

Fighting cancer while pursuing his dreams

NTU grad works as part-time engineer while running his own start-up and doing community service

● KOK YUFENG

As a child, he had always looked up whenever an airplane flew by. Even after he was diagnosed with soft tissue sarcoma, a rare form of cancer, at age 12, Mr B. Kanesh never gave up his dream of taking to the sky.

Although he did not end up becoming a pilot like he had hoped, the 26-year-old channelled his passion for flying into a love for aerospace and aeronautical engineering.

Not even cancer, which came back again twice, could deter him.

"I had always wanted to be a

pilot but having a medical history is not easy so I kind of understood reality and I found other things that I like to do. I am a hands-on person, so I build a lot of stuff," Mr Kanesh said.

Now a mechanical engineering graduate, Mr Kanesh is one of over 9,000 Nanyang Technological University (NTU) students who will be receiving their degrees during this year's convocation ceremonies, which started yesterday and will end on Aug 2.

"All the way throughout my life, everybody was telling me, 'You can't'..." Mr Kanesh told The New Paper last Monday,



Mr B. Kanesh. TNP PHOTO: ZHANG XUAN

hours before surgery to remove a tumour around his nasal and sinus regions.

This was the result of radiation-induced sarcoma, a side-effect of the radiation therapy that he had received to treat his first bout of cancer.

This second cancer, which is also rare, usually develops 10 years after patients receive treatment, and it hit Mr Kanesh in his final year of university last year.

"Last November, I went for surgery and apparently it is not 100 per cent gone so I am going for surgery again to get rid of it," he said.

It was not just cancer that made Mr Kanesh's journey a rocky one.

He was bullied a lot in secondary school as radiation therapy had left burns on his face, and his desire to pursue an aerospace engineering diploma in polytechnic was also hanging in the balance as he was failing mathematics.

Mr Kanesh managed to pull his grades up and got a place at Nanyang Polytechnic, but university proved to be another academic hurdle.

"At one point, my grades were so bad that I wanted to quit school," Mr Kanesh said. It was only with the help and motivation from his professors and lecturers at NTU that things turned around.

Mr Kanesh said his other pillars of support were the doctors and nurses who took care of him, as well as his family, who always made time for him and had burned through their savings to pay for his treatment.

"I am grateful because these are the people that give me the

energy to move forward," he said.

"The only reason I am ever troubled about my illness is that I am a burden to everyone around me... That is the biggest pain. Other than that, I think everything else is manageable."

While he awaits his convocation ceremony on Friday, Mr Kanesh is not sitting idly.

"I still feel like I have a lot of things to do that I think I should be doing. It does not end here."

Mr Kanesh currently works as a part-time engineer with local technology start-up In.Genius, which hopes to send the first Singaporean to space.

The self-professed tinkerer also has his own start-up that conducts science and technology workshops for young people, and he is involved in community service and grassroots work too.

"A lot of people will say, I do not have time to do this, I do not have time to do that. But it is really about making time, which comes back to time management," he said.

And Mr Kanesh certainly has no time to mope around.

He said: "There were plenty of overwhelming moments, but you get so used to it that it does not affect you anymore. You are going through a life of uncertainty and you know cancer can come back anytime."

"So might as well just go ahead, live the best you can. That is also what gives you the strength. Otherwise, you would be just overthinking and crying over it."

"And that does not help."

yufengk@sph.com.sg