

After a big year, an even bigger one looms for the paddlers

SINGAPORE — They celebrated a successful 2009 season on Friday night, but Singapore's women's table tennis team of Feng Tianwei, Sun Beibei, Li Jiawei, Wang Yuegu and Yu Mengyu have already laid out their goals for the upcoming year.

The team finished second at the World Team Cup and Asian Table Tennis Championships last year, and the national side wrapped up the season by bringing home six out of the seven gold medals on offer at the SEA Games in Vientiane, Laos in December.

At the inaugural Singapore Table Tennis Association (STTA) Awards Ceremony at Toa Payoh on Friday, president Lee Bee Wah set the team a target of three medals at the Asian Games in Guangzhou

in November, and four golds at October's Commonwealth Games in Delhi.

Feng, the world No 6, was crowned Best Player of the Year.

The 23-year-old and other members of the national team depart Singapore for the Qatar Open on Monday, and will miss the Lunar New Year holidays.

"The big task this year is the World Team Championships, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games ... with Jiawei back in the team, the team strength will increase and become stronger," she told MediaCorp.

Sun, world No 19, teamed up with Yu Mengyu to win the SEA Games women's doubles title and she received the Special Award of the Year.

The spotlight also turned on Singapore's local-born paddlers at the event. Pang Xuejie bagged the Most Improved Player of the Year accolade. Singapore Sports School student Isabelle Li, 15, who won the mixed team bronze medal at the Asian Youth Games, received the Most Promising Young Player award.

With STTA's increased focus on developing local talent, table tennis chief Lee stressed that players like Pang, Isabelle and Zena Sim would receive the support required to turn them into world-class paddlers.

"We would like to give them opportunities to take part in events like the World Championships and Pro Tours, and improve their world rankings," she said.



Pang Xuejie bagged the Most Improved Player of the Year accolade. TODAY FILE PHOTO

"In the last two years, our youth development squad and national youth teams have doubled in numbers, and youth development is going well."

Paddler Xuejie, 16, who graduated from the Singapore Sports

School last year, has taken a year off studies to concentrate on table tennis.

"My goal is to get a medal in the Commonwealth Games with my doubles partner Cai Xiaoli," he said. LOW LIN FHOONG