

# 19 honoured for 'never-say-die' spirit

Mendaki Club salutes 19 Muslim polytechnic, varsity grads who succeeded despite the odds

Priscilla Goy

Seven years ago, Mr Muhammad Zailani Ismail was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Mistaken as a member of a gang, rival members slashed him with parangs, leaving injuries which required a two-week stay in hospital and took away the use of his hands for a year, forcing him to drop out of Nanyang Polytechnic.

But he went back to school, graduated from Republic Polytechnic last year, and is now pursuing a degree in communication studies.

The 25-year-old was one of 19 Muslim polytechnic and university graduates who were recognised at the Mendaki Club Graduates' Tea for succeeding despite the odds.

Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Yaacob Ibrahim, who was guest of honour, praised them for their "never-say-die attitude".

He also highlighted how the number of Muslim students graduating with first class honours from local and overseas universities had grown this year. There were 38 such students this year.

Ms Nur Syafiqah Mazlan got her first class honours last year when she graduated from the National University of Singapore after studying chemistry. She is now doing a PhD in the subject.

The oldest of three children, her father works as a cook at an army camp, while her mother irons clothes for a small fee. Mendaki paid for her undergraduate studies fully. Her PhD education is also fully paid

for, thanks to an NUS scholarship.

Said the 23-year-old: "I think there are fewer than five Malay girls in the undergraduate cohort for chemistry.

"Some people think that there isn't really a future in science compared to banking or business. But if you like the subject, just follow your dream and I think you'll do well."

Mendaki Club president Mohammad Azree Rahim said the annual event also celebrates the people who supported the graduates in their achievements.

For Mr Zailani, they include his family, and even strangers. "I've always been very thankful to the people who saved my life. They took off their shirts to help stop the bleeding. I don't even remember their faces or their names," he said.

Dr Yaacob said that while pursuing their dreams, graduates should also make a positive difference to society. He cited the example of Mr Muhammad Sadik Mohamed, 26. Di-



Some of the 19 Muslim graduates recognised yesterday included (from left) Ms Nur Syafiqah Mazlan, 23; Mr Muhammad Zailani Ismail, 25; and Mr Muhammad Sadik Mohamed, 26. PHOTO: BERITA HARIAN

agnosed with glaucoma at the age of 12, Mr Sadik can only see with his right eye, but he coped with his condition and graduated with a degree in psychology last year.

He currently works at Dialogue in the Dark Singapore – a charity which employs visually impaired

guides to let people experience what it is like to be blind. He also hopes to be a counsellor in future.

"I want to help others because I've also been receiving help from society," he said.

Added Dr Yaacob: "Much of what the community has achieved today

is the result of the community's resilience, determination and the 'gotong-royong' spirit... I hope, as our future leaders, you will build on the strong foundations that have been laid by our forefathers."

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