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Performance tribute

FARAZ IHTESHAM

As the year 2007 comes to an end, The Daily Star Sport acknowledges the outstanding performances by the Bangladeshis both on the local and international stages.

The contenders were nominated for their achievement during the year 2007.

Mohammad Ashraf was listed as the Sports Personality of the Year along with his Tigers teammate Mashrafe bin Mortaza as well as Abdullah Al-Rakib, Zahid Hassan Emily and Enamul Hossain Rajib.

Ashraf was instrumental in Bangladesh cricket team's success as they beat South Africa in the ICC Cricket World Cup and West Indies in the World Twenty20 Cup.

Mashrafe was responsible for saving the follow-on against India that ultimately led to Bangladesh earning a draw in the Chittagong Test, their only one in the year.

Rakib became only the fourth chess Grand Master of Bangladesh. Emily was the best footballer in the inaugural B. League.

Rajib, who qualified to the World Chess Cup, made it to the second round of the tournament.

The contenders for Coach of the Year were Dav Whatmore, Syed Nayeemuddin and Aminul Islam Bulbul.

Whatmore was the mastermind behind Bangladesh making it to the Super Eights of the main World Cup in West Indies.

Nayeemuddin kept faith in his boys as Bangladesh drew 1-1 with Tajikistan during the FIFA 2010 World Cup pre-qualifier at the Bangabandhu National Stadium; a match which Bangladesh should have won.

Bulbul coached Abahani to the domestic cricket title. Bangladesh National Cricket Team and Abahani got the nod for the Team of the Year.

Bangladesh achieved great success in international cricket while Abahani made a clean sweep

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AL MUSABBIR SADI

As the dawn breaks in the New Year, everyone would love to forget the depressing sporting year of 2007 as soon as possible. A flickering hope of walking in the right way again would keep the sportsmen alive though, as the country tries to settle and bank on the coming sporting events to revive its reputation in the backdrop of players plunging into uncertainty and many considering ending their careers prematurely as money continued to dry up from the grim domestic sports scene.

What began with the footballers' demonstration in demand of starting domestic competitions has also become a concern for cricketers following a court battle of some clubs with the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

Football, on the wane regarding popularity, lost another point to cricket as the country's first-ever professional league failed to draw a single full-house crowd.

Unfortunately, it turned into all but a table sport throughout the year as the governing body of the game ran into fire from the frying pan by the end of the season, a complement of his highness SA Sultan's (BFF president) crusade of upholding the FIFA mandate against the popular demand of his resignation.

The launching of the Pro League -- or the B. League -- as it is called, was perhaps the only plus-point for the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), which shelved all other tournaments including the very popular National League to make its newborn a success.

It provided food for less than 300 footballers -- or the so-called professionals -- for 11 teams as the remaining players had to travel across the country to play 'kha'p' (on hire) in negligible tournaments to earn their bread. A few youngsters, not already forced to leave



PHOTO: STAR FILE

ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.I Although we are already nearly a decade into the 21st century, the country's sports' state of affairs remains in the ancient age as depicted in this picture. The picture taken on April 21 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium shows a veteran attendant timing the men's 4x100-metre relay manually with the help of a stopwatch during the 32nd National Athletics Championships. Bangladesh is probably the only country in the world which is still using this outdated method when just about everything you need is available at your fingertips.

the profession or go abroad for meagre jobs of petite salaries -- were told to concentrate in other sports by their worried parents.

Despite lack of infrastructure to go pro, footballers and organisers welcomed the B. League with hope of giving a booster dose to the

'dying game' and put it back on the big stage.

With eventual winners Abahani facing Muktiyoddha in the opener, the historic event kicked off on March 2 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. Three teams from Chittagong and Khulna

joined eight clubs of the capital and although the standard of the game got higher, the crowd was not attending. Matches were played, even outside Dhaka, in empty stadiums as one of the tightest title chases in history of local football climaxed on July 27 when Abahani

beat Sheikh Russel 2-0 to secure the maiden professional league title and end a six-year trophy drought.

The league concluded five days later with Dhaka Mohammedan, who had formed the weakest possible team as far as the memory goes, successfully securing the runners-

up spot.

Abahani had begun their journey under former Bangladesh coach Diego Cruciani, the Argentine who left midway through the league due to growing pressure as two of the three Argentine players failed to produce the goods. The return to form of Zahid Hassan Emily, whose marksmanship later in the competition saw the sky-blues cruise to the end with a seven-point lead, proved decisive in the end. The year proved as good for Abahani's cricket team, who regained the league title after half a decade in the wilderness.

Barring the B. League, football hogged the headlines for all the wrong reasons. A week before the end of the B. League, BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal tendered his resignation (July 24). The federation admitted the well-kept secret on August 6.

