

# Research in digital media bears fruit

94 projects getting research grants are expected to boost S'pore's capabilities

BY LEUNG WAI-LENG

DON'T leave home without it - your virtual credit card, that is.

Or see how virtual reality technology allows users to physically interact with an on-screen character.

These are among 94 digital media projects funded by the Interactive and Digital Media Programme Office (IDMPO) since last year.

Together, they are expected to create 100 new patents and nurture about 900 researchers and engineers in order to boost Singapore's capabilities in digital media R&D.

The grants each project received ranged from \$50,000 to "a few million", said IDMPO executive director Michael Yap. The money comes from the National Research Foundation (NRF), which has allocated \$500 million to research and development initiatives in interactive and digital media over the next five years.

About 20 of the projects were showcased at the Interactive Digital Centre in Temasek Polytech-

nic yesterday, the first results of the NRF-funded push in the digital media R&D space.

Some have already borne fruit.

First Meta, a financial services provider for virtual worlds like Second Life, launched a virtual credit card last July that can be used for both virtual and real-life transactions.

The MetaCard offers credit of between 5,000 and 25,000 Linden dollars, the currency used in Second Life.

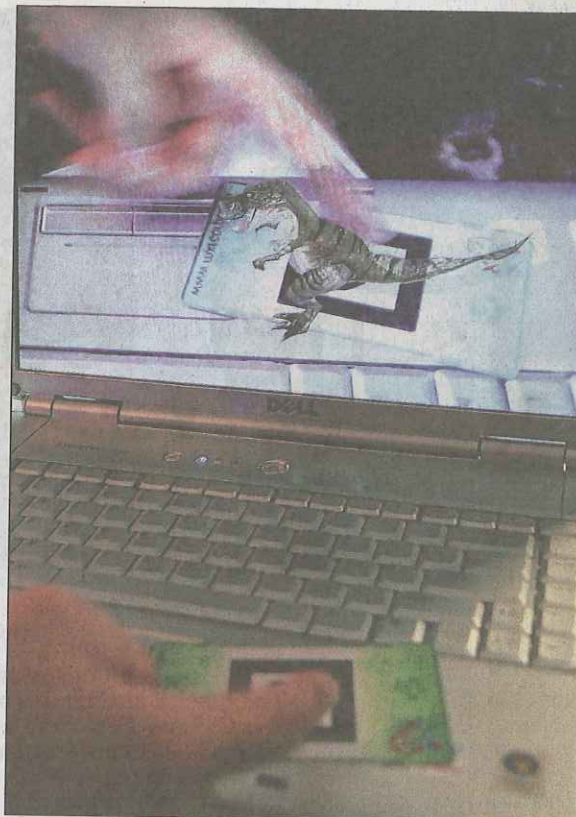
The currency, which can be converted into real money, trades for 265 Linden dollars to US\$1 (S\$1.44).

About one million to two million Linden dollars are charged to the card per month by 700 users, and First Meta chief executive officer Douglas Abrams estimates real-world revenue of between \$2 million and \$3 million this year.

GG Games, a games software company, created an online platform for users to play games like WarCraft 3 and Defence Of The Ancients with minimal lag. It now has over 1.6 million gamers from 253 countries using its software.

Said Mr Chan Yeng Kit, co-chairman of the IDMPO: "Although the research projects will take a few years to complete, we are already beginning to see some promising results."

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PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO

**DIGITAL INNOVATION:** The Chinese Language Learning Game (left) and the augmented reality poster were some of the projects showcased yesterday at Temasek Polytechnic's Interactive Digital Centre.

## Reality and fantasy unite in virtual world projects

### » MetaCard

First, conquer the virtual world, then the real one. That is what virtual world financial services provider First Meta has done with its MetaCard Second Life credit card.

The card can be used at over 400 virtual shops offering more than 20,000 virtual products in the online world.

Soon, it will also be accepted in real-world shops that sell products online. The card pays in Second Life's currency, Linden dollars, which can be converted to US dollars.

### » Fashion Communication

"Mood" clothes developed by Mixed Reality Lab can change instantly to suit a wearer's accessories and emotions.

Clip a brooch with an electronic chip embedded onto a dress and a coloured pattern will appear to match it.

Feeling blue? Slip on a black accessory, or yellow if you are in a brighter mood. Or, fix a button with the same chip onto your jacket

collar and have the lines on your outfit flash in sync with the music you are listening to.

### » AudiOdyssey

Now, even the blind can play video games.

In AudiOdyssey, the graphics are minimalist and muted but this music game is loud and fun. Using the motion-sensitive Nintendo Wii controller, players can also tap along to the rhythm of the game's music compositions.

### » wizQubes

Sony may have popularised this 3D technology with virtual reality game Eye of Judgement on the PlayStation 3, but MXR corporation made it first.

The company's wizQubes allows users to view any object in 3D. Put it under a special camera and the object will appear on-screen.

Unlike Sony's game, MXR's offering allows users to interact with the image.

For example, prodding a T-Rex with a finger will cause the dinosaur to snap at it.

# S'pore scientists say black tea could lower risk of Parkinson's

BY JUDITH TAN

DRINKING black tea regularly could help prevent the onset of Parkinson's disease, according to a new study by Singapore scientists.

Those who drink 23 cups of the beverage a month are 71 per cent less likely to contract the brain-wasting disease, researchers from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine and National Neuroscience Institute report.

The results have led to optimism that the disease, which affects 300 new patients a year, can be beaten.

"Hopefully, in years to come, there may be a pill developed from black tea extracts to prevent its onset," said Dr Koh Woon-Puay, an assistant professor at the Yong Loo Lin medical school.

Scientists are not yet sure why black tea helps to prevent Parkinson's, but believe enzymes in the drink could hold the answer.

They do know, however, the health benefits are not linked to the tea's high caffeine content.

"There are ingredients in black tea other than caffeine that seem to be responsible for risk reduction," said Dr Koh.

The results of the study were published in the American Journal of Epidemiology late last year.

Parkinson's disease affects the middle part of the brain, which is associated with movement. Patients often shake and have difficulty with hand-eye coordination and walking.

About three in 1,000 Singaporeans over 50 years of age suffer from Parkinson's disease.

Dr Louis Tan, a senior consultant in the department of neurology at the National Neuroscience Institute, said 300 new cases are diagnosed each year.

"This number is predicted to increase to 500 every year by the year 2030," he said.

The study involved more than 63,000 Chinese men and women aged 45 to 74 who live in the heartland.

The results have led scientists to test the enzymes in black tea on cells and animals in a bid to unravel the drink's mystery.

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