

MAGDALENE LIE AND  
SAMPOORNA DASGUPTA  
news@newstoday.com.sg

FURIOUS Thai students are rioting against their government. What does Russia suggest Thai officials do? Buy 50,000 gallons of vodka to inebriate the students and then dump them in Siberia.

This bizarre solution was one of many thrown up during a mock United Nations (UN) meeting organised by the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) earlier this month.

Aimed at raising awareness of global affairs among students, the two-day event saw 76 tertiary students posing as country diplomats in a UN conference setting where they hammered out solutions for real life conflicts such as Iran's build-up of nuclear weapons.

Similar events have been staged here before, but the NTU session is said to be the first model UN conference to pitch jun-

# Global issues invade classrooms

## Mock UN sessions give students an alternative platform to air their views

ior college (JC) and polytechnic students against those from higher institutions such as the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University.

"We tried to elevate the debate quality by bringing in university students who are more experienced in debating," said one of the organisers, Mr Utkarsh Bahadur, who heads NTU's English Debates Society.

Such "UN" proceedings targeted at tertiary students aren't new – and they are certainly showing no sign of abating.

In fact, apart from NTU, there are at least two other youth set-ups with their own version of training global citizens by engaging them to think beyond the classroom.

One of them – the Singapore International Youth Council (SIYC) – joined forces for the first time with another group, The Young Global Citizen, to organise a series of workshops targeted at secondary school, JC and university students.

The sessions covered international issues such as trade, globalisation, the environment, gender equality, human rights and peace building.

"It's great to see young Singaporeans eager to learn about development and how

they can play their part as citizens of a donor country," said 25-year-old Bernise Ang, who founded the SIYC.

And as if such local sessions aren't intellectually stimulating enough, there are always overseas stints such as the Global Young Leaders' Conference (GYLC).

Twenty-year-old Dawn Tan spent 12 days of her mid-year break two years ago at the GYLC in Washington DC and New York City.

Also at the meeting were 14 other Singaporean students, as well as hundreds of youth from all over the world.

At the international forum, the youth – comprising students from secondary schools and JCs – huddled together to analyse and debate on issues related to law, human rights, peace, security and economic affairs.

Simulated UN summits were also organised, with the youths divided into groups representing nations across the world.

"My group represented Nigeria and we spent hours evaluating UN Bills and proposals and discussing whether they would benefit Nigeria or not," said Ms Tan, now a law student at NUS.

Such sessions may be make-believe, but they deal with real issues, such as the Aids problem in poorer nations.

We were given the challenge of combating the HIV problem in Third World countries such as Nigeria. My group chose to solve it through education, but this is quite difficult in real life due to the lack of education among the females in Nigeria.

— Ms Dawn Tan, who attended a Global Young Leaders' Conference

"We were given the challenge of combating the HIV problem in Third World countries such as Nigeria.

"My group chose to solve it through education, but this is quite difficult in real life due to the lack of education among the females in Nigeria," Ms Tan added.

Such discussions also exposed young Singaporeans to the inner workings of other international bodies such as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Mr Lim Jinli, 18, who went on a GYLC trip in June 2003, recalled how simulated WTO meetings on the price of coffee made him realise "the amount of high-level decisions that goes into seemingly normal things in our daily lives".

Such global platforms – whether local or foreign – are attracting more students seeking avenues to voice their views – often alternative – on world issues, said the youth who were interviewed.

Such sessions have also proven to be fertile ground for civic activity to take root and blossom.

"After the trip, some youths from India and Pakistan actually set up a network among themselves to combat the HIV problem in their region," said Ms Tan.



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