Prestigious medal for NTU professor

PROFESSOR Bertil Andersson has become the first Singapore-based researcher to win the prestigious Wilhelm Exner Medal.

The current provost at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) will receive the medal, which recognises his work and contributions in plant biochemistry research, in Vienna in November.

The 61-year-old is one of two recipients of the award. The other is Professor Ada Yonath from Israel’s Weizmann Institute, who also won the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Prof Andersson, who came to Singapore from Sweden in 2007, said: “It’s great to be appreciated and to get this medal.”

“I used to get medals as a ski racer in my youth but now that I’m too old for that, the only medals I can get are in science.”

He joins an illustrious list of laureates which includes 15 Nobel Prize winners.

The medal has been awarded annually since 1921 to scientists and inventors whose work opens up new possibilities in industrial applications.

A large part of the research Prof Andersson is being recognised for deals with plant photosynthesis — the process by which plants derive energy.

Explaining his passion for the field, he said: “We depend on plants for many things like food or fuel.”

“I find it fascinating that such a simple process can lead to so much.”

Prof Andersson, whose wife is an associate professor at NTU’s School of Biological Science, credits the Singapore Government for investing in research.

However, he feels there is a lack of desire among Singapore students to go into research.

He added, though, that there has been some progress in this aspect.

“There is a slow shift but it’s an evolution, not a revolution.”

BRYAN TOH