

NUS slips to 3rd, NTU climbs to 4th in Asia uni rankings

This year's rankings the largest with 856 unis; India beats China as most represented

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Correspondent

The National University of Singapore (NUS) slipped from the second to third spot in the latest Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) 2024 ranking of Asia's universities released on Wednesday. NUS was ranked Asia's No.1 university from 2019 to 2022, and came in second in the 2023 list.

In the latest list, China's Peking University held on to the top spot it claimed in the 2023 list, while The University of Hong Kong climbed two spots and came in second.

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) climbed one spot to be placed fourth, alongside Tsinghua University, in the list by the Britain-based higher education consultancy that highlights Asia's top universities.

In a statement, an NUS spokesperson said its performance is "an affirmation of the outstanding contributions of our talented community of academics, researchers, staff, students and alumni who are breaking frontiers for a better world and more sustainable future".

"We remain committed to nurturing well-rounded and resilient young minds through interdisciplinary learning; conducting research of high translational value with emphasis on solving world problems; and building up a strong and diverse pool of faculty and scholars."

This year's QS Asia Rankings are the largest, featuring 856 universities, up from 760 in the previous year. It evaluated institutions based on several factors, including academic and employer recognition, quality and volume of research, teaching resources and the propor-

tion of international faculty and students.

India overtook China as the region's most represented location, with 148 Indian institutions making it to the list. It is followed by China with 133, and Japan with 96.

In a statement, QS senior vice-president Ben Sowter said: "Singapore is one of Asia's foremost higher education systems. With two universities among the region's top five, it boasts a truly exceptional concentration of academic excellence, underpinned by outstanding research and a collaborative, international outlook."

In the area of research output, NTU came in second in Asia, based on QS' measure of scholarly impact, going by citations per paper. NUS is placed third, and the newly ranked Singapore University of Technology and Design ranks 10th in this aspect.

In a statement, an NTU spokesperson said that NTU's ranking among the top universities in Asia "reflects the university's continued pursuit of academic excellence, impactful research and innovation, and industry collaboration to create real-world solutions".

"NTU's good performance is a testament of the hard work and dedication of its faculty and staff to nurture future leaders and create societal impact through innovations in teaching, scientific breakthroughs and research translation."

NUS came in fourth in Asia for international research network, which refers to cross-border collaboration and research, while NTU is eighth in the region.

Singapore's institutions did not rank among the region's top 100 in terms of volume of research and number of staff with a PhD.

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Asia's top 10 universities

2024 rank	2023 rank	Institution	Location
1	1	Peking University	China
2	4	The University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong
3	2	National University of Singapore	Singapore
4	5	Nanyang Technological University	Singapore
4	3	Tsinghua University	China
6	6	Zhejiang University	China
7	6	Fudan University	China
8	12	Yonsei University	South Korea
9	15	Korea University	South Korea
10	12	The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Hong Kong

Source: QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Kosovo and Singapore reaffirm friendly ties



Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu called on President Tharman Shanmugaratnam at the Istana on Wednesday. Both presidents reaffirmed the friendly relations between Singapore and Kosovo, and discussed the potential for further economic cooperation and increased people-to-people exchanges, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. Dr Osmani-Sadriu was in Singapore from Monday to Wednesday and spoke at the Bloomberg New Economy Forum. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

Study flags loss of muscle and strength in people as they age

Judith Tan
Correspondent

A 10-year study that tracked 300 people found that loss of muscle and strength in people as they age, a condition called sarcopenia, could become a challenge for the healthcare system.

Such muscle-wasting contributes to frailty, affecting balance, mobility and a senior person's overall ability to perform daily tasks, and will be especially important as one in four Singaporeans is expected to be over the age of 65 by 2030.

The longitudinal study by Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) Institute of Geriatrics and Active Ageing (IGA) found the prevalence of sarcopenia here ranged from 13 per cent to 25 per cent, compared with 5.5 per cent to 25.7 per cent for Asia as a whole.

