

Lighting up Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations



Quirky lanterns made from recycled materials illuminated Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park last night, where hundreds of Teck Ghee residents gathered to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. Joining them were Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his wife. Some residents tried to guess the answers to traditional Chinese lantern riddles, while others watched a variety of stage performances. As part of the celebrations, residents were also encouraged to design colourful tiles that will be used to decorate a float for next year's Chingay. The Bridge of Harmony float will represent 60 years of effort by the People's Association in bringing communities together. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

New infectious diseases centre boasts new tech

Electronic eyes track every patient, visitor and worker, for contact tracing if outbreak occurs

Linette Lai

At the new National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), every

patient, visitor and staff member is tracked through electronic eyes. During a disease outbreak, this real-time location system enables doctors to swiftly identify the peo-

ple with whom an infected patient came into contact, where the interaction took place, and for how long. "The most important thing is the speed," said Professor Leo Yee Sin, the centre's executive director. "Within a very short period of time, we can identify the contacts among different individuals." The 330-bed NCID is designed to

handle an outbreak on the scale of the severe acute respiratory syndrome, and replaces the old Communicable Disease Centre in Moulmein Road. It was officially opened yesterday by Health Minister Gan Kim Yong, who highlighted the centre's role in tackling disease outbreaks at the national level. Mr Gan noted that new diseases,

such as avian influenza, continue to emerge in many parts of the world. "These infectious disease challenges remind us that Singapore must continue to strengthen its infectious disease capabilities and capacities, as well as remain vigilant against these threats," he added. Since starting operations, he said, the NCID's ability has been tested in the management of Singapore's first imported case of monkeypox. The patient was a Nigerian man who had arrived in Singapore on April 28. It took about 30 hours to diagnose the patient from the time he reached the centre, where he was treated and later recovered. The centre houses clinical care, public health, and training and research facilities. It began operations late last year. The NCID will work with international partners such as the World Health Organisation.

"As infectious diseases are not constrained by borders, a total defence strategy is needed, which includes building community readiness and resilience among stakeholders, not just in Singapore but beyond our shores," Mr Gan said. The centre's real-time location system sounds the alarm if staff have not sanitised their hands before tending to a patient. Equipment such as wheelchairs and beds are also tagged, making them easy to locate should they be needed in an emergency. The centre features Singapore's first high-level isolation unit, where patients with highly contagious diseases, such as Ebola, will be housed. The self-contained facility can, if necessary, be locked down during larger outbreaks. linettel@sp.com.sg



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