The BFF, which roped in India's Syed Nayeemuddin as national coach, took a surprise decision by sending two 'national teams' to Nehru Cup in India and Merdeka Cup in Malaysia simultaneously under different coaches. The teams returned without a win -- Nayeemuddin's men even failed to beat Cambodia in New Delhi -- but a 1-1 home draw against Tajikistan on October 8 in the pre-qualifiers for the 2010 World Cup raised new hopes.

Hours after the game on the same night, the roof of the press box at the Bangabandhu National Stadium collapsed during a rain-storm. Thankfully, it was empty at the time of the crash. Any one visiting the site next day realised the power of devastation: all three commentary boxes and the stretched seating arrangement for reporters were totally smashed by the weight of the concrete as the entire hanging roof, which was

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Moments of 2007

Each year has its share of thrills and spills; and 2007 was nothing different. Here at Daily Star Sport, we share our favourite moments and the not-so-favourite ones and a quote that will remind us of this year.

Mohammed Al-Amin
Sports Editor

Favourite Bangladesh moment
Bangladesh's victory against India in the World Cup

Favourite international moment
Twenty20 World Championships that took the world of cricket by storm

Worst moment
The untimely death of Manjarul Islam Rana and Sajjadul Hasan Shetu on March 16

Favourite quote
Anything that Jose Mourinho said during his glorious three and half years with Chelsea

Favourite Bangladesh moment
Senior Sub-Editor
Victory against India in the World Cup

Favourite international moment
India's Twenty20 World Championships victory

Worst moment
Bangladesh's 5-0 loss to Tajikistan in the second leg of the 2010 World Cup pre-qualifiers in Dushanbe after their impressive 1-1 draw in Dhaka on October 8.

Favourite quote
"He can't keep his mouth shut because he wants to keep making these comments. He must be a miserable man in his life."

Muttiah Muralidaran, off-spin legend, on leg-spin legend Shane Warne
Zakaria Simon
Senior Sub-Editor

Favourite Bangladesh moment
When Bangladesh football team drew 1-1 with Tajikistan in a 2010 World Cup pre-qualifier at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on October 8

Favourite international moment
Zimbabwe's unlikely victory over Australia in the Twenty20 World Championships

Worst moment
Learning the news that young cricketer Manjarul Islam Rana died in a road accident in Khulna on March 16

Favourite quote
"Sri Lanka Cricket at this moment of time is not going in the direction it should be going, especially with a set of muppets headed by a joker."

Former Sri Lanka captain Marvan Atapattu endears himself to his selectors during Sri Lanka's tour of Australia

Al Musabbir Sadi
Senior Sports Reporter

Favourite Bangladesh moment
Launching of the professional football league

Favourite international moment
Brazil's second-string team's Copa America triumph beating Argentina in the final

Worst moment
Collapse of the press box at the Bangabandhu National Stadium

Favourite quote
"Media cannot be controlled without exchange."

Bangladesh Football Federation president SA Sultan
Bishwajit Kumar Roy
Sports Reporter

Favourite Bangladesh moment
Tigers beating India in the World Cup

Favourite international moment
Sourav Ganguly's comeback

Worst moment
To watch the Tigers in Sri Lanka

Favourite quote
"You can only write an obituary on this scorecard but not a report."

A veteran journalist reacts after Bangladesh were bundled out for 62 on Tuesday

Quazi Zulquarain Islam
Sub-Editor

Favourite Bangladesh moment
Bangladesh beating South Africa in the World Cup

Favourite international moment
Iraq's victory in the Asian Cup against all odds

Worst moment
Brian Lara retiring from cricket

Favourite quote
"All I want to ask is, have I entertained?"

West Indies legend Brian Lara asks the obvious in his last international match against England
Mohammad Isam
Sports Reporter

Favourite Bangladesh moment
Bangladesh's win over South Africa in the World Cup Super Eights

Favourite international moment
Yuvraj Singh's six sixes off a Stuart Broad over in the Twenty20 World Championships

Worst moment
Manjarul Islam Rana's tragic death

Favourite quote
"You want to see your son alive or do you want a cricket player?"

Bangladesh and Chittagong batsman Nazimuddin recalls a conversation with his mother during a torturous Under-19 camp

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Brilliant start & forgettable end

Our bits and bobs



PHOTOS: AFP FILE

MOMENTS OF GLORY: Paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) starts the end of India by uprooting opener Virender Sehwag's middle stump in their first group match in Port of Spain on March 17 while Mohammad Ashraf (R) executes his trademark scoop to perfection on way to guiding the Tigers to a famous win over South Africa in the Super Eights stage in Guyana on April 7 during the World Cup in the West Indies.

BISHWAJIT ROY

The last day of the Year 2007 could not turn any worse for the Tigers. If Queen's Park Oval was a dream then Queenstown is a living nightmare.

On March 17 2007, Tigers turned India upside down to seal a historic five-wicket triumph in their first group match of the World Cup at the Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain and sent shockwaves throughout the cricketing fraternity.

