

# Virtual games made physical

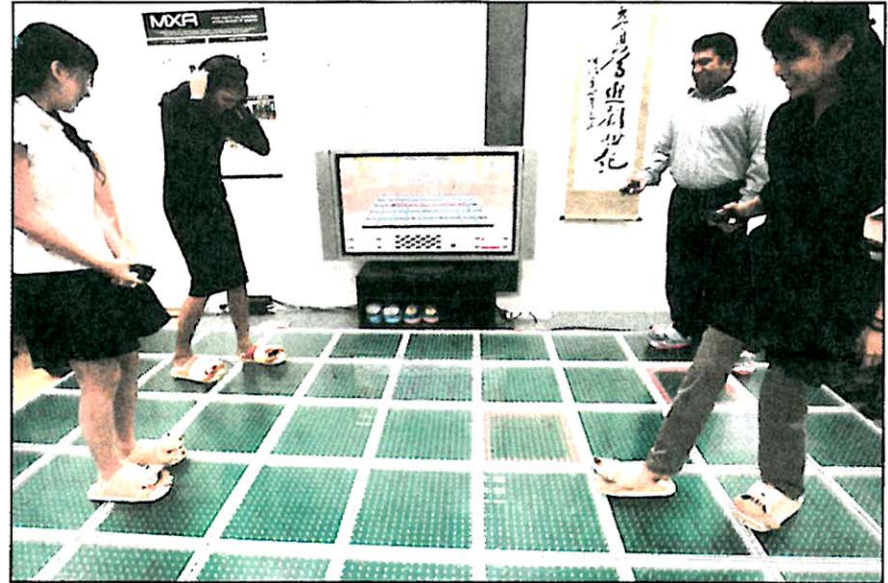
IN A few years, grandparents who have never touched a computer game might be able to play one with their grandchildren – on an easy-to-use game mat designed by a new centre for interactive digital media.

Parents travelling abroad for work might also be able to give their children goodnight “hugs” by manipulating a doll. The doll is connected over the Internet to special pyjamas worn by the children so they can feel the hugs.

Such projects are the brain-child of the new Keio-NUS Cute centre, which was officially opened yesterday with President S R Nathan as guest of honour.

The \$20 million centre, a tie-up between Japan’s Keio University and the National University of Singapore (NUS), aims to develop interactive technology.

“We have audio, video and text to communicate, but they’re not yet the same as being physi-



**Researchers and students demonstrating a prototype of Age Invaders, a computer game played on a special mat. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO**

cally present,” said Dr Adrian Cheok, a co-director of the centre and an associate professor in NUS’ department of electrical and computer engineering.

Dr Masa Inakage, dean of Keio’s Graduate School of Media Design, is the centre’s other co-director.

Besides its interactive communication work, the Cute centre – the acronym stands for Connective Ubiquitous Technology for Embodiments – also aims to collaborate with government agencies and companies, and spin off its own start-up firms.

For instance, it is already working with Japanese IT company

NEC on communication technologies for the kitchen and with the Defence Science and Technology Agency here.

It is funded for five years by the National Research Foundation, NUS and Keio University, and has campuses in both Singapore and Japan. Students and researchers can spend time at both sites.

The centre is the latest addition to a rapidly growing interactive and digital media sector, to which the National Research Foundation allocated a five-year, \$500 million sum in 2006 for research and development.