

Tribune

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GUJARATI



All she wanted to do was help.

So NP student Priyanca Radhakrishnan

roped in two other friends to kick-start

what became a massive island-wide quake relief effort.

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The lowdown on the \$150 rise. Plus aid schemes, bursaries and loans to help you cope.

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NP students dig a water hole in Indian tiger reserve, trek near Himalayan mountains.

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Students sell flags for Muhammadiyah Welfare Home. Good samaritans bring cheer to the aged.

It started small; I only wanted to help the victims of the Gujarat earthquake. But after a few meetings with Student Affairs officer Mr Vickneshwaran s/o Thangavelu, and friends Alvenia Chenteley and Kevin Lim, we decided not to limit collection to Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP).

We did not know there was so much red tape we had to clear. The Land Transport Authority had to give permission for us to use MRT stations, the Commissioner of Charities for permission to collect public donations. It took five days to search for volunteers, arrange for transport and storage and iron out the coordination.

We finally started Operation Gujarat on Saturday, 3 February at 9 am.

We thought it would stay small

I had not expected the snowball effect. The usually pristine sports hall, our operations centre, was completely transformed.

Mountains of donations were piled ceiling high. Volunteers were dashing from one end of the hall to the other; bringing in donations, sorting, packing and taking inventory. All this while, the Operation Gujarat hotline rang non-stop, as people called in after hearing about it from the radio, television and newspapers on just one day.

Truckloads of donations arrived at NP, all filled with bags of clothing, blankets, rice and other necessities. They had been collected from the four designated MRT stations and from house-to-house collections.

We had hoped to receive 25 to 30 tonnes of donations. After 14 hours, we got 150 tonnes.

The massive outpouring of generosity and compassion and the fact we pulled this off still surprises me. But what moves me most is the response to our call for aid. One woman, who declined to be named, donated one tonne of rice. There was even an elderly gentleman who called in and offered to donate 20 kg of gummy sweets and 30 Teletubbies toys to the earthquake victims.

About 200 people dropped what they were doing that Saturday to help out.

Operation GUJARAT

BY PRIYANCA RADHAKRISHNAN



A flood of donations and compassion. Almost 200 volunteers turned up to help sort the 150 tonnes of donations.

Among the helpers, including families and their children, were about 100 Indian labourers who turned up, thanks to Tamil radio station Oli 96.8 FM.

Sorting out the 150 tonnes

Through the day, the volunteers at NP toiled like coolies, transporting the loads from the trucks into the hall. Bodies bent, shirts soaked through, they had a joy that comes with good, honest work.

Over at the MRT stations, it grew almost chaotic. As the piles of donations grew, volunteers formed human chains to haul the donations to waiting trucks.

By 5 pm, 70 truckloads of supplies had arrived in NP. By midnight, we ran out of packing cartons. About 15 of us stayed over in school that night. We had to finish the packing, take inventory and discuss what to do with the phenomenal amount of donations.

It was quite an adventure – imagine eating hot roti prata and curry chicken at 2 am! As we ate, we chatted and laughed, marvelling at the benevolence of the human spirit. That night, I got a taste of communal living at its best.

The aftermath

We only managed to clear up the sports hall by 7 am. By then, it was neat once again. It was hard to imagine that just a few hours back, it was alive with the shouts and laughter of volunteers and the sound of little feet running around. All the items were packed into marked cardboard cartons and stacked at the back of the hall.

All the hard work made every bone in my body cry out for rest. As I sat in the front of the hall and looked back, a sense of satisfaction overwhelmed me. Suddenly the exhausted and aching limbs felt amazingly good.

The five days of conceptualising and organising Operation Gujarat had been well worth it. All the obstacles in the planning stages no longer mattered.

It felt good to help; I was so proud of Singaporeans and their generosity. It is nice to know that in a world rife with crime and evil, there is still some kindness and compassion.

The well-rounded chase



KELVIN NG

FROM July, students in this polytechnic will get broadbased learning. Budding engineers can learn to be the next Sim Wong Hoo. Ditto business and accountancy students eager to ride the life sciences wave.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) hopes this will make students more well-rounded. The formula: that by 2002, you will take 30 percent of your modules outside the usual classes in your discipline.

Core subjects will take up only 70 percent of your modules, down from 85 percent previously. This will be fresh air for most students who dread three years of routine, similar subjects.

To make space for these inter-disciplinary modules, core curriculum may be cut. Trimming repetitive modules is always welcome for students; nobody relishes mugging the same topic twice.

Although details have not been finalised, the changes may also put the squeeze on both lecturers and students. Already, they have more heavily weighted assignments – the result of the lowering of exam weightage announced last July. Will the new

modules throw up even more work for students?

As it is, some ECA groups say they are having trouble drawing more students in. And yet there is no better way of being well-rounded than mixing with people of different academic backgrounds, picking up a new hobby, or helping the community. If students can be graded for the inter-disciplinary modules, then there should be some academic merit for being well-rounded through ECA achievement.

This newspaper is in favour of inter-disciplinary learning, but a three-year course is too short for it. Even with the proposed changes, students will only take perhaps four modules outside their respective departments. Is it enough to give depth to our learning, or will we be trying to do too much with too little time?

Also, the institutionalised effort at making students well-rounded reflects what seems to be a disturbing reality. Will students learn only when they are required to?

My view is that universities which focus on academic instead of vocational skills are better set up to give a rigorous broadbased education. More importantly, students need to know if the new modules will make them more flexible and valuable in a workforce that needs people with hands-on skills.

After all, NP prides itself on being a polytechnic of industry.