It was not the only occasion when the country erupted into frenzied celebrations rather there were more to come from Bangladesh in the year that just ended. But the cricket-loving fans enter the New Year 2008 with a bitter memory following their shocking 10-wicket defeat at the hands of the Kiwis.

Starting the year with a 3-1 away series victory against Zimbabwe, the Tigers gradually improved their reputation as a one-day unit before they sunk in New Zealand for a contrasting finish to the year with a whitewash in the three-match series.

On the eve of the New Year, we

always love to look back at what happened in the year gone by and that was the reason we have decided to look back at what we have achieved in international cricket in 2007.

Unfortunately Bangladesh's sport at international stage is all but a story of its cricket team's success or failure and without any doubt it could only have brought back some happy memories when we look back at the Tigers' performance had they not spoiled the party in the end.

But we have to put aside what happened in New Zealand when we sum up the year that has gone by.

Of course in terms of statistics, the failure took over the success stories but one may be fooled by only relying on the 'stupid' figures because the Tigers stood up tall to ensure that our beloved 'Red and Green' flag flew high in the game's two most important events -- ICC World Cup in West Indies and the first-ever Twenty20 World Championships in South Africa.

Out of 23 one-day internationals, Bangladesh won eight and had one success, their maiden victory

against West Indies in any form of the game, in the Twenty20 version in Test as they suffered four innings defeats out of their five games. The only draw came thanks to a rain-favoured match against India in Chittagong.

But please set aside the above figures and think of what happened in the night of March 17 when the

Tigers did more than their share to uphold the spirit of the martyrs, in what had been a month of pain for Bangladesh as regards to the struggle for freedom thirty-six years ago, as they also dedicated the success to their fellow teammate Manjarul Islam Rana, who tragically and untimely died in a road accident just few hours before the match. This was the most painful incident

of the year.

If the confirmation of the Tigers second round berth for the first time in history was not good enough, then simply recall the night of April 4 when Habibul Bashar's men caused the biggest World Cup upset after they romped to a famous 67-run victory over then number one ranked team South Africa in their World Cup Super Eights encounter at the Guyana National Stadium.

These two fascinating wins saw the country erupt into more festivities but as well as that, they also experienced the saddest part when Bangladesh lost to ICC associate member Ireland.

After four months the Tigers however produced another occasion to celebrate when they cruised to a six-wicket victory against West Indies to make themselves a passage for the second round berth in the Twenty20 World Championships.

On individual success, it would also be unwise only to judge the matter on statistics because few stunning successes of Mohammad Ashraf and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza could not be matched with any other.

How one can forget the devas

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We mourn



PHOTO: STAR FILE

NATIONAL LOSS: Manjarul Islam Rana (L) and Sajjadul Hasan Shetu were killed in a tragic road accident in Khulna on March 16.

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Sometimes work pressure brings the best out of The Daily Star Sport team and our stomach starts yearning for 'something good'. At that point, all eyes move to the birthday list on the bulletin board to check out the next fulfilling dinner.

January and July are the best months while May, October, November and December do not disappoint either.

After every hearty meal on these birthdays, a big "Thank You, ..." follows; someone points his finger to the next birthday boy at that point.

TRAGEDY IN THE MUD

(A BRAZILIAN DOES A KAHN)
Quarterfinals of the Meril Media Cup football tournament saw The Daily Star leading 1-0. Our captain and goalkeeper, who had an answer to everything flung towards him in the tournament till that point, let an innocuous looking long-range shot slip between his hands in the muddy quagmire of the Bangabandhu National Stadium, although the defence was to blame for the ball going through that far (1-1).

Minutes into the extra-time, our form striker (who once posed with Jamie Reeves) missed the simplest of chances laid on by the playmaker/sports editor.

So off we went to the penalties

and as it happens to England almost in every tournament, The Daily Star missed those vital spot kicks and bowed out gracefully, with the Fair Play trophy in its bag.

THAT PHONE CALL TO RAFIQUE

One night in November, Al Amin bhai wanted to take Mohammad Rafique's immediate reaction after the veteran left-arm spinner was 'rested' from the New Zealand tour.

Photographer Anisur Rahman, apparently quite a friend of Rafique, provided Al Amin bhai with his mobile phone number but it wasn't quite what we thought. Glee, he asked him to call up the photography section of his office for a better conversation on a land phone. A confused Al Amin bhai expressed his surprise that how does our Dhakaia hero Rafique sit at a photography section of a newspaper office; stomach-churning laughter ensued.

Al Amin bhai did get to talk to the real Rafique but only after we crosschecked, double-checked to see if it was the right man.

OUR SHIFT

The Sport Section was on the third floor, which is the top floor, until

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

FOUR REASONS TO SMILE: Abdullah Al Rakib became the country's fourth chess Grand Master in September.

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