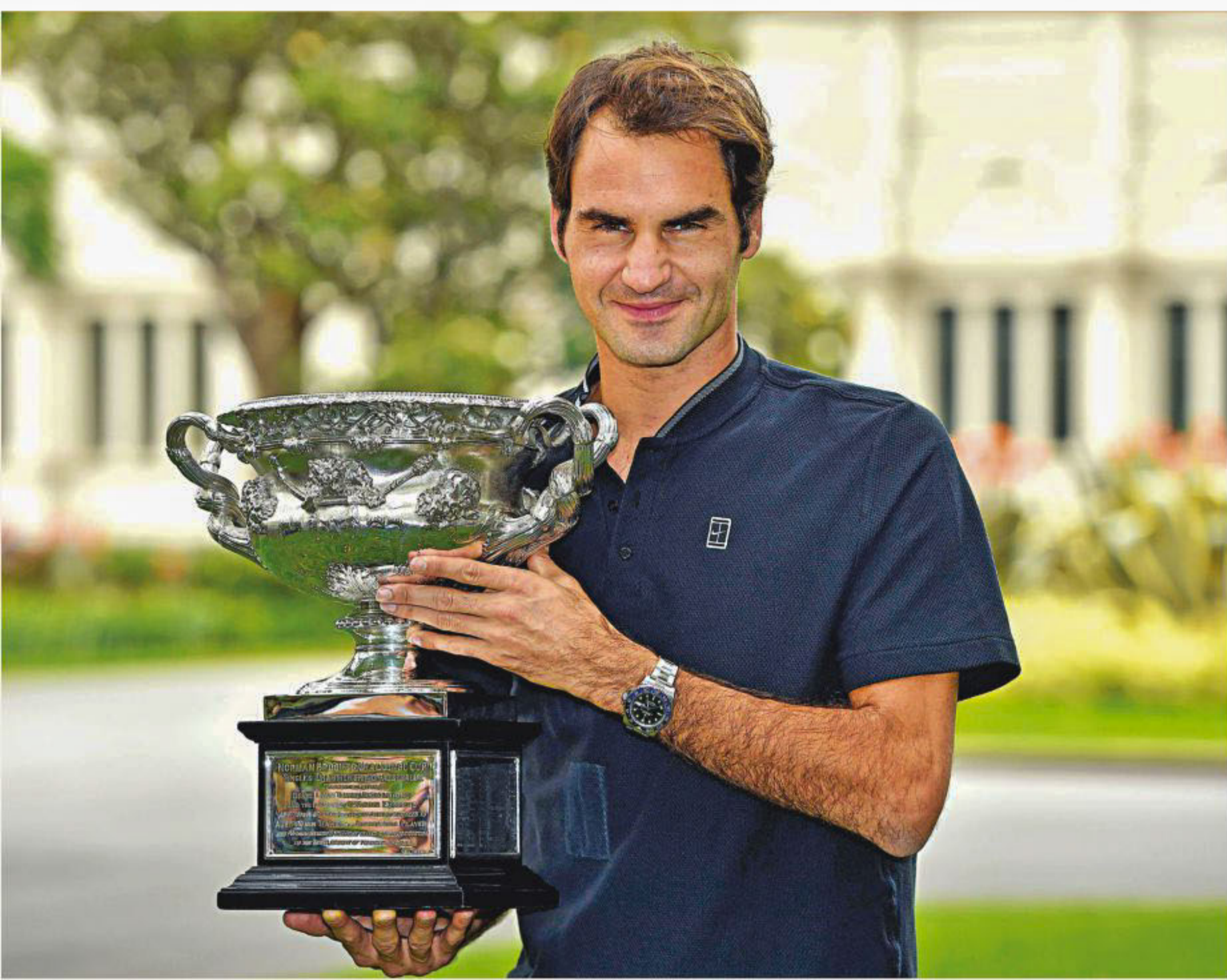


**IT STARTED FROM BARCELONA**

Diego Maradona has revealed his drug problems began when he was at Barcelona in the 1980s in an interview with an Italian private television network, Canale 5. The 1986 Argentina World Cup winner said his habit began in his early 20s and continued beyond the end of his career. "I was 24 when I started taking drugs. I was at Barcelona," said Maradona. "It was the biggest mistake I've ever made in my life. My daughter asked me to live for her while I was in a coma. I thank God because he listened to her and woke me up." Maradona was asked whether money, women or drugs were the biggest problem in his career. "Drugs were the biggest problem — drugs kill," said Maradona. "I'm very fortunate to be here speaking to you. If I had continued I would have died. No doubt." —AGENCIES



Roger Federer of Switzerland holds the Australian Open trophy during a photocall in Melbourne yesterday, a day after winning the men's singles final for his 18th career Grand Slam title.

PHOTO: AFP

**Federer hints at retirement**

AFP, Melbourne

Roger Federer dropped hints that his great career will be drawing to a close after his age-defying win over his Grand Slam nemesis Rafael Nadal at the Australian Open.

The 35-year-old Swiss admitted his return to Melbourne wasn't guaranteed after he ended a five-year wait for his 18th major title by beating Nadal in a thrilling five-setter.

He told the Rod Laver Arena crowd: "I hope to see you next year, but if not, then it was a wonderful year here and I couldn't be happier tonight."

Federer has been rebutting suggestions of retirement for several years, but he said he was now aware injuries could force him off the scene.

The Australian Open marked his comeback from a six-month injury break, the longest of his career, after he underwent surgery for the first time last February.

"This is all about, you know, knowing that I have only so much tennis left

in me," he told reporters, when asked about the comment in his acceptance speech.

"If I do get injured, you know, maybe if I miss next year, who knows what happens... You never know when your next Grand Slam is going to be, if ever.

"You never know if you're going to have an opportunity at this stage."

