



Agassi wins Aussie Open

REUTERS, Melbourne

Defying the ravages of time, Andre Agassi has raced to a landmark, fourth Australian Open crown, thrashing Rainer Schuettler to become the oldest Grand Slam champion for 31 years.

The 32-year-old's 6-2, 6-2, 6-1 victory equals the most one-sided in the event's 98-year history and gives him an eighth Grand Slam title.

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Promotion commotion slows down admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The long-drawn promotion backlog in the civil administration has stirred resentment among mid- to top-level officials and slowed administrative activities.

Over 2,000 senior assistant secretaries, deputy secretaries, joint secretaries and additional secretaries earned eligibility for promotion long ago, said highly placed sources.

Several moves for promotion by the Superior Selection Board (SSB), the highest decision-making body on promotion, stalled due to the influence of a group of civil servants.

Although the civil servants are much junior, they exerted much influence on the administration and were appointed to key offices like the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), after the BNP-led alliance assumed power on October 10, 2001.

The group led by one of the assistant private secretaries (APSS) to the prime minister also asked the SSB to ensure their own promotion ahead of others, alleged senior

officials at the PMO.

Besides, the secret policy of the government on promotion criteria has made uncertain the future of thousands of officials, who joined the civil service through the competitive BCS examinations.

Various criteria set by the government about promotion will create an opportunistic section in the administration and grievance among the majority, fear sources.

Meantime, the continued extension of contractual appointments to key administrative posts led to a backlog, forcing many to go into retirement without promotion.

According to an official figure, 23 out of 54 secretaries in the administration are on contract, 14 are additional secretaries in charge of different ministries and divisions and 17 are regular secretaries.

About 1,620 senior assistant secretaries who entered the civil service between 1983 and 1991 are waiting for promotion to deputy secretary. But there are only 379 vacancies.

Similarly, several hundred offi-

cials are waiting for promotion to joint secretary, additional secretary and secretary.

Sources said the SSB after a series of meetings and much scrutiny over the last seven months finalised the promotion of 379 senior assistant secretaries from 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 batches. But the juniors interfered with the move, as they were dropped from the list.

The SSB on an instruction of the government set criteria that candidates have to score 85 marks. But it will deprive most field-level officials of promotion, as their marks in the annual confidential report (ACR) are not high enough.

Citing an example, a top-ranking bureaucrat on condition of anonymity said the ACR marks of the said APS to the PM must not be the same as others because he has been in service since 1991.

It will be unwise to look back to the civil servants' previous academic life, he argued.

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She came to vote, too

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, back from Rupganj

Fuljan Bibi, 80 years old and blind, yesterday went with her 12-year-old grandson to Kazi Abdul Hamid High School of Rupganj Union to vote. But no-one at the polling centre helped Fuljan cast her vote. She eventually did cast her vote. However, officials at the centre were not sure whether her vote would count.

But it matters little to Fuljan. "Everything is going on well and I am very happy to get the chance to vote." She was one of those women voters who waited in the queues longer than the men did at Rupganj.

Things were no different in the morning in all three unions -- Rupganj, Kaetpara and Daudpur under Rupganj thana yesterday. Most of the 68,722 voters of the three Union Parishad cast their vote. With the voting starting at 8:00am, thousands of men and women stood in queues at different centres.

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PHOTO: STAR

She may be 80, she may be blind, but still Fuljan Bibi went to the polling centre to elect her representative in the Union Parishad elections yesterday at the Kazi Abdul Hamid High School in Rupganj.



PHOTO: PID

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman briefs foreign diplomats at the state guesthouse, Padma, yesterday on the latest developments including push-ins by India.

Ensure people's rights

President tells JS session

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed in his maiden address to parliament last night called for establishing democracy in all spheres to ensure people's fundamental rights and development through a synergy of efforts.

"Only well-coordinated activities of country's legislature, judiciary and executive organs can ensure and expedite development and people's rights," he said in his speech in the maiden session of parliament in the New Year.

Paying glowing tributes to the national heroes for democratic struggle and national independence, the president said: "Independence creates scope for

realising democratic values and spirit. In fact the benefits of independence can be ensured for the people by proper practice of democracy and preserving democratic institutions and values."

Noting that human rights and democracy are complementary to each other, President Ahmed said starting from election procedures, political parties, Jatiya Sangsad, government organisations, civil societies and NGOs -- all must be "clean and truly representative."

The president termed parliament as the main centre for formulation of important policies and laws to run the country and urged the MPs to pass important bills in this 8th parliament through their constructive, effective and active participation in parliament proceedings.

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As the new president delivered his speech at 6:40pm, main opposition Awami League stayed away from the House on a boycott, a usual practice by the opposition seen for last few years on different pretexts.

Jatiya Party MPs led by Rowshan Ershad entered the House to listen to the president after the much-talked-about Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003 was introduced by Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed immediately after the House convened for its winter session.

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JCD asks DMC teacher to quit in 24 hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) yesterday threatened a Dhaka Medical College (DMC) teacher to quit within 24 hours or face 'dire consequences'.