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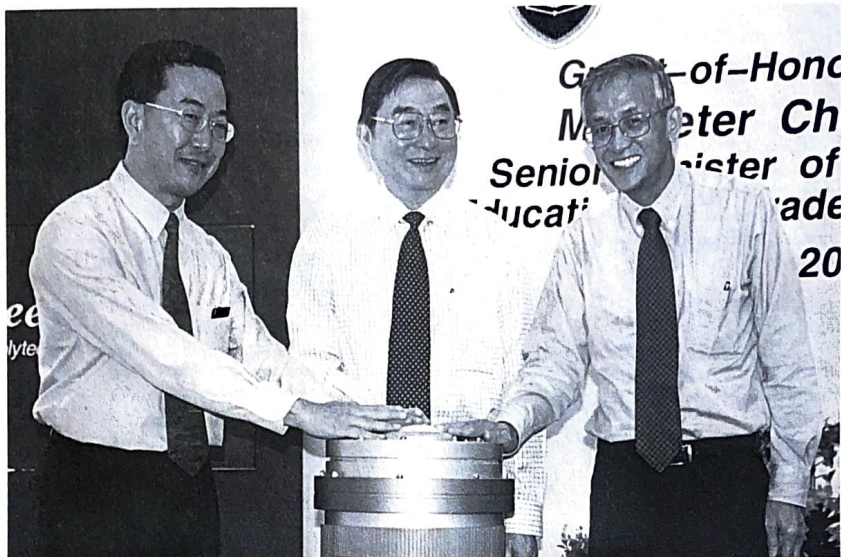
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We welcome feedback and suggestions from our readers. Contribute by writing to: The Editors, Ngee Ann Tribune, Centre for Film & Media Studies, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, 535 Clementi Road, Singapore 599489 or email us at ntribune@hotmail.com. Letters should include your full name, contact number and department. The editorial team reserves the right to edit all letters where necessary.

Course structure gets revamp from July



NP will come out leaner and more agile. Also, students will reap the benefits of a more broadbased curriculum, said Senior Minister of State for Education and Trade and Industry, Mr Peter Chen (centre).

BY AMY TAN

From July, first-year students will be the first to benefit from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) new learning matrix.

This will give students broadbased, industry relevant skills, said Senior Minister of State for Education and Trade and Industry, Mr Peter Chen. Speaking at the ground-breaking ceremony for Phase V of NP's expansion programme, he said, "Broadbase would mean that [students] need to pick up skills other than technical, we do not want students to leave the polytechnic knowing only technical things."

Last June, NP put together an Academic Systems and Structure Team to review its current education system. It recommended a new learning matrix and re-organisation of existing academic departments into six schools. This aims to provide students with a more well-rounded learning experience.

A New Learning Matrix

Inter-disciplinary modules take up 15 percent of curriculum now. These are compulsory modules for all students such as, Physical Education, Productivity and Quality Studies and Social and Community Values 1 and 2.

Under the new learning matrix, inter-disciplinary content will double to 30 percent, said Mrs Pee See Hua, Director of Institutional Planning and Development. Classes in a student's core discipline will make up the other 70 percent.

The proposed modules can be chosen from the areas of Media and the Arts, Entrepreneurial Studies, Information and Communication Technology, Life Sciences, and Communication and Life Skills. Details of scope and registration for these modules are being worked out.

"The introduction of the new learning matrix will allow students a more wholesome total learning experience in NP as well as the ability to customise their curriculum, to a certain extent, based on their own interest and choice," said Mrs Pee.

"If we can give them the opportunity ... to pursue certain modules of their interest, I think it gives the students more motivation," she said.

NP principal, Mr Chia Mia Chiang said, "We want to have ... a student that will graduate from Ngee

Ann, more well-rounded ... [with] broad knowledge that will enable him to function not only in his own area of study but also other fields as well."

Six Super Schools

Besides the new learning matrix, academic departments will be reorganised into six schools. They are the Schools of Engineering, Life Sciences and Chemical Technology, Business and Accountancy, Infocomm, Film and Media Studies, and Inter-disciplinary Studies. The Centre for Early Childhood Education is not affected.

Mrs Pee, the incoming director of the School of Inter-disciplinary Studies, said this will create a "greater synergy ... sharing of facilities ... optimal utilisation of resources and also because of the inter-disciplinary school, a lot of talent flow".

The schools will not only "nurture enterprising graduates and promote own professional expertise", but also enable lecturers to do more research, said Mrs Pee.

Infrastructural Changes

In the pipeline is a five-storey central teaching hub that will replace the Octagon, classroom block 56 and Lecture Theatres 64, 65 and 66.

One highlight of the \$40 million expansion programme is a 2,000-seat Convention Centre. Piling works for the Convention Centre began early this year. It will be ready by March 2002. The Octagon will then be demolished to make way for the new five-storey teaching block, to be ready by 2003. This replaces the Octagon as NP's landmark and will be a venue for cultural events.

Also, some of the oldest departmental buildings – Electronic and Computer Engineering, Business Studies and Accountancy – will be re-engineered to keep up with the changes and needs of the industry, said Mr Mui Cheng Hock, Deputy Head of Estates and Development.

Their laboratories will be re-configured and a design technology centre will be built, with construction starting by June.

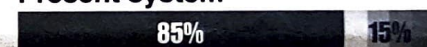
Also part of Phase V, the two-way road between Canteen 1 and the Octagon will be widened and a covered walkway will be built across the road.

Broadbase would mean that [students] need to pick up skills other than technical, we do not want students to leave the polytechnic knowing only technical things.

– Mr Peter Chen

Senior Minister of State for Education and Trade and Industry

Present system



A Mechanical Engineering student, for example, has 85% of modules in engineering-related, or core subjects.

The remaining 15% was split between four modules – PE, PQS and SCV 1 and 2.

New system



From July, core modules make up 70% for first-year students.

New inter-disciplinary modules will take up the other 30%. They are from the following key areas:

- Communication and Life Skills;
- Entrepreneurial Studies;
- Information and Communication Technology;
- Life Sciences;
- Media and the Arts.

Poly fees up \$150 from July

BY SITI RASIQAH

From July, polytechnic fees will rise by \$150 to \$1,950. This will increase by about 8 percent annually for the next three years.

The fee increase comes after a two-year freeze during the economic crisis. But in this time, operating costs of polytechnics have gone up, said Mrs Ang Beng Wah, Head of Finance at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP). She added that since 1997, the cost of training a polytechnic student has increased by 21 percent.

NP's foreign students will pay 10 percent more than Singaporeans. Tuition fees for the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore Management University will also be raised.

For students who need help, there are several financial assistance schemes. The three most common ones are loans, bursaries and scholarships.

Loans like the CPF education scheme, tuition fee loan and study loan schemes are not based on academic merit and there is no minimum income requirement.

The CPF scheme has the most number of applicants. It gives a maximum loan of up to 100 percent. The tuition fee loan for Singaporeans and permanent residents pays for \$1,462.50 or 75 percent of the fees. Foreign students can also apply for this scheme but they will pay 10 percent more.

From 1998 to 2000, all who applied for the CPF scheme, tuition fee loan, PSC study loan and NP study loan were awarded the loans.