Federer added: "Look, I've had a tough year last year. Three five-setters are not going to help. I just meant it the way I meant it.

"There wasn't something planned behind it, that this is my last Australian Open. I hope can I come back, of course. That's my hope right now."

Federer, now four titles clear of Nadal and Pete Sampras on the all-time major-winners' list, was troubled by injury during the tournament and he said he had been carrying an upper leg problem since the second round.

Unusually for the Swiss, he took a medical timeout in the final as well as during his five-set semi with Stan Wawrinka. He also went five sets with Kei Nishikori in round four.

He said Sunday's 6-4, 3-6, 6-1, 3-6,

6-3 win ranked alongside his 2009 French Open victory, which completed a career Grand Slam and ended a run of three defeats in the final.

"I think this one will take more time to sink in. When I go back to Switzerland, I'll think, 'Wow'. The magnitude of this match is going to feel different," he said.

"I can't compare this one to any other one except for maybe the French Open in '09. I waited for the French Open, I tried, I fought. I tried again and failed. Eventually I made it. This feels similar."

Fittingly it was Nadal who pushed Federer to one of the biggest achievements of his career, after his Grand Slam chances had been largely written off.

It was a redemptive win as Federer has struggled against Nadal, losing four straight major finals to the fearsome left-hander since his Wimbledon victory in 2007.

"Rafa definitely has been very particular in my career. I think he made me a better player," Federer said.

"It remains for me the ultimate challenge to play against him. So it's definitely very special."

**4-member team to run BCCI**

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from New Delhi

India's Supreme Court announced a four-member team to run the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday.

The team is headed by former highly-respected former bureaucrat and Indian government's top audit body head Vinod Rai, historian Ramachandra Guha, ex-woman cricket captain Diana Edulji and banker Vikram Limaye.

A three-judge bench of the apex court, led by Justice Dipak Misra, said Limaye, along with Anirudh Chaudhary and Amitabh Chaudhary of BCCI, will represent the Board at the ICC meeting in February first week.

