

weekend **TODAY**

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Universities in scholarship war

Students spoilt for choice as varsities offer bonanza of perks

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THE bonanza of grants and bursaries in the Government's latest Budget may ensure that most Singaporean can afford a tertiary education, but for their part, local universities have more and more been dangling a no-strings lure of their own – bond-free scholarships – to hook the very best and brightest.

Take straight-As student Jo Tay. She had her pick of schools here and overseas, but the former was initially not a consideration at all. Her mind was set on studying in Japan on a scholarship from one of the many corporations and government agencies that had scouted aggressively at her junior college.

"But then I got disillusioned by the idea of a bonded scholarship, because I wasn't ready to commit to a career or company yet," said Ms Tay, 20.

And so, when she was offered a bond-free scholarship by Singapore Management University (SMU), she took the local route after all. "I liked the culture of the school, and it was an attractive scholarship that suited my needs. I like the freedom to choose what to do with my life after I graduate," said the SMU Lee Kong Chian scholar now pursuing a double degree in law and business.

Such local university scholarships – bond-free and dangling perks such as sponsorship for overseas exchange stints – are growing in popularity with local students.

With tuition fee hikes, deepening competition between the three public-funded universities – not to forget a fourth soon to join

the fray – and plans to grow the number of subsidised university places per cohort to 30 per cent by 2015, these scholarships are a vital talent-bait.

Case in point: Scholarship portal BrightSparks has observed a "shift" in students going for university scholarships, as opposed to ones offered by the private sector and public agencies like the Public Service Commission.

Indeed, the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National University of Singapore (NUS) and SMU all made BrightSparks' list of Top 20 scholarship providers in Singapore last year, as voted by junior college students, according to Mr Lim Der Shing, director of Jobsfactory which manages Brightsparks.

At SMU, all scholarships offered and administered by the university are bond-free. Individuals and private organisations sponsor some, while others are funded by the SMU faculty, staff and generous alumni.

Dean of students Low Aik Meng felt it was the trend for scholarships to go bond-free. "Our scholarship sponsors believe in the over-arching objective of supporting young talents and contributing to the economy as part of nation-building," he said.

About 1,500 students applied for 300 scholarship places at SMU last year, up from 1,330 applications for 240 places in 2006.

But there are other bases of attraction too, for scholars. NUS Global Merit scholar Magdalene Lie, 20, told TODAY: "The scholarship includes sponsorship for an overseas exchange programme, so I get the best of both worlds – studying at NUS Law Faculty while still having the experience of studying overseas."

NUS introduced its prestigious Global Merit Scholarship in 2005, and has also

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IN YOUR WEEKEND XTRA

FEVER THAT DIDN'T GO

CANDID REVELATIONS OF HOW UNIONIST LOST HIS FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

Veteran unionist Nithiah Nandan knew something was wrong when he couldn't shake off a fever and he was fast losing weight. When medical tests in July 2005 showed he had cancer in the kidney, the 55-year-old started the last battle of his life, as chronicled in a recently-published book on his life and career

"(IN JULY 2005) the doctor told us 'Renal cell carcinoma. Stage Four. Incurable.' I am sure he didn't say it so bluntly, but that's all I heard.

"I had been given my death sentence. I felt blur. My wife and daughter broke down. I had to calm them. But they were inconsolable. I asked my doctor: 'How long do I have? Be frank.' He said: 'Eight months to 12 months.' My doctor said the treatment he will recommend could only prolong my life and maintain or improve my quality of life."

Nithiah was put on two drugs –

erlotinib and bevacizumab. Erlotinib, he took orally every day, and bevacizumab, intravenously every fortnight.

"My doctor warned me of severe side effects. I said: 'Go ahead.'

"The side effects were horrible. I had pimples all over my face. Then, there were the frequent vomiting, diarrhoea and a constant sore throat. I responded to the treatment initially, but the cancer progressed and the treatment could no longer help me. It was stopped."

On Jan 19, 2006, Nithiah was started on a different course of medicines, Interferon and capecitabine. Interferon was given by injection three times a week. The injection was through the stomach. Vimalla (wife), Yoges and Pravi-ta (daughters) had to learn how to do it as they were going to be his caregivers.

"It was torture."

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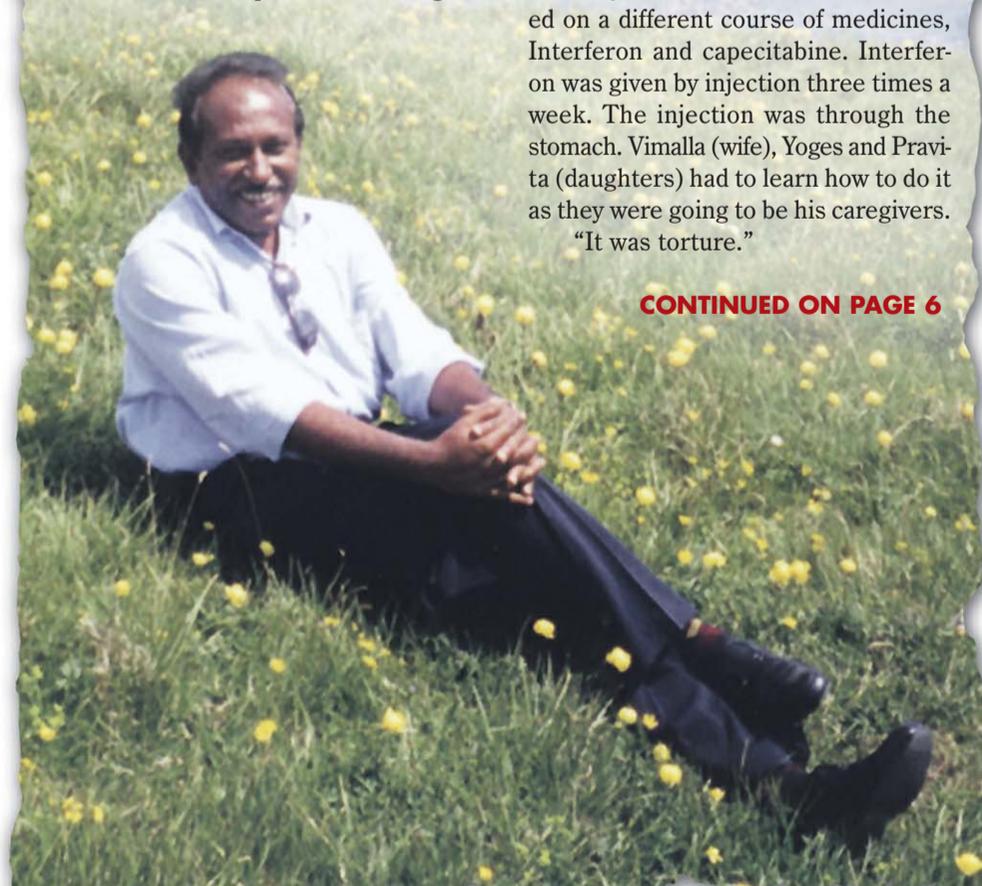


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THE BUILDER OF BUNGALOWS AND BIG DREAMS

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