Bursaries are also not based on academic merit, but there is a household income requirement. Amounts given out range from \$465 to \$3,319, depending on a student's need. Donors give money for bursaries, and the amount may exceed fees.

Scholarships are awarded to students who have done well in their studies. The financial needs of applicants are considered. Application usually opens in July.

In 1999, 32,192 students from all four polytechnics were given financial help. About 27 percent of the applicants for the polytechnic administered award schemes received the awards in the same year. For the Community Development Council/Citizens Consultative Committee (CDC/CCC) polytechnic bursary, almost 89 percent of applicants were successful.

The new \$1,950 fee from each student pays for about 15 percent of NP's operating costs. These include staff salaries, utility bills, teaching materials, minor maintenance works and so on. The other 85 percent is subsidised by the government, added Mrs Ang.

This figure does not include miscellaneous fees such as examination and Students' Union fees.

"The [Government's] target is to get students to pay 18 percent of the operating costs. But even with the increase, in three years' time, the fees will cover just 17 percent," said Mrs Ang.

The impending increase caused mixed reactions. For some students like Norita Abdullah, 18, a first-year Electrical Engineering student, it is still "affordable".

Others want to see improvements around campus for the extra money they are paying.

But Mrs Ang explained the fee increase does not cover costs of new infrastructure such as lecture theatres or more advanced equipment. All these costs, called capital expenditure, are borne solely by the government.

2003 ●
Singaporean students \$2,270
Foreign students \$2,497

2002 ●
Singaporean and PR students \$2,100
Foreign students \$2,310

2001 ●
Singaporean and PR students \$1,950
Foreign students \$2,145

Now ●
Singaporean and PR students \$1,800
Foreign students \$1,980

Tertiary fees are up eight percent by \$150 in July. Here is what some Ngee Ann Polytechnic students had to say about the increase.

"The fees are paid by me. With the increase, I don't have much money left ... I earned enough to pay for around three years in poly," **Ong Jenn Shyan**, 17, a first-year Centre for Computer Studies student.



"The poly fees are already so expensive. I don't feel it's necessary to increase it any more. I have another sister who's also studying in poly, so it's quite hard," **Sandy Leong**, 17, a first-year Business Studies student.



PHOTOS: ADALINE LAU

"It doesn't affect me now, but maybe after I start work, when I have to repay. But for some of them who are paying on their own, of course, it's a really big sum of money," **Ng Lyn Kwan**, 19, a second-year Mechanical Engineering student. Lyn Kwan is on a CPF loan scheme.

Financial help for all – you don't have to top your class

Scheme	CPF Approved Education Scheme*	Tuition Fee Loan Scheme*	NP Study Loan Scheme*	PSC Study Loan Scheme*
Eligibility	Full-time students with CPF savings or whose parents have CPF savings	Full-time students regardless of citizenship	Full-time students awarded the Tuition Fee Loan	Needy students who are Singaporeans or PR. Full-time students awarded the tuition fee loan
Loan amount	Up to all tuition fees, or up to 80% of investible savings	Up to 75% of tuition fees	Up to \$1,200 per semester, depending on need	Up to 25% of tuition fees and up to \$1,000 for living expenses
When	Application opens every May and November	Application opens every June	Applications throughout the year	After tuition fee loan is approved

*Forms available at Finance office, block 1, level 1

*Forms available at Student Service and Information Centre (Atrium) and Student Counselling office (block 18, level 2)

No changes in dress code

Most departments opt to keep no-bermudas, no-dyed-hair rules after a Student Affairs poll. SA tells Ian Koh it has to curb excessive fashion statements.

It is final – the Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) dress code is here to stay. Inter-department polls conducted by Student Affairs (SA) in November and December asked departments to vote to keep the rules, modify them or scrap them entirely. The result: most departments are in favour of the present guidelines.

Although there are no official results, SA officer Mr Vickneshwaran s/o Thangavelu, confirmed this in an interview with Tribune.

When asked if last year's Project Eyeball newspaper report – which followed up on a Tribune story about the NP dress code – prompted this review, Mr Vickneshwaran said, "The trigger for the review was not Project Eyeball itself. The article was just a catalyst."

He said that the review was long overdue because while SA recognises that young people express themselves through fashion, NP has to maintain its role as an educational institution and draw the line at excessive fashion statements.

In comparison with previous years' regulations, the present rules are more liberal. Ms Nurmeza binte Ali, 24, an Electronic and Computer Engineering graduate and current lecturer said, "I find that rules

Although students like to dress fashionably, the dress code must be followed [for them] to look more dignified, rather than in an unkempt manner.

**– Mr Tan Ah Sway
Head of Mechanical Engineering**

previously were much stricter because students were not even allowed to colour their hair."

Meanwhile, SA said there were fewer dress code offences since the new semester began, in comparison with the same period last July.

Mr Vickneshwaran added that the number of offenders within each department is small in relation to its size. Unofficial figures put the number at one percent of the general school population.

He said, "Students have to look at things from a school's point of view and the poly has to do that as well. But often, students' needs and a poly's need do not match. The best guideline is to ask yourself 'what can I wear to the workplace'."

Lecturers have their reasons for agreeing with the dress code. Mr Tan Ah Sway, Head of Mechanical Engineering said, "Although students like to dress fashionably, the dress code must be followed [for them] to look more dignified, rather than in an unkempt manner."

Dr Hedy Goh, from the Centre for Life Sciences and Chemical Technology (LSCT), agrees, "The way you dress reflects your character. [A] certain sense of decorum is required. After all, this is an educational institution."

"Me and my dad, we are pals"

BY AMY TAN

A father and son who go clubbing together and share clothes? That is the incredible story of Jeffery Yang, a Building Department (BD) lecturer and his 21-year-old son, Jian Yang, a Film and Media Studies graduate.

"Instead of a father-and-son thing, we're more like friends," said Jian, now a national serviceman in the Republic of Singapore Air Force. They share everything from shoes to pants to problems at work, said the two, nudging elbows as they talked.

The duo was invited to speak at Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) first-ever student forum. Held at the Regional Language Centre, the two-day event 'Family Matters - Understanding', aimed to give the 150 student participants a greater understanding of the family and its importance.

Jane Chee, one of the organisers, a third-year Electronic and Computer Engineering student, said the theme "is something near to everyone's heart – family ... We realised some of the families nowadays in Singapore are getting more westernised and it seems like we're losing all the traditional methods of how a family should be like."

