NTU charts its 'great global university' plan
by Vimita Mohandas

SINGAPORE - An artificial leaf to mimic nature and turn sunlight and water into a fuel source. A "virtual human" that will allow fashion designers to try out different designs and fabrics on various body types or even act as personal tutors.

Such cutting-edge research ideas will be behind the Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) push to transform itself over the next five years, into a "great global university".

Unveiling its strategic blueprint yesterday, NTU said it wants to make its mark globally in five areas: Sustainability, health care, new media, best of the East and the West, and innovation.

Under the five-year plan, the university also hopes to double the percentage of Singaporean undergraduates pursuing PhD programmes to about 40 per cent in that time frame, said NTU provost and president-designate, Professor Bertil Andersson.

This translates to 800 more places for PhD students in the next five years.

"Far too few young Singaporeans are attracted to going into research and that must change. Otherwise Singapore will always be dependant on foreign talent. Attracting foreign talent to come to Singapore is important. But there must be more Singaporeans coming forward too," Prof Andersson said.

NTU will also increase its inter-disciplinary modules. Prof Andersson said "these interdisciplinary modules should be broadening. You cannot, as in the old days, be specialised in one area. Then you won't be able to manage in modern society".

To fund the research efforts in five identified fields it terms "peaks of excellence, NTU said it will provide seed funding of up to $100 million from its own resources for the various projects and supplement the amount from external sources.

NTU said it has already put in more than $830 million in research funding in the area of sustainability.

The university's outgoing president Su Guaning noted that the "tremendous" career options in this field, "with the world seeking urgent solutions in sustainability".

Said Dr Su: "Anyone interested in sustainability research and studies will find the best facilities and the foremost scientists here at NTU. We have formed at NTU a nexus of centres of competence, recognised for their excellence in the various scientific and engineering niches."