Sources said JCD activists led by its leaders Dr Javed Ahmed, Mahmudur Rahman Noman and Razan went to the room of Assistant Professor of Forensic Department Dr Mizanur Rahman at around 12:40 pm and allegedly gave the threat.

Campus sources said a faction of the JCD brought out a procession on the college campus yesterday noon to welcome Dr Javed who went into hiding after a warrant of arrest was issued.

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Shippers in rough waters over cargo sharing

RAFIQ HASAN

A recent government attempt at reconciliation has only deepened the rift between local and foreign shippers over cargo sharing.

The minutes of a January 15 meeting of the Department of Shipping with mainline and local operators have created serious confusion.

According to the minutes, the mainline operators have "agreed to give their cargo to the Bangladeshi flag feeder vessels if they could maintain their schedule and provide vessels at regular frequencies".

"Only if they fail to get any space on flag feeder vessels, would they book their containers with non-flag vessels meaning foreign flag vessels."

However, representatives of the mainline operators say there is no such agreement and the minutes have been issued without their consent.

The Bangladesh Steamer

Agents Association, representative body of the mainline operators, will soon explain its position, sources say.

The meeting, chaired by Director General of the Department of Shipping Golam Rabbani, also had a chaotic end, with the mainline representatives walking out over a comment from the president of the Bangladesh Ocean Going Ship Owners Association (BOGSOA). The chair's request could not get them back to the meeting.

The minutes, signed by Rabbani, termed the walkout "very unfortunate".

Earlier at the meeting, the BOGOSA president proposed that if a Bangladeshi flag vessel can comply with shippers' requirements, it must get priority over other vessels.

As no mainline representative raised any objection, the government deemed the matter settled, the minutes explain.

A director of QC Shipping

Limited, one of the major feeder-vessel operators and member of the Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee (CFTC), said the mainline operators could boycott Bangladesh or ignore the minutes.

Nevertheless, the country should not allow any monopoly over shipping as it would hamper trade, he said.

He also blamed the BOGSOA president for provoking the mainline representatives to boycott the meeting. "There should be competition and businessmen should be allowed to choose vessels based on their needs."

BOGOSA President Sayeed Hossain Chowdhury termed the boycott an insult to Bangladesh. "They (mainline representatives) must go by the law of the land, if they want to do business here."

"We should not be afraid of disruption in trade if foreign shippers impose any restriction on the

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Judiciary separation SC unhappy over govt inaction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday expressed dissatisfaction with the four rules on separation of the judiciary and the draft bill to amend the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

The court sent the draft back and asked the government to submit it in three months after modifications based on the court's earlier directions.

The order was issued by the full bench of Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury, Justice Md. Ruhul Amin, Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim, Justice KM Hassan, Syed JR Muddassir Husain, Justice Abu

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US rules out gas export link with INS registration

UNB, Dhaka

The US government said its decision tightening immigration regulations for Bangladeshis is in no way linked with gas export, port or any other commercial issues.

Rather, it is based on the question of potential national security or law-enforcement concerns on available information, a spokesman for the

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Terror-risk list FDI may not slow down: BOI chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment (BoI) Mahmudur Rahman believes Bangladesh's recent inclusion in the US list of terror-risk countries may not put brakes on the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI).

"It is the trade which is going to be affected more than the investment by the listing," he told a monthly meeting of Foreign Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) at a city hotel yesterday.

President of FICCI Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan said at the meeting that the recent inclusion and the country's poor image abroad are likely to hit the country hard.

"Although the government is

very rightly concerned about what will happen to the Bangladeshis living there, it is equally important to assess what impact it will have on future foreign investment in this country," he said.

The FICCI president regretted the FDI flow into the country has not been what was expected of.

He cited confrontational politics, bureaucratic procrastination, inconsistencies between policies of the government and their implementation, inadequate and inefficient infrastructure facilities as the major impediments to the FDI flow into the country.

"Frequent and abrupt changes in the fiscal policies and lack of co-ordination between policy executing agencies of the government are

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Enam, Shuvra Dev get ad-interim bail

UNB, Dhaka

Reuters stringer Enamul Huq Chowdhury and singer Shuvra Dev were granted ad interim bail yesterday.

A High Court division bench granted Enam ad interim bail for six months and issued rule upon the government to show cause in two weeks as to why he should not be granted regular bail.

The court order came upon a petition filed on behalf of Enam, which was moved by Dr Kamal Hossain.

Enam was detained on December 12 on charge of filing "false and misleading" reports linking al-Qaeda elements with the

December 7 bomb blasts in four movie houses in Mymensingh.

Enam, a staff reporter of state-run news agency BSS, was sacked from his job while in custody.

Later, he was shown arrested in the Mymensingh bomb blast case, which is under investigation.

Meanwhile, Chamber judge of the Appellate Division Syed JR Modassir Hossain granted ad interim bail to singer Shuvra Dev who has been in custody since December 5.

Shuvra was arrested on charge of attempting to smuggle alleged top criminal Abdul Rashid alias Kala Faruq out of the country as member of a cultural team to Sweden.

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