University deputy presidents win S’pore’s top science prize

By RACHEL AU-YONG

PROFESSORS Barry Halliwell and Freddy Boey are two of a kind. The pair of university deputy presidents each won the President’s Science and Technology Medal – Singapore’s top science accolade – yesterday.

This is the first time there are double winners since the National Science and Technology Awards were rebranded as the President’s Science and Technology Awards in 2009.

The two professors received gold medals from President Tony Tan Keng Yam at a ceremony held in the Gardens by the Bay’s Flower Dome.

The jury praised Nanyang Technological University’s (NTU) Prof Boey, who has developed more than 30 patents, for fusing his academic and entrepreneurship talents.

One of his inventions is a customisable hernia mesh which minimises infection after surgery. It was the first of its kind to be approved for sale by the United States’ Food and Drug Administration last December.

Described as “ahead of his time”, National University of Singapore’s (NUS) Prof Halliwell was looking into antioxidants and free radicals as early as 15 years ago, when he first came to Singapore from London.

He told The Straits Times: “When I started, there were only three people in this area. Now the results affect a host of things like nutrition and plant science.”

The President’s Science Award and President’s Technology Award, which come with $50,000 and a trophy each, were also given out at yesterday’s ceremony.

The President’s Science Award was given to Prof Yu Hao from NUS for his work in plant genomics, and to Prof Boris Luk’yanchuk from the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*Star) for his work on laser-matter interactions.

The President’s Technology Award was given to A*Star’s Dr Li Haizhou, for creating several technologies for translating Asian languages like Bahasa Melayu and Chinese dialects.

President Tan also gave out the Young Scientist Award to three researchers under the age of 35. They were Assistant Professor Qiu Chengwei (NUS), Assistant Professor Yonggui Robin Chi (NTU) and Dr Khor Chiea Chuen (NUS and A*Star).

At the ceremony, Second Minister for Trade and Industry, Mr S. Iswaran, said the Government remains committed to research and development, and that it will look to “grow new sectors such as medical technology, nutrition and business analytics”.

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