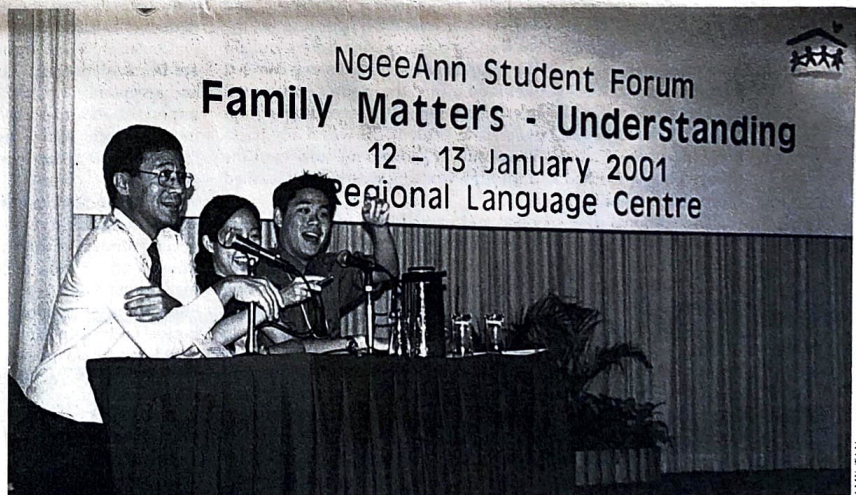
Sharing their personal lives with the students, Mr Yang said a teacher-friend, who found Jian's behaviour rude, told him to "respect his father more".

The father laughed as he recalled Jian telling that friend, "You don't understand my relationship with my father, me and my dad, we are pals."

Added the 47-year-old, "If I had five seconds to think of the greatest achievements in my life before I were to kick the bucket now ... it would be to hear my son say 'me and dad, we are pals'."

Both father and son cited communication as the key to their strong bond. Building this relationship, takes hard work and consistency, they said. Being in the same campus for the last three years also helped as Jian talked with his father every day on the way to school and back home again.

However, some are not as fortunate as Jian. Coming from a double-income family, Chua Ga Wang,



A 36-year age gap or not, father Jeffery Yang (far left) says he even wears son Jian's (far right) pants.

18, a first-year BD student, said that he hardly sees his parents during the day. The only way to "talk" to them is by leaving short notes or memos.

Ga Wang, the eldest of three children, cooks for them all because his mother works. Having to take care of his siblings, he has also learnt independence and responsibility. Working mothers, parents and late marriages were some of the issues discussed by guest speaker, Nominated Member of Parliament, Claire Chiang. Ms Chiang, a working mother of three, said the ever-changing demands of a modern society, such as Singapore, add pressures to a family. Thus, work-stressed parents and their academically-stressed children must try even harder to maintain good and strong family relationships.

The NP student forum, organised by 12 students from various departments, was held to promote strong family foundations, a key component of the Singapore 21 vision.

If I had ... to think of the greatest achievements in my life ... it would be to hear my son say 'me and dad, we are pals'.

**– Jeffery Yang
Building lecturer**



Digging a 'hole' in a tiger reserve

Tribune reporters, Sze Toh Yui Munn and Priyanka Radhakrishnan, roughed it out in the Indian outback with 30 other students, all for a good cause.

They were city folk. But, in seven days, 30 Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) students built a water hole in a North Indian tiger reserve.

In India for a 21-day community service and adventure trip, the volunteers worked for a week, unwound at the Himalayan foothills and even managed to squeeze in a visit to the Taj Mahal.

Touching down at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi airport at midnight on 6 November, the tired students were soon crowded three-to-a-seat on a rickety school bus for a six-hour trip. The mission: to increase villagers' water supply at the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, 180 km southwest of New Delhi.

With the villagers, the students built a water hole, or *johad* in Rajasthan. A *johad* loosens the ground and collects rainwater. This in turn raises the water level in village wells. Water harvesting is very important for the rainfall-scarce region. According to the villagers, it only rains once a year in August, over a four-day period.

Every morning, the students left the lodge at seven to collect their shovels and steel pans from the guards of the reserve, and began digging. Because the *johad* was inside the tiger reserve, the students were warned not to wander off alone, as a tigress and her cubs were on the prowl. The quiet beauty of the reserve coupled with the danger of being tiger food upped the group's excitement.

According to Kalidasan s/o Singaraju, 20, a second-year Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering student, "It was really back-breaking manual labour, it was fun. It showed me how hard the village people worked and through working with them, I learned more about them."

The students dug, scooped and passed pans of soil the entire day under the blazing sun. During that time, they had the help of boys from the nearby village school. The boys, aged between 11 and 20, spoke the native language, Rajasthani. Communication with NP students was mainly through sign language. However, the camaraderie steadily strengthened and by the end, some of the Singaporeans had picked up some Rajasthani words.

The students also saw life at its simplest in a village. The women, their faces covered by brightly coloured veils, drew water from the well and balanced the water pots on their heads all the way back to their huts. Some could even balance three pots with-

out holding them. Outside the villagers' mud huts, the students sipped steaming cups of garam chai, or hot tea, in the waning sunlight.

After a gruelling week in Rajasthan, the students boarded another bus, for a more comfortable thirteen-hour ride to Tirthan Valley, 750 km northeast of New Delhi.

Compared to the sweltering heat in Sariska, the weather in Himachal Pradesh, at the foothills of the Himalayas, was almost shocking.

Although temperatures dipped to minus five degrees Celsius here, students had no trouble acclimatising. They were soon headlong in the nine-day adventure program, which included rock climbing, river crossing, mountain biking, rappelling and a three-day trek up a 3,900 m high mountain.

Working together to cross a river with only ropes, scaling a mountain face and helping each other during the exhausting trek, allowed students get to know each other better. Sharing tents and answering the call of nature in the frozen outdoors were new experiences to most.

Dayanithi s/o Karunanidhi, 21, a second-year Film and Media Studies student said, "I realised that teamwork is very important and acceptance of each other's strengths and weaknesses is also important on a trip like this one. It's important for everyone to motivate each other. I saw this in Himachal Pradesh." He added, "I learnt a lot on this trip and if I get another chance I'll definitely go again."

No trip to North India is complete without a visit to the Taj Mahal in Agra, a five-hour train ride from New Delhi. One of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Taj Mahal is a brilliant fusion of Muslim and Hindu architecture. It is made of gleaming white marble inlaid with semi-precious stones. Built in 1653 by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, it houses both their tombs.