The bench rejected the Attorney General's request to appoint the Secretary of Sports Ministry as a member of the committee. The apex court referred to its earlier judgment debarbing ministers and government servants from holding office in BCCI in forming this judgment for now.

Career banker Limaye & BCCI Joint Secretary Amitabh Choudhary will represent BCCI in the ICC meeting on financial share model which will be held in the first week of February.

The apex court had in its order from January 2 removed Anurag Thakur as BCCI president and disqualified all the board and its state association office bearers who had failed to meet the new norms set by the Justice R M Lodha Committee. The Justice Lodha Committee had recommended a revamp of the BCCI.

Vinod Rai, former Comptroller and Auditor General of India, had shot to limelight some years ago when he had uncovered the national loss suffered by Indian government in allocation of telecom spectrum to private companies in what came to be known as 2G scam.

**Siddikur to spearhead local challenge**

*Bashundhara Bangladesh Open starts tomorrow*

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman will be hoping to use the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open as a springboard for a return to top form after enduring some tough times in the last two years. The two-time Asian Tour winner, whose last success on Asia's premier golf tour came more than three years ago, is expected to spearhead a 39-man Bangladeshi contingent in the third edition of the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open, which gets underway at the Kurmitola Golf Club tomorrow.

Siddikur, who finished last season in 16th position on the tour's Order of Merit, thinks he is doing pretty well despite not having won a title in a long time.

"There are shifts in a golfer's career due to internal reasons like injury, swing variation, etc. Those things had an impact on my not winning a big title in the last two editions," the 32-year-old golfer said at the pre-tournament press conference at the KGC auditorium yesterday. "However I don't think I'm doing badly. Finishing 16th on the Order of Merit is not bad, is it?"

Despite finishing 35th and 38th in the two editions on his home Asian Tour event, Siddikur did show glimpses of his best form last year when he finishing second in the Mauritius Open. The ace golfer is hoping he finds his best form, or that any compatriot

wins so that the trophy designed after the Royal Bengal Tiger stays at home since this tournament is believed to be the last of the Asian Tour events sponsored by the Bashundhara Group.

"I will be equally happy if it's not me but someone else from Bangladesh winning the trophy. The scores that have been set in the BPGA events recently augers well for this event," Siddikur hoped.

Indeed Shakhawat Hossain Sohel, who was the best local in both the previous editions, and Jamal Hossain Molla, who finished seventh last year, are two of the 38 other Bangladeshi golfers who will have a shot at the 54,000 winner's cheque come Saturday. The fact that this year the foreign contingent is supposedly not as strong as the previous two years will only increase the locals' chances.

The foreign challenge is expected to be led by the opening edition's champion Mardan Mamat of Singapore, India's Jeev Milkha Singh, American Johannes Veerman, in-form Shubhankar Sharma of India, as well as countryman Rashid Khan and American Casey O'Toole.

A total of 134 golfers from 23 countries will be vying for top honours in the 300,000-dollar event, which is the third leg of the Asian Tour schedule this season, informed speakers at the press conference, which was attended, among others, by Asian Tour director Jittisak Tappasert, officials of Bangladesh Golf Federation, Kurmitola Golf Club and Bashundhara Group.



Golfer Siddikur Rahman (C) will be the centre of attention when the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open gets underway at the Kurmitola Golf Club tomorrow. Here the ace golfer is seen posing in front of the winner's trophy with the tournament hosts, organisers and sponsors alongside him after a press conference yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

**Mustafiz, Shila win BSPA awards**

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket sensation Mustafizur Rahman and South Asian Games' double-gold medalist swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila won the sportsperson of the year award for 2015 and 2016 respectively in the Kool-BSPA Sports Award held at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

Finance minister AMA Muhith distributed prizes among the winners as the Bangladesh Sports Press Association awarded sportspersons, coaches, organisers and sponsors for their contribution to sports in the last two years.

