

# Micro-organism research centre opens at NTU

RESEARCH into micro-organisms got a fillip yesterday with the opening of a research centre at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The Singapore Centre on Environmental Life Sciences Engineering (Scelse) and the research it undertakes will be financed by a \$120 million fund to be disbursed over the next 10 years.

The money comes from the Ministry of Education and the National Research Foundation.

The centre was declared open by Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources Grace Fu.

A collaboration between NTU and the National University of Singapore, the centre is headed

by visiting professor at NTU Staffan Kjelleberg.

On Scelse's advisory board is Dr Craig Venter, one of the first scientists to sequence the human genome.

The centre's area of study will be the living organisms responsible for many things - from the plaque on one's teeth to the slime that accumulates on the hulls of ships and slows them down.

The Scelse team has already begun two projects with national water agency PUB.

One involves analysing water samples from the Ulu Pandan wastewater reclamation plant to find a way to improve the treatment process.

Prof Kjelleberg said: "If there's

a system breakdown, for example, we can analyse samples from before, during and after the breakdown to see which micro-organisms were responsible."

The team's other project will bring scientists into Ulu Pandan waterways to find better ways to recycle rainwater using the organisms.

Prof Kjelleberg said the centre will produce scientists trained in engineering and the life sciences: "We plan to take in doctoral students from both departments so they can be trained in each other's disciplines. This will make them more practical scientists."

Ms Fu said Scelse's set-up is timely, given that urbanisation around the world is putting stress on cities.

"Countries everywhere are now confronted with increasingly complex challenges related to... clean water supply and proper sanitation," she said.

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