Most participants felt that the \$900 they paid for the three-week Operation Ngee Ann was worth it. Kalidasan added, "I value my life more as now I understand that I have a lot more than a lot of people. I strongly encourage others to go on such trips outside of Singapore, look beyond our shores and see how others live."

For seven days, NP students laboured hand in hand with the students of a local school...



As opposed to the sweltering heat in Sariska, it was freezing cold in Himachal.

PHOTOS: SZE TOH YUI MUNN

BY SITI RASIQAH

The recent career fair pulled in some 3,500 students, but some have said the variety of jobs offered was poor. Recruiters taking part were mostly looking for engineering graduates.

"The fair doesn't offer much for me, since it's focused more to the engineering side," said Jean Li, 19, a third-year Accountancy student.

"It doesn't really have what I'm searching for," echoed Joslyn Hua, 20, a Building student. However, she said the fair was helpful as it widened her career choices.

What the companies had to offer

At the two-day event on 11 and 12 January, visitors saw prospective employers from the government sector, such as the Singapore Police Force and the Defence Science and Technology Agency. Telecommunications, banking, hospitality and shipping companies also took part.

Of 35 companies, most offered technical positions. Companies such as Tech Semiconductor Singapore Pte Ltd and ST Assembly Test Services said they were mainly targeting engineering students.

Students like Wong Ee Wern, 20, a third-year Electronic and Computer Engineering student found the fair relevant since most jobs offered were in line with their course of study.

Singapore Telecom had other positions for Business Studies, Accountancy and Computer Studies students. But Mr Lee Soon Tee, Singtel's human resource manager, said their focus was still on engineering students.

Exhibitors also talked to students about job prospects, career development and salary details. ST Engineering Ltd engineers even shared job experiences with students. There were no immediate job offers for students, but those interested could fill in application forms.

Organisers' say

Responding to students' views this year, Ms Alice Chung, the organiser and a Ngee Ann Polytechnic student counsellor, said she would try to bring in companies from other industries like communications, accountancy and finance in future.

She said 2,000 invitations were sent last October but those who replied and registered were mainly engineering companies. Next year, Ms Chung will try a different approach.

"It will be based on the percentage of students in Ngee Ann ... If 40 percent of our students are engineering students, then 40 percent of the companies will be from the engineering industry," said Ms Chung.



where
is the
variety

HOT JOBS:

- IT and Engineering – the job market needs technical personnel.
- Accountancy – there is a constant requirement for accountants.
- Film and Media Studies – more jobs for media students with the birth of new media companies.

Source: Ms Eve Lim, GMP Recruitment Services (Singapore)



TRAVELLING Chinese opera artistes brought an ancient Chinese myth to life at the Atrium on 18 January. Fleshing out the adventures of monkey god, Sun Wukong, and his companions in the tale, 'Journey to the West', actors from China-based Pan Yan Ling opera troupe wowed the crowd in two half-hour shows. Deft back flips, swift acrobatics and intense swordfighting scenes made the shows an entertaining affair. Said Alex Lo, 21, a third-year Electronic and Computer Engineering student, "It's quite refreshing. I thought it would be quite boring, but it turned out to be quite alright. I'm impressed by how the five performers are able to perform so many different roles."

Electronic and Computer Engineering joins life sciences chase

BY JUSTINA TAN & SITI RASIQAH

LIFE sciences – the buzzword of the times. With the government's multi-million dollar push into the industry, it is not surprising that the life sciences and related fields are the hot, new career and study choices. In keeping with industry demands, Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) Electronic and Computer Engineering (ECE) department will introduce a new diploma course this July – Biomedical Engineering (BME).

ECE has been offering BME as an elective for third-year students since 1994. With changing industry demands, the decision to convert BME into a full course came last year.

"The elective by itself is just one module and it's insufficient to train the students. So instead of that, we are actually turning it into a full course now," said Mr Chua Kok Poo, a principal lecturer at the Biomedical Engineering Centre.

The elective [BME] by itself is just one module and it's insufficient to train the students ... we are actually turning it into a full course now.

– Mr Chua Kok Poo

Biomedical Engineering Centre Lecturer

Mr Chua said BME is a combination of engineering and life sciences. Some modules that will be taught include principles of electrical and electronic engineering, engineering mathematics, medical instrumentation and molecular and cell biology. Some biology-related modules will be conducted at the Centre for Life Sciences and Chemical Technology.

Currently, students in the BME elective undertake research and development projects, some in collaboration with the medical industry. This year, students and ECE staff have just finished developing two medical products.

Students can also try designing their own medical equipment. Third-year students like Ng Tian Khoo, 19, invented a talking caller-ID device for the visually-impaired. Lee Siew Ling, 23, designed a "musical tree". Her invention promotes hand-eye coordination for children with cerebral palsy.

BME graduates can work in the biomedical engineering department of hospitals, where trained personnel are needed to maintain medical equipment. Potential employers include manufacturers and distributors of medical equipment. Graduates may also work in research laboratories.

Students do okay without second try

BY JUSTINA TAN

LAST semester's move to do away with supplementary exams also saw the number of students failing or repeating subjects decreasing slightly. Andrew Yang, 17, a first-year Electronic and Computer Engineering student said, "This system gives me a balance of practical and theoretical skills and I don't feel so stressed during exam period."

Figures from Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Academic and Public Affairs office (APA) showed 89.7 percent of students passed the recent examinations, up 1.3 percent from October 1999. This slight increase coincided with a 0.9 percent drop last October in the number of students repeating their failed modules.

One department that recorded significantly higher pass rates was Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering (SOE). Mr Tan Kim Pong, Head of SOE told Tribune, "There was generally an overall increase in pass rate for most modules. A few modules did not show any radical improvement. On the whole, the



Higher pass rates: Despite initial fears, 1.3 percent more students passed October's examinations.

overall pass rate of the SOE course improved by about 10 percent."

These results provide an indicator of the benefits of the new system and are "encouraging", said Mr Tan. But he added, "As the system stabilises after a few semesters, smaller improvements will be more likely."

According to APA, the figures could reflect a fluctuation in results. This was the case for the increase in passes between October 1997 and October 1998.

With a focus of 70 percent on coursework and regular assessments, and 30 percent for examinations, Mr Lee Tuck Seng, Deputy Principal (Academic) said that the new system "teaches students to have better time management".

He also said the weightage is only a "guide". "We also give departments or courses ... flexibility in implementing an appropriate coursework for the simple reason that each module is different, each course is different. To impose a uniform weightage on all modules will not be ideal," said Mr Lee.

