve out a slice for itself in an already congested market of franchise cricket, but is aiming to revolutionise the game as we know it.

Firstly, it won't actually take place in Saudi Arabia as in the initial blueprint, only the final is supposed to take place there.

Secondly, seven to eight teams from different countries are expected to compete

in not one but four separate tournaments held in different venues spanned across the year, much like the ATP Tours in tennis, culminating in a final like the ATP Finals.

So, the Saudis are not just trying to enter the cricket market, they want to establish a new T20 circuit with them at the helm of it.

### Wider implications

Another aspect that sets this league apart is that the World Cricketers' Association (WCA), the global body for cricketers, is a key part of its think tank.

WCA has been butting heads with ICC for years on issues like cricket scheduling and improved remunerations for players.

The association released a comprehensive review of the game's global structure on March 26, 2025, where it called out ICC for its short-term thinking, said only 10.5 percent of the global cricket revenue go to the cricketers, proposed reducing India's current share in the revenues from 38.5 percent to 10 percent and also proposed setting up a global growth and development fund for associate nations.

In the same report, WCA also shared skepticism over whether these proposals would be implemented and said, "A new global cricket product may need to be created that achieves this."

This 'new global product' could be the Saudi league, which promises to distribute its revenue more evenly among all participants and allocating more funds for teams outside the 'Big Three' of India, Australia and England so that they can play more Test matches.

Currently, 50 percent of the ICC's total revenue goes to the 'Big Three' and this monopoly has forced established Test teams like South Africa, West Indies and New Zealand to cut back on the number of five-day matches they play.

The situation is even direr for a new Test nation like Ireland, which recently had to cancel its home Test series against Afghanistan owing to a fund crunch.

Funds from the new league could potentially save the future of Test cricket. And as the Saudi-backed league is set to become the first player-led league in cricket, this should mean higher salaries for the cricketers, which would turn it into one of the most lucrative leagues for the players.

Challenges and the India question

Injection of more funds, a new exciting tournament format, more funds for Test

cricket and better remuneration for cricketers: till now it seems that this new Saudi-backed league – if it takes off – would be a blessing for the game.

But for all that to happen, cricket's biggest stakeholder, India, have to be on board.

As the most powerful and influential cricket board in the world, Board of Control for Cricket in India's disapproval would almost certainly lead to the ICC also rejecting this new league.

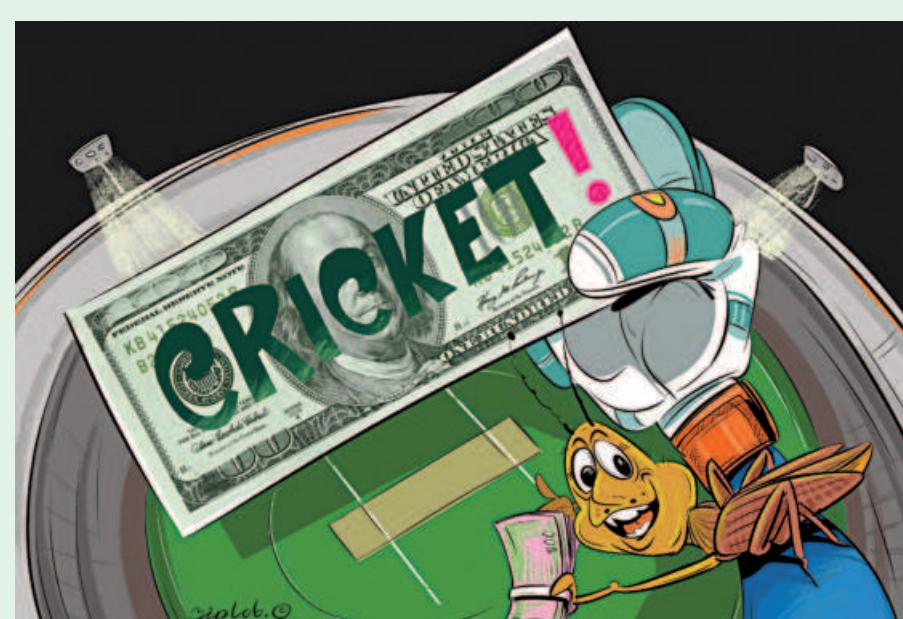
Moreover, for this new league to reach its potential, it would require the participation of Indian players. Right now, the BCCI does not allow any of its contracted cricketers to compete in leagues outside of India. If

Investment's CEO Danny Townsend had broached the subject of the new league to Jay Shah, at that time secretary of BCCI and currently the ICC chairman.

But getting approval from India won't be easy as a new league like this would threaten the current hierarchy of global cricket, where India sits on top.

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is also not interested in entertaining this new league, evidenced by its CEO Richard Gould saying, "there is no scope or demand for such an idea," recently to Sydney Morning Herald. Cricket Australia (CA) is also likely to oppose it.

But that's how the big wigs are thinking



it doesn't make an exception for the Saudi league, it would greatly hinder the league's earnings potential.

While venturing into golf a few years back, Saudi Arabia had boldly created a parallel circuit, LIV Tour, offered millions to top golfers to deflect them into their circuit and basically took over the game with its wealth. But till now, the Saudi officials have taken a much more cautious approach in cricket and have been mindful of India's stronghold on the game.

The IPL players' auction for the ongoing edition was held in Jeddah in last year's November, during which, according to media reports, Saudi Arabia's SRJ Sports

about this Saudi-backed league. What about Bangladesh?

Where does Bangladesh stand? The first question from a Bangladeshi perspective about the Saudi league should be whether a team from Bangladesh would get to take part.

As the structure of the league is still taking shape, there is a chance that players of different nationalities could mix and match to form a team, just like how it happens currently in franchise competitions.

But even if that happens, the interest for Bangladeshi cricketers is likely to be minimal if not nonexistent.

There are other implications as well.

In the current cricket calendar, there are separate windows for all leading franchise competitions, with IPL having the highest two-month window.

The Saudi officials are unlikely to tinker with the IPL window or try to barge into the windows of England's The Hundred and Australia's Big Bash League (BBL).

But if this new league gets approved, four more windows would be sealed off in the calendar, putting other weaker franchise leagues like the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at a disadvantage.

This new T20 league would reduce the importance of inconsequential bilateral series, and further diminish the importance of the already flailing ODI format, both bad news for Bangladesh cricket.

Unlike the cricket authorities in countries like South Africa and West Indies, BCB is not really in need of funds to hold Tests, so how much value the extra Saudi cash could add is debatable.

So, as things stand right now, if a team from Bangladesh doesn't get to participate in this league, there is really not much Bangladesh cricket could gain from it.

### The solution

Coming back to Neil Maxwell, this is not his first rodeo at trying to start up an improbable cricket league.

Maxwell was one of the first persons to push for the creation of a T20 league in the USA in the early 2010s. It turned out he was a bit ahead of his time as a little over a decade later, Major League Cricket began.

Now, Maxwell is leading the charge to establish a radical new league which could change cricket's future. But right now, there seems to be more reasons for it to fail than succeed.

Getting approvals from the ICC and the 'Big Three', the sheer logistics of holding four tournaments and a final every year and finding the time for a competition like this in an already packed schedule are just few of the many hurdles that lie ahead of this ambitious competition.

However, the solution to all of these problems may be quite simple.

As Dan Ohlmeier, late American television producer and former president of NBC West Coast, had once said to explain how every problem in the sports broadcast industry gets solved, "The answer to all your questions is money." And for the Saudis, money is no problem.