



Recipients of the Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities – (from left) Mr Nirat Singh Rajpal, Ms Zhu Jiahui and Ms Kimberly Quek – at the scholarship ceremony on Oct 7. Since 2004, 52 scholarship holders have received more than \$2 million from the foundation. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

As a teen, he raised funds to help other deaf students

He is among six to get scholarship that lauds those with disabilities

Ang Qing

Mr Nirat Singh Rajpal once dreamt of inventing headphones for others like him who have hearing loss.

When he found out that such headphones already existed, he set up an organisation in Vietnam to help students with the same condition – he was then just 16.

The Singaporean, who grew up in Vietnam, roped in some friends and raised nearly \$7,000 to give low-income deaf students items such as headphones, mp4 players and English audio books.

Mr Nirat, 21, now an economics student at the National University

of Singapore, is one of six recipients of the Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) Foundation Scholarship for Persons with Disabilities.

Since 2004, 52 scholarship holders have received more than \$2 million from the foundation, which is funded by APB. They include Ms Yip Pin Xiu and Mr Toh Wei Soong, who competed in this year's Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Students with disabilities who have outstanding academic achievements and have shown strong leadership in the community are eligible to apply for the scholarships.

At the scholarship ceremony on Oct 7, Minister of State for Education Sun Xueling said the Ministry of Education (MOE) has put in more effort over the years to make education more inclusive for people with special needs.

Since 2019, children with moder-

ate to severe special educational needs – previously exempted from compulsory education – must attend one of 20 government-funded special education schools.

In her speech, Ms Sun said schools in Singapore have set up or upgraded facilities, staff and services to support these children.

Students can also get funding from MOE and SG Enable, an agency that provides services to people with disabilities. The money can be used to get assistive technology and support services such as note-taking, she added.

Ms Sun said: "Despite the support that is already in place, we do know that success does not come easy for many students with disabilities. But it is exactly through their successes that we learn nothing is impossible."

Mr Nirat said the scholarship helped him with educational ex-

penses when his family's business was hit hard by the pandemic.

Another recipient of the scholarship is bowler Kimberly Quek, 21, who won Singapore's first bronze medal at the 2017 Deaflympics.

Now a first-year undergraduate at Yale-NUS College, she was diagnosed with a condition known as bilateral profound hearing loss when she was 18 months old.

The Singapore Sports School alumna has represented the Republic and her school at two world championships, and 10 international and 18 national competitions.

Ms Quek hopes her achievements will encourage people to believe that some of the hardest things are achievable with diligence and determination.

She also said she wants to raise awareness about the inconvenience that Covid-19 restrictions bring about for people who are deaf. For instance, masks and social distancing have made it difficult for her to understand what people are saying because she depends on lip-reading.

Ms Quek said: "I would like to encourage people to be patient and write down what they want to say, or use a clear mask when they meet a deaf person."

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