Mustafizur also won the popular choice award, said a press release from the organisation yesterday.

**Timely boost for Zidane**

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane believes he has no need to rush Gareth Bale back from a long-term ankle injury as the European champions extended their lead at the top of La Liga on Sunday.

Madrid saw off Real Sociedad 3-0 thanks to goals from Mateo Kovacic, Cristiano Ronaldo and Alvaro Morata to open up a four-point lead on Barcelona and Sevilla.

Bale has been out since suffering ankle ligament damage in November and is not expected to return before March.

**A-Stoinis-hing effort**

AFP, Auckland



New Zealand scraped home in the first one-dayer against Australia Monday, but only after rookie all-rounder Marcus Stoinis' fell agonisingly short of dragging his team to victory with an unbeaten 146.

In just his second ODI, Stoinis took three wickets then flayed the New Zealand attack as the Australians chased a target of 287 runs at Auckland's Eden Park.

He came to the crease with Australia reeling at 54 for five and calmly set about rebuilding after his more experienced teammates had squandered their wickets.

His 146 was a record ODI score for an Australian number seven batsman and included 11 sixes and nine fours.

Remarkably, the 27-year-old's last

partnership with Josh Hazlewood was worth 54, but Hazlewood did not face a single ball as Stoinis stayed on strike trying to guide Australia home.

His heroics prevented a trouncing in the opening match of the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy, sparing Australia's blushes after they rested their star batsmen for the series.

The tourists left David Warner and Usman Khawaja out of the squad to protect them for the upcoming Test series in India, then lost captain Steve Smith and wicketkeeper-batsman Matthew Wade to injury.

But the players expected to offer leadership in their absence failed to step up and the Australians crumbled before Stoinis arrived.

Their woes were largely caused by rash or careless shots, not demons in a pitch on which the New

Zealanders had batted solidly.

Relative newcomers such as Travis Head (5) and Peter Hanscomb (4) could be forgiven for a rush of blood to the head at the sight of the short Eden Park boundaries.

However, stand-in captain Aaron Finch (4), Shaun Marsh (16) and Glenn Maxwell (20) -- all with 50-plus ODIs -- are likely to face tough questions over the performance.

Boult dismissed Head and Finch in the fourth over, with the acting skipper falling to an acrobatic Jimmy Neesham catch trying to pull past square leg.

Marsh went after a lazy dab at Mitchell Santner's spin and Maxwell tried to collar rookie speedster Lockie Ferguson, only to nick the ball to the wicketkeeper.

Stoinis grafted an 81-run seventh wicket partnership with James Faulkner (25), then added another 52 to Australia's total with Pat Cummins.

He smashed three sixes off one Jimmy Neesham over, then blasted another off Boult to bring up his century off 96 balls.

Australia looked on the verge of an unlikely victory, needing just seven runs off three overs, before a mix-up saw Hazlewood run out and Stoinis stranded at the crease.

Finch, missing his star scorers, elected to bowl after winning the toss.

It paid early dividends as New Zealand struggled, with nerves appearing to get the better of some Black Caps as they sought to avenge a 3-0 white-wash to Australia last December.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**

**NEW ZEALAND:** 286 for 9 in 50 overs (Guptill 61, Williamson 24, Broom 73, Neesham 48; Cummins 2-67, Stoinis 3-49)

**AUSTRALIA:** 280 all out in 47 overs (Maxwell 20, Stoinis 146 not out, Faulkner 25, Cummins 36; Boult 2-58, Ferguson 2-44, Santner 3-44)

**Result:** New Zealand won by 6 runs. **Player-of-the-match:** Marcus Stoinis.



Marcus Stoinis of Australia celebrates his whirlwind century against New Zealand during the first ODI at Eden Park yesterday. Stoinis scored an unbeaten 146 runs off 117 balls but failed to win the match for his side. PHOTO: AFP

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