FACE-TO-FACE WITH NOBEL LAUREATES

Inspiring the young

Curiosity is key to success, says this Nobel Laureate

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SIR Anthony Leggett had no background in science during his school days. And it did not surprise anyone that he chose to do Latin and Greek for his undergraduate studies because he had wanted to teach philosophy.

But after much thought, it dawned on him that there was no objective criteria to decide what was good or bad in philosophy, and he felt uncomfortable with that.

So it was back to classes for a second undergraduate degree in physics — a subject, he felt, which would allow him to prove whether a theory was right or wrong.

His inquisitive nature paved the way for his Nobel Laureate in physics in 2003 for his pioneering work on superfluidity — the ability of a fluid to flow through very small cracks without any friction — as he discovered that previous books on the subject contained critical errors.

It is this sense of curiosity that the Englishman hopes to impart to students and educators from the region together with two other Nobel Laureates — Professors Douglas Osheroff (physics, 1996) and Kurt Wuthrich (chemistry, 2002) — during the five-day inaugural International Science Youth Forum (ISYF) in Singapore.

Reflecting on Sir Anthony’s opening remarks yesterday, Dorothy Wong, 17, from the Diocesan Girls’ School, Hong Kong, said: “He grabbed every opportunity that was given to him. His success story is good for people who think they are not good in science, as it gives encouragement that they can succeed.”

Said Richie Cain Fook Ming, 17, of Sekolah Menengah Sayyidina Ali, Brunei: “From this programme, I hope I can learn and be exposed to the many disciplines in science. When I go back to Brunei, I want to explain to as many of my friends, the difference in the education systems of Singapore and Brunei.”

Co-organised by Hwa Chong Institution (HCI) and Nanyang Technological University, the forum, which is held in conjunction with HCI’s 90th anniversary celebrations, brings together 82 science students and 28 educators from 25 secondary schools and junior colleges in China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore.

The programme will see students discuss their research and take part in hands-on activities, while educators will be sharing ideas with their counterparts. Schools will also be looking to establish close ties with each other and explore future collaborations.