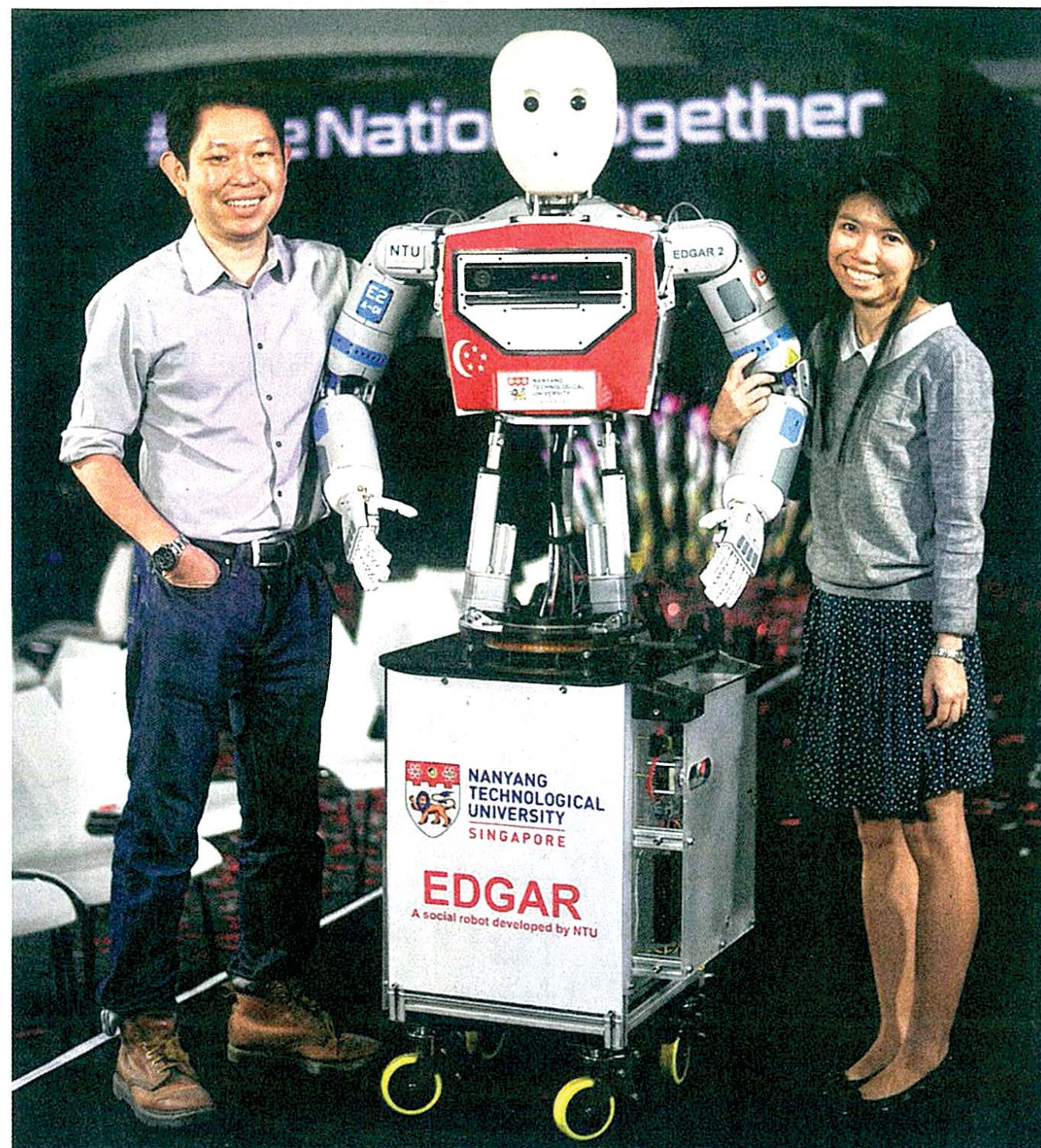




Here's your NDP host, Edgar the robot

Audrey Tan

With his crisp, clear voice, and the ability to talk about almost anything under the sun, Edgar seems made for the bright lights.

The ambitious performer has even set his sights on one of Singapore's greatest stages: the annual National Day Parade (NDP).

On Aug 9 this year, his dream will come true.

Edgar will be sharing the lime-light with more than 3,000 other performers during the NDP at the Marina Bay floating platform.

But as the first robot host in NDP history, Edgar, the height of a human in his blue-and-white "armour", would be no problem to spot.

Together with four human hosts – Joakim Gomez, Julie Tan, Nurul Aini and Subramaniam Narainda – he will psych up the crowd before the parade starts.

For one thing, the made-in-Singapore robot wants everyone to know how Singaporean he is.

During his warm-up appearances at the National Education shows on July 2 and 8, he told the crowd of primary school children: "I know all about Sang Nila Utama and where to eat the best chicken rice – any self-respecting Singaporean can tell you that!"

Edgar has the ability to ad-lib, which means he can come up with his own responses to questions posed to him, said Edgar's maker, Dr Wong Choon Yue, 39, a research fellow at Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

"But for the NDP, we coded specific responses so he doesn't say

anything too cheeky," said Dr Wong.

Edgar was "born" in NTU three years ago, and was programmed by Dr Wong and NTU research associate Pang Wee Ching, 34, to express the wish to perform at an NDP.

It was no idle wish.

"It had always been our goal to have Edgar featured on the greatest stage on the Singaporean calendar – the NDP... So we were overjoyed when we were contacted last August by the show committee," said Dr Wong.

The committee had come to know of Edgar through videos online.

It was double the happiness for the couple, who were in the midst of preparing for their wedding last October.

"After the wedding, there was a mad rush to get Edgar ready by making him more reliable, and getting him to look more Singaporean too, by 3D-printing a Singapore flag on his arm," said Dr Wong.

Ms Pang added: "I think it is apt to showcase a Singaporean robot during NDP. When people think of robots, people think of Japan, Korea or the United States. But this is a chance to show that Singapore can also compete with the big boys in the area of robotics."

Colonel Tan Tiong Keat, chairman of the NDP show committee, agreed that Edgar's inclusion would be appropriate.

He said: "A lot has been spoken about the use of technology to enhance productivity, about automation and robotics, so we thought it would be a good idea to have a robot host to complement the actual hosts."

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VIDEO
Edgar will become the first robot to host NDP
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