

Singapore tops biology olympiad

Team wins four golds to tie for No. 1 spot with the US; RI student is top scorer

Sherri Lee

The 23rd International Biology Olympiad (IBO) ended on a high note for Singapore yesterday, with its students coming up tops in the prestigious competition.

The Singapore team won four gold medals, placing first in a field of 236 students from 59 economies along with the United States, which also scored four golds.

China, Taiwan and South Korea tied for second place, with three golds and one silver, and Estonia and Finland tied for third with two golds and two silvers.

Raffles Institution (RI) student Nol Swaddiwudhipong finished as the top scorer of the Olympiad.

It is the first time a Singapore team has taken the top spot, as well as the first time the Republic has won four gold medals in one year. Singapore was third last year.

Singapore was also hosting the event for the first time. Over the last week, promising pre-university biologists put their skills to the test in a series of challenging theoretical and practical tasks at the National Institute of Education.

The competition was keen, especially as the participants had all won their own countries' national biology olympiads to be selected for the international contest.

The other members of the Singapore team were Zhang Hui Ting and Mao Haitong, also from RI, and Lim Yuan Wei from Hwa Chong Institution. They are all 18 years old, and in JC 2.

The four were selected from more than 300 students who took part in the Singapore Biology Olympiad (SBO) last year.

Emotions ran high at the awards ceremony, as participants waited to

hear the results. "It was agonising," groaned Nol, who waited over 1½ hours to find out he had won.

The others in the team placed sixth, 11th and 23rd individually.

The tests required teams to apply their thinking skills to original data from research papers.

Competition regulations disallow more than two weeks of intensive preparation, so they had been studying hard since late June.

Nol said they were mentored by professors from the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and the National Institute of Education, SBO and IBO alumni, and their own schoolteachers.

Even though the olympiad has finally come to a close, there will be no rest for the weary – the team's next challenge will be the looming preliminary examinations and the dreaded A-levels.

At least for now, though, the team will take a well-deserved break before hitting the books again. "We will just revel in the moment first," said Hui Ting. Haitong laughed, adding: "I think it will sink in tomorrow... Because school starts again next week!"

✉ ljsherri@sph.com.sg



Team members (from left) Zhang Hui Ting, Mao Haitong, Nol Swaddiwudhipong and Lim Yuan Wei with their medals. It is the first time a Singapore team has taken the top spot, as well as the first time the Republic has won four gold medals in one year. Raffles Institution student Nol was also the Olympiad's top scorer.

ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM