



Among the winners of this year's awards are (from left) entrepreneur Darius Cheung, 30, geneticist Teo Yik Ying, 33, film-maker Boo Junfeng, 27, and Touch Cyber Wellness youth workers Chong Ee Jay, 32, and Anthony Yeong, 31. ST PHOTO: MUGILAN RAJASEGERAN

# They're young... and dare to dream

Four Youth Award individual winners this year eschewed conventional paths to success

BY LEOW SI WAN

AT FIRST sight, the four individual winners of this year's Singapore Youth Award could not be more different.

But the film-maker, entrepreneur, scientist and youth community leader share one thing in common. All eschewed conventional paths to success and dared to follow their dreams. They will be presented with the awards at the Istana by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean on Sunday. A team of 12 social workers will also receive an award.

Started in 1975, the award is Singapore's highest accolade for those under 35 who have made significant contributions to society and excelled in areas such as the arts, entrepreneurship and science.

This year's individual winners are film-maker Boo Junfeng, entrepreneur Darius Cheung, geneticist Teo Yik Ying and youth community leader Terence Chia. All have inspiring stories to tell.

Take Mr Boo, 27. The soft-spoken man studied film at Ngee Ann Polytechnic after his O levels, even though his civil servant father and retiree mother were hesitant at first.

"My parents were resistant as film-making is uncharted territory," he said.

He is now a successful director. His first feature film, *Sandcastle*, won several awards at the Vietnam International Film Festival and Hong Kong Asian Film Festival.

Likewise, Mr Cheung, 30, broke the typical Singaporean mould when he co-founded tenCube. The firm is a start-up pioneering applications in mobile security, most notably an award-winning software which guards against data loss in mobile phones.

The engineering graduate from the National University of Singapore said his firm started as a "hobby project", adding: "My founding partner lost his phone and we felt something could be done to protect data loss. So we started on the project and, along the way, we realised there is a market."

Dr Teo, 33, chose to specialise in biostatistics, instead of the more popular financial statistics, because he felt it would provide more "fun, novelty and meaning". The married father of two said: "Most people would have taken financial statistics, but I really wanted to look at biological problems from a mathematical perspective."

He has developed important methodological solutions to challenges in discovering genetic causes of diseases such as diabetes and malaria. He said: "I hope to leverage on this award to inspire more young students to become interested in science."

Mr Chia, 30, who was not at yesterday's press briefing at the National Youth Council Academy, is an active volunteer and the chairman of the National Youth Achievement Award Gold Award Holders' Alumni.

The 12 social workers are from Touch Cyber Wellness, which helps people deal with risks they could face online.

Mr Edward D'Silva, chairman of the Singapore Youth Award panel, said: "These young Singaporeans have not only excelled in these categories, but have also contributed to the community."