Gurmit 'training' for World Cup

BY SITI RASIQAH

LOCAL artistes training for the 2002 World Cup on Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) soccer field? Close but not quite.

Local celebrities Gurmit Singh, Hossan Leong and Collin Chee were at NP's soccer field early this month to rehearse for Eric Khoo's and Wei Koh's new movie 'One Leg Kicking'. Rehearsals were held at NP because it is convenient and the people here "have been really helpful to lend us this field" according to Ms Shirley Lau, the movie's assistant director. Most of the other scenes were shot at Goodwood Park Hotel.

The artistes and players from S-League club Tampines Rovers were hard at work even in the drizzle and on a wet pitch.

"It's been raining every day and he [Gurmit] is out there, kicking the ball, having so much fun! The actors involved in this project are all soccer fanatics – they all love soccer," said Eric Khoo, who came to watch the soccer action.

Eric's latest project revolves around a soccer tournament where the winning team will go to the 2002 World Cup Finals in Japan and South Korea. The two competing teams are the Durians and the Cosmos.

The Durians are a mixed-up group of low-income 'losers' played by Gurmit, Hossan Leong, Mark Lee and Moe Alkaff. Rivals, the Cosmos, are wealthy kids who drive fancy cars, and believe that the rich will always win. Robin Leong plays the rich American-born Chinese captain.

Eric said the idea for this film was born during the 1998 World Cup, when his soccer fanatic friends urged him to make a soccer flick.



In NP to train for Eric Khoo's soccer flick, Gurmit Singh (left) braves the drizzle and wet pitch.

"They were like 'hey, man, Eric, you gotta do a soccer film'. So I sat down with some friends and we came up with some ideas. We thought, let's go with this bunch of losers ... You know, like Peter Parker, the Spiderman character," he said.

The film also looks at unfairness in society and how difficult it is for the underdogs, said Hossan. These underdogs are often bullied and stepped on but they find solace in soccer, he added.

So will the underdogs win in the end?

"We can't tell you that!" Hossan cheekily replied. You will see Hossan's antics as an uptight civil servant who cannot play soccer but manages to "wheelie himself onto the team" because he is in charge of the registration forms.

Filming will end by late March, with the film out in local cinemas by the end of this year.

ME students: expansion cuts study area

BY IAN KOH

While Ngee Ann Polytechnic is in the midst of its building expansion programme, some Mechanical Engineering (ME) students are feeling the squeeze.

Where ME students used to find study benches, at the void deck of block 51 – a convenient gathering point for them – there are now three new lecture theatres (LTs). They replace LTs 64, 65 and 66, which were torn down.

Of the original 60 study benches, only 30 remain. The rest have been moved behind block 50 and to the corridor by LTs 38 and 45, which is opposite block 37.

The new LTs cost about \$600,000 and can seat 120 each. Besides the standard soundproofing, the LTs have cushioned seats, instead of the normal stiff plastic ones. The brightly painted interiors are a stark contrast to the usual dull colours in existing LTs.

Though some students like the new LTs, all five students Tribune spoke to missed the convenience of the previous study benches.

Before the construction of these new facilities, ME students could study and discuss projects at the study benches. Now they have to scout elsewhere.

Head of ME, Mr Tan Ah Sway, said he "doesn't see any real problem" and added that there are now more study tables at LTs 38 and 45.

A third-year ME student, Shannen Lim, 19, said, "There used to be open-air benches here for us to sit and hang around. But now, there are not enough places to sit and always very crowded during lunchtime. Actually there are more tables behind block 50, but the place is warm and has lots of bugs."

Eson Chang, 26, another third-year ME student, agreed. He said, "The nearest convenient place for us to do our work is at Canteen 4, but even that is not good for studying. And the library is also too far."

When contacted, Estates and Development (ED) said the LTs will be used for two to three years or until the Phase V LTs – next to block 56 – are completed. For now, ED will not get new tables because the previous tables were merely moved but not removed, said a spokesperson.



Not enough tables at block 51 (top), and those behind block 50 (below) are not sheltered.



PHOTOS: IAN KOH

CAMPUS ROUNDUP



I merely studied, said top student-cum-busy mum.

Mum tops class

SHE is 32 years old, has two children, and is one of Ngee Ann Polytechnic's (NP) top engineering students. Mrs Neo-Yaw Choon Hong, a second-year Electrical Engineering (EE) student, received \$30 cash, a medal and a certificate at the 13th annual Motorola Awards on 5 January. Choon Hong was surprised by her win. "I did not think about winning any award, but just studied," she said modestly. She finished third in her previous semester.

Husband Mr Neo Gim Huah, inspired Choon Hong's return to school. The busy owner of an air-conditioning and electrical firm needed the know-how from the Electrical Engineering course but had no time to pursue the diploma himself. "She replaced me by studying," quipped the 35-year-old in Chinese.

The Motorola Awards recognise the top three female performers in EE, Electronic and Computer Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. The awards are given to first- and second-year students.

— LEO FENG

Elective shopping made easy

FIRST- and second-year Electronic and Computer Engineering (ECE) students were given an introduction to the various third-year electives on ECE Day held on 2 February.

Briefings by lecturers and exhibitions of third-year student projects aimed to help the first and second years make better decisions in their electives. One third-year student, Zhao Yong Xin, got the chance to showcase his final project, a Bluetooth Wireless Modem.

Bluetooth technology is a common standard that can link digital appliances seamlessly, according to developer Ericsson.

Andrew Tan, 17, a first-year ECE student found that the "projects on display ... show what I can expect to be doing if I enter the course. This is a better way of introducing the courses than if a written description was provided".

— JUSTINA TAN

Abacus counts for BS students

THIRD-YEAR Business Studies students in the Tourism and Leisure Management elective will get hands-on training on an industry-standard real-time software.

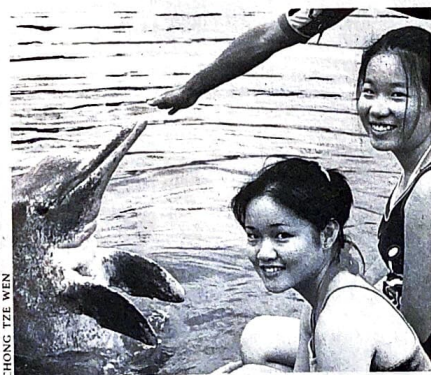
AbacusWhiz PowerSuite works like an online travel agency. Hotel bookings, flight bookings and customer profiles are available at the click of a button. Mrs Chew Chui Lian, section head for Tourism, Economics and Statistics, said, "It enables students to have an overview of a travel agency's operations and practical hands-on in these functions."

