YOG athletes fly home, students scramble to move into NTU

BY NG KAI LING

The flame has been put out, the athletes have flown. And now, like Cinderella, the Youth Olympic Village (YOV) has 24 hours to change back into part of the campus of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) before the new semester starts today.

It is time to come back to earth as the university bids farewell to 5,000 Youth Olympic Games (YOG) athletes and officials, and welcomes back 30,000 students for the new school year.

Across the campus, signs were being taken down, road blocks removed and students were reclaiming their rooms.

Since the village closed officially at midnight on Saturday, workers have been working round the clock to clean the halls of residence and get the tutorial rooms and lecture halls ready for the new school term. It took two months to convert them into the village and will take two weeks to dismantle them.

Yesterday, at the National Institute of Education (NIE) plaza, the heart of the YOV and location of the World Culture Village, booths which had showcased the culture and customs of the participating National Olympic Committees were stripped bare and taken out piece by piece.

The mascots Merly and Lyo were no longer smiling from above on banners but lying on the ground.

Said Mr Alan Chu, NIE's director of corporate planning and development: "Our most immediate challenge is to get 50 tutorial rooms and lecture theatres up on Aug 30 when lessons start."

The rest, including the school's plaza and the gymnasium, which was converted into a gym with treadmills and weight machines, will be back to normal by the end of next month.

But some traces of the glorious two weeks will remain. NIE has asked to keep two art installations, created by students from Lasalle College of the Arts, commissioned for the YOG.

The school also wants to keep the flags of the participating nations for another fortnight so that its staff and students can take pictures.

All around NTU, students were seen moving in with their boxes, hoping to settle in before school starts today.

To facilitate the check-in for some 6,500 students, NTU has set up a registration area at its School of Biological Science, and students are taken from there by bus to their halls.

"We have about three to four hours to move," said mechanical and engineering undergraduate Andrew Santos. "Last year, we could do it bit by bit over two weeks. I'm very tired."