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Kitchen tools for the visually impaired presented at Falling Walls Lab Singapore 2017

No more cooking scars

MELANIS TAI

When Mr Kevin Chiam Yong Sheng, 25, volunteered at Touch Home Care centre, he noticed that scabs and scars were common on the hands of people who are visually impaired.

"As I asked further, they revealed that (the scabs and scars) were from their unfortunate endeavours in cooking," he said.

That was when the then industrial design student from the National University of Singapore (NUS) decided to design Folks Kitchenware.

He designed five cooking tools for visually impaired people and submitted them for his final thesis. He graduated this year. The tools include a knife with a retractable guard to guide fingers and a teaspoon with an integrated float that informs users of the water level.

Mr Chiam's Folks Kitchenware was one of 21 projects presented at Falling Walls Lab Singapore 2017 on Monday. The Falling Walls Lab is an annual gathering that provides opportunities for academics and professionals to present innovative ideas, research projects or social initiatives relating to solutions for real world challenges.

The event here, organised by the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), was one of the international qualifying events.

Mr Chiam was moved to help those with visual disabilities cook safely because cooking "helps build self-esteem of the users when they are in control".

PRACTICAL

Mr Inderjit Singh, who chaired the jury and is from NTU's board of trustees, commended Mr Chiam's project. He said: "It is a practical and useful thing... It can be implemented almost immediately."

The two winners of this event will join 98 participants of the international Falling Walls Lab finale in Berlin in November.

The three winners of the finale will receive cash prizes and get the opportunity to present their projects on the grand stage of the Falling Walls Conference on Nov 9.

A*Star chairman and guest of honour at the event, Mr Lim Chuan Poh, said: "I am delighted to find out that we have received many creative, original submissions and that the judges had a tough time down selecting the field to the most interesting, groundbreaking work."

The project on reversing antibiotic resistance, which Dr Siti Zarina Zaimal Rahim, 33, worked on, clinched first place.

The research assistant at the NUS Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering was hired by her professors to work together to create a group of chemicals that they call Silence Bac. It blocks bacterial communication to stop turning on the genes responsible for antibiotic resistance.

She has travelled to Israel to conduct experiments on Silence Bac and strains of bacteria that doctors have found commonly resistant to antibiotics.

She said: "We are thinking of pre-clinical studies and applying to make it a drug."

Mr Singh said: "It could be five to 10 years before it can be implemented, but the idea is unique. Everyone is working on molecules, how to treat it... But (this is) a better concept of (preventing) the bacteria from talking to each other."

A project on "electronic skin" gloves that translate sign language into speech — by Mr Kaushik Parida, 28, a research associate at NTU's School of Materials Science and Engineering, and his team — took second place.

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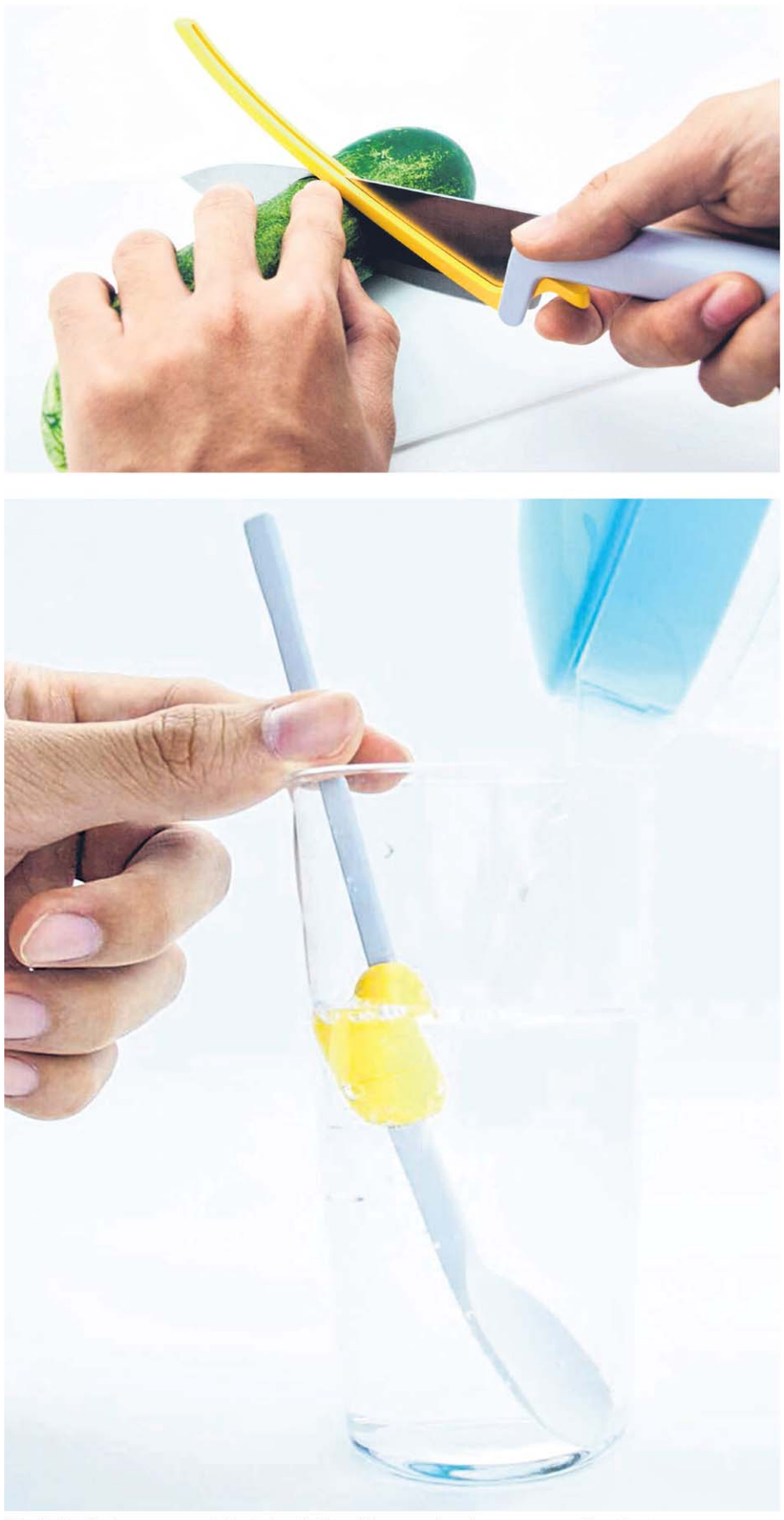

The Folks Kitchenware tools include a knife with a guard and a teaspoon with a float.
PHOTOS: **COURTESY OF KEVIN CHIAM**