

Tech help to free ageing from obstacles

By **NUR ASYIQIN**
MOHAMAD SALLEH

IN THE future, elderly folk will be able to turn to interactive digital media (IDM) technologies to help with the problems of growing old.

An iPad-based farming game tracking the user's hand movements and memory to diagnose his risk for Parkinson's disease is currently being tested in Canada.

Meanwhile, a collaboration with Chinese conglomerate Lushang Group will see motion sensors installed in senior citizens' homes to track their daily activities and send feedback to caregivers remotely, allowing the elderly to live more independently while maintaining their safety.

These are among ideas the Active Living for the Elderly Research Centre - Lily for short - hopes to develop for the ageing population.

Said centre manager Zhang Liang: "Ageless ageing will use technology to free the ageing process from obstacles."

Lily is one of three new IDM centres at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) officially launched last week to develop new technologies in ageing, gaming and multimedia search capabilities. A total of \$90 million from industry partners, the Media Development Authority (MDA) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) will be poured into funding the development of software in these three areas.

NTU provost Freddy Boey said: "This is a very strong effort from NRF and MDA to build competency. NTU already has a strong pool of talent in these areas. So they chose us because we already have experience and research platforms."

The new centres will also allow the testing and piloting of new software before it hits the market, and will serve as training ground for IDM scientists and experts.

Over the next five years, 75 research staff and 74 graduate students are expected to join the centres to work with researchers seconded from partners like Tencent, China's biggest Internet service provider.

IDM is a burgeoning industry here. Since 2006, NRF has invested \$580 million to fuel research in the area.

A study by Deloitte this year found that the sector's value-added doubled from less than \$1 billion in 2008 to over \$2 billion last year.

Employment in the sector grew from 7,613 to 14,510 in the same period.

✉ asyiqins@sph.com.sg