

President's Science and Technology Awards

PUB chairman gets top honour for sewer system

He led team that linked every house to network of sewers; science award goes to cancer research team

Melissa Lin



Mr Tan Gee Paw's team took steps to close down the night soil collection service.

Mr Tan Gee Paw remembers when the last night soil bucket was collected back in 1987. Up until then, some toilets in Singapore still consisted of a wooden shack and a metal bucket. Every night, workers braved the stench to collect the buckets filled with human waste and take them to treatment plants.

This rudimentary system, a reflection of poor public health standards, would keep foreign investors away, according to 72-year-old Mr Tan, the chairman of national water agency PUB, who won Singapore's top science accolade last night.

He led a team that linked every house to a network of sewers, collected the last night soil bucket, retrenched the workers and closed down the service. "The night soil bucket, as Mr Lee Kuan Yew has said, was a symbol of the poverty of the past," said Mr Tan. "Imagine the indignity of man, having to carry... night soil buckets."

For this and other efforts, Mr Tan was awarded the President's Science and Technology Medal by President Tony Tan Keng Yam at a ceremony held at Resorts World Sentosa yesterday.

The President's Science Award went to a team comprising Professor Patrick Tan, 46, from Duke-NUS



President's Science Award recipients (from left) Patrick Tan, Teh Bin Tean and Steven Rozen were recognised for their work in Asian cancer genomics. Their research has led to strategies for the prevention of Asian cancers, improved diagnosis and treatment. ST PHOTOS: SEAH KWANG PENG

Graduate Medical School and A*Star's Genome Institute of Singapore (GIS); Professor Teh Bin Tean, 50, from the National Cancer Centre Singapore; and Professor Steven Rozen, 64, from the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, for their work in Asian cancer genomics.

Their research, which involves decoding Asian cancers for potential cures, has led to strategies for the improved diagnosis, treatment and prevention of these cancers.

Professor Neal Chung Tai-Shung, 64, from the National University of Singapore (NUS), won the President's Technology Award for his innovative research on membranes that have benefits that range from protecting public health to making desalination more environmentally friendly and effective.

Mr S. Iswaran, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, gave the Young Scientist Awards to four researchers under the age of 35: NUS assistant professors Goki Eda and Yvonne Tay; Nanyang Technological University assistant professor Nripan Mathews; and Dr Wan Yue from A*Star's GIS.

Mr Iswaran, who is also Second Minister for Home Affairs and Trade and Industry, said the "world-class talent base" that Singapore has built at its public research institutions, universities and hospitals has been key to its research and development efforts.

He added: "We will continue to nurture a pipeline of local talent, complemented by a rich diversity of international researchers."

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