Abacus Travel System will train the lecturers before starting the programme. Students will have to take an examination certified by Abacus Travel System and Ngee Ann Polytechnic at the end of the module. The system will be fully operational in July 2002.

Mrs Chew said, "AbacusWhiz PowerSuite will accord our students the same high degree of acceptance and recognition by industry players."

— LEO FENG

Blue pink dolphins



Moody dolphins prevented LSCT students from swimming with them, but they got close anyway.

BY CHONG TZE WEN

SULKY dolphins, cowardly cuttlefish and deadly octopuses – these are some of the marine creatures 39 students from the Centre for Life Sciences and Chemical Technology (LSCT) saw and learnt about at Underwater World, Sentosa on 3 February.

There, they learnt many previously unknown facts about pink dolphins.

Samuel Lim, 17, a first-year student, found out

that the dolphins are born grey and only develop their characteristic pink pigmentation when they mature. They also discovered that dolphins have mood swings.

One of the pregnant dolphins was moody after being moved to a new pool. Her behaviour affected the others, so the students were not allowed to swim with the dolphins. Marine mammal manager, Dr Fred Chua, 38, described jokingly to the student that the dolphins had been "on strike" for the previous two weeks.

Other creatures students saw were the deadly but beautiful blue-ringed octopus and the dart frog. Both these creatures' venom contain enough poison to kill 50 people.

The response to the outing was overwhelming, with about 200 students signing up. "The intended response was only 39, but we don't want to turn them away so we will have four more batches of students going in the following weeks," said Dr Phang Chiew Hun, organiser and Deputy Director of LSCT.

Besides being fun and educational, the outing was affordable for students. Thanks to an LSCT subsidy, the students paid only \$5, about one-third the usual admission price.

The visit to the Lagoon and Underwater World was part of the Enhancement Module (ECM) programme launched last year.

Two other outings on LSCT's ECM programme are a Singapore Symphony Orchestra concert and a music appreciation class.

NP's Leo Club took charity to Orchard Road, selling flags for Muhammadiyah Welfare Home on 3 February.



ADALINE LAU

Lions' hearts, helping hands

BY AMY TAN

I want to die early but couldn't. Now at this age I have no more money to buy myself a coffin even," said a 99-year-old granny.

That was one of the many heart-wrenching stories Yeo Yifan, 19, a member of Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Leo Club, has heard in her three years as a volunteer with the club.

Villa Francis Home for the Aged has been the adopted charity of the Leo Club for the last 13 years. Club members visit the home once every two months. They talk to the residents, feed them and play games with them.

"A friend of mine sat next to a grandpa once. He said nothing but the grandpa's face just lit up with a smile," said the third-year Business Studies student.

Each time the Leo Club visits the home, Yifan will spend time with the century-old granny, whom she affectionately calls "Ah Mah".

"She reminded me of my own grandma. From her, I learnt to cherish my parents when they are still around," she said.

In addition to the bi-monthly visits to the Home, club members also celebrate special occasions such as the Lunar New Year and Mooncake festival with the residents.

However, funding for such celebrations does not

A friend of mine sat next to a grandpa once [at Villa Francis], he said nothing but the grandpa's face just lit up with a smile.

— Yeo Yifan,

Leo Club volunteer

come easily. Said the president of the club, Lim Cheng Siong, 21, a third-year Mechanical Engineering student, "We need to set aside money for future events, so each year we have at least two fund-raising projects."

Funds are usually raised through the sale of cards and flowers and through their own flag days.

Besides doing their bit for their adopted charity,

members also help other homes such as the Muhammadiyah Welfare Home. They sold flags for the home on 3 February along Orchard Road.

Mr Shaik Dawood Tahir, a director at Muhammadiyah Association said, "We estimated to have raised around \$100,000", with the help of 2,400 students from secondary schools, junior colleges, pre-universities and the polytechnics.

"They did a good job. Most of them raised an average of \$40 each," said the director. Some \$600,000 is needed to ease a budget deficit at the home.

Currently housing some 190 residents, the Muhammadiyah Welfare Home has helped more than 500 juvenile offenders, wayward and abused youths re-enter society.

"Flag Day for secondary schools students is compulsory. But for us, we're just trying to help so we volunteered," said a participant, Raymond Tang, 24, a third-year Accountancy student and a Leo Club member.

Said Cheng Siong, "We hope to reach out to other associations such as the orphanages and Spastic Children's Association of Singapore in the future, but we'll need funding and more manpower."

To participate in Leo Club's community service programme, please contact Cheng Siong at chengsiong@y2knet.org

ECA compulsory for BD students

BY TEO HUIXI

COMPULSORY Extra Curricular Activities (ECA), life skills workshops and a longer industrial attachment will become part of Ngee Ann Polytechnic's Building department (BD) students curriculum.

From July, ECA or a community service commitment will be compulsory for BD students. First-year BD students now attend a team-building workshop and third-years undergo an etiquette workshop.

The team-building workshop is a change from project-based assignments. It teaches students successful group dynamics.

Mrs Tam Li Phin, 47, Deputy Head of BD said, "We want to train students not just on the technical

aspect, but also develop their personality and attitude. I believe that compulsory ECA can help accomplish that."

A tracking system that is yet to be finalised, will help ensure that all students are involved in at least an ECA or a community service activity for at least one semester during their polytechnic education, said Mrs Tam.

One ECA option is the annual community service trips the department has been organising since 1996.

During such visits to Cambodia and China, students help the local community. They often build and paint schools, fix drains and do minor repairs.

Though this option is open to students from all

departments, Mrs Tam feels that these projects are especially helpful for BD students as they will be able to use their "technical knowledge to benefit the community".

Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering (SOE) lecturer, Mr S. Chandra, 39, is in favour of compulsory ECA.

He said SOE also emphasises ECA because they help build interpersonal skills and character.

However, Dr Hedy Goh, a Centre for Life Sciences and Chemical Technology lecturer said the option of ECA should depend on the student.

Many are already involved in activities outside school and further participation in school activities may be too time-consuming, she said.

NAPFA: Take it as often as possible

BY SZE TOH YUIN MUNN

Third-year students can take the National Physical Fitness Award (NAPFA) test as many times as they want to. This is the good news that Student Development Officer, Mr Gopinathan Retnam, 30, shared with Tribune. But the results are valid for only six months, so students should take the test in their last semester.

Third-year students can start registering for the test from as early as 7 February.

Registration will end in late April.

Letters will be posted to students to remind them to register, and also if they fail to turn up for the compulsory NAPFA test.

There are two ways to register. Students can go to the Student Development Office at the sports complex. There, they can select a convenient test date.

Another way is for students to get test dates and sign up at their respective departments. Here, the Student Development Centre will liaise with the different departments, which will then choose the dates most suitable for their students. The departments will inform their students of the dates.

For male students, the test is critical, as failing the NAPFA or failing to register for the tests means they will have to go through five months of Basic Military Training instead of the usual three.

And for all students, failing the NAPFA or not registering for it will result in a failed grade in their transcripts.

National servicemen are not exempted, unless they have done the test in reservist training within six months of the test dates.

"It is advisable for students to take the test as early as possible because if they fail, they can choose to take it again, and for as many times as they wish, to achieve the best results possible," said Mr Gopinathan.



Novice basketballers edged out

BY IAN KOH

HAVING lost all its games in the Institute-Varsity-Polytechnic (IVP) women's basketball competition, the going might have been tough for the Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) team, but they did not lose their fighting spirit.

In the fourth and second last match of the series, the NP team put up a gallant fight before conceding 9-67 to strong opposition from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

On the other hand, NUS was looking to boost its morale after a narrow three-point loss to Nanyang Technological University (NTU) a week earlier.

What set NP's team distinctly apart from the other teams was its enthusiasm and inexperience.

Most NP players had not played basketball before joining the team, let alone in an IVP tournament. But most NUS players had represented their colleges before. Most also had at least two or three years' experience.

On top of this, their confidence was given an extra boost with the presence of a national player.

In just the second minute, NUS scored the opening basket. Although NP's reply was swift, NUS still took the first quarter 25-4.

Even an NUS injury failed to stop the onslaught. They continued to overwhelm NP with endless waves of attacks, to extend its lead to 28-8 by half-time.

The last half-hour of play saw NUS brilliance come alive as they showed excellent ball control skills and individual flair in NP's half of the court.

Throughout the game, both teams fielded all their players to get as much on-court experience as possible, and many substitutions punctuated the match.

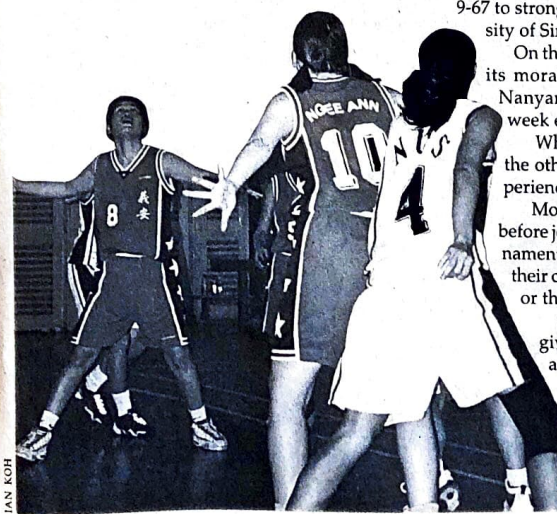
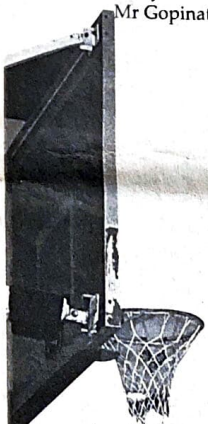
NP's centre, Celine Kho, 19, a second-year Business Studies student, was confident that NP will deliver better results next year. "Our team is very young. So at this point, if we can score ten to fifteen points, we'll be glad."

"[We've] been doing very well, performing better with every match ... But it's just that we're very inexperienced and a very new team. So I hope next year, we'll do it better with more training," she said.

Former NP player and now team coach, Mr Gary Ng, 30, remained optimistic. He said, "Considering that they started playing [basketball] only three months ago ... To have this kind of tempo, there's not much more to expect."

Having just taken over last November, he added that there was not enough time for the team to train and build their unity.

The Vacation Training Programme (VTP) last holidays also disrupted training for a few students, he said.



**SIZE TOH YUIN MUNN
UNRAVELS**

GERALD'S PASSION-NET DEVOTION

His is a simple reason, "I like the game," said Gerald Ho, 18, a second-year Computer Studies student in Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP). This down-to-earth, unassuming badminton player has represented Singapore in both local and international competitions, including the South East Asian (SEA) Games.

Encouraged by his father, he picked up badminton 12 years ago, and has not looked back.

Because of his daily regimen at the Singapore Badminton Hall, Gerald has had to make certain sacrifices. "I don't have much of a leisure life, and I miss it sometimes," he said. "You have to be patient because it's quite hard to balance study and games."

Of course support from family and friends is important, said Gerald. Just last year, he missed one and a half months of school to train in Cape Town, South Africa. He managed to catch up with school work, thanks to his classmates' help.

Pressure mounts when he dons national colours, said Gerald. Though the attention that an international match draws can be distracting, he tries not to let this affect him. But when he plays for NP, he does not feel any pressure. He said results are not as emphasised in polytechnic matches, so he plays for personal satisfaction.

Looking at badminton in Singapore, Gerald wished that it would get more support and recognition. It is unfair that other sports like swimming or soccer get all the attention, he said. "Yes, these sports do win medals in the SEA Games but if you look at the competition, it is only at regional level. Whereas for badminton, the powerhouses are from the region and competition is much stronger and more difficult."

That said, he has no regrets. "I chose badminton because it is more fun and it uses both mental and physical strengths. Plus I can compete and I know that I have a fighting chance against my opponents," he said.

Badminton has also helped him be more disciplined, independent and mature. When he hits a rough patch, he draws upon his own strength. "Sometimes I do feel tired and I'll take a break. Leaving the scene does help," Gerald said. He turns to his coach when he needs advice, but as he said, "It's half myself, half my coach."

Gerald dreams of turning professional one day, and knows that there is no secret to success but pure hard work, perseverance and talent.

He also said the current terms for turning professional are not attractive. "But I play for personal satisfaction, not just fame or money," he said. "You can still make a living, but not as much as the usual careers."



SIZE TOH YUIN MUNN