IGA director Lim Wee Shiong, who led the study beginning in 2013, said on Wednesday that sarcopenia is not as widely recognised a syndrome in older people as dementia, but it is still important to raise awareness of it, and the steps that can be taken to prevent or delay its onset.

In the longitudinal study, GeriLABS, doctors used screening and assessment tools to detect sarcopenia in its early stages and identify those at risk of adverse outcomes, such as frailty, so they could receive timely and effective interventions.

Associate Professor Lim said disorders of the muscle and bones are the leading cause of years that people in Singapore live with disability, as they increase the number of falls and result in low quality of life, low physical activity and loss of independence in daily living.

Frailty, an age-related decline that increases a person's vulnerability to adverse health outcomes and falls, is expected to grow markedly among older people

within the community, from 5 per cent to 6 per cent now to 27 per cent by 2030.

"Our research helped to validate screening and assessment tools to detect sarcopenia and unravel clinical and physiological markers of sarcopenia. This, in turn, helps predict an individual's risk of frailty and functional decline. Doctors can now diagnose sarcopenia in the early stages more accurately and identify those who are at risk of adverse outcomes, and intervene in a timely manner," Prof Lim said.

Scans used in the ongoing study include a bone density test called dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry, and bioelectrical impedance, which runs electric current flows through the body to calculate muscle mass.

At the same time, muscle strength is measured by the strength of the patient's hand grip using a hand dynamometer.

Loss of muscle mass could happen even in overweight people who do not appear to be losing bulk. An older person suffering from such obese sarcopenia, more commonly known as "fat-frail", actually has very low muscle mass.

The issue here, said TTSH-IGA geriatrician Lim Jun Pei, is that many of those who suffer from obese sarcopenia often do not see the problem in themselves because "they remain large (and are) not shrinking or wasting away".

"This person might not have enough functioning muscle to carry the weight of their own body around, so they depend on motorised PMDs (personal mobility devices) when they need to be exercising, which is one of the solutions for people over the age of 60 with sarcopenic obesity. This results in a vicious circle," she added.

Prof Lim Wee Shiong said: "The solution for people over the age of 60 and who are fat-frail is to eat more protein, walk and do resistance exercise (strength training)."

He added that losing weight through dieting could simply



Retired businesswoman Susan Loong, 70, was found to have pre-sarcopenia. She was asked to eat more protein and to exercise regularly. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

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mean losing more muscle mass.

The study also shed light on the non-obese form of sarcopenia. This could happen among people who neither exercise nor eat well, perhaps because of injury or dementia.

One such person who had her

condition caught in time was retired businesswoman Susan Loong, 70.

"I felt I was getting small. I thought it was something more sinister, so I asked my daughter to take me to the doctor for a thorough check," she said.

Blood tests and scans conducted earlier in 2023 led her doctor to conclude that Madam Loong had pre-sarcopenia, and she was asked to load up on her protein intake and to continue to exercise regularly.

"I never ate a lot of meat when I was young, but now I have two hard-boiled eggs for breakfast every morning, and I changed from drinking skimmed milk to (high-protein) powdered milk," she said. For the first time, Madam Loong got herself a trainer and works out in the gym.

"I must ensure that I build up my strength so I am not at risk of falling. It is very scary to fall and hurt myself at my age," she added.

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Man fined \$1,000 for hacking python to death in Boon Lay

Sherlyn Sim

A man who was filmed killing a python with a cleaver in Boon Lay in April has been fined \$1,000 by the National Parks Board (NParks).

In response to Straits Times queries, NParks' group director of wildlife management Ryan Lee said on Wednesday that NParks had completed investigations and imposed a composition fine which the man had paid.

Mr Lee said it is an offence under the Wildlife Act to kill wildlife without the director-general's approval. First-time offenders can be fined up to \$10,000 or jailed up to six months, or both.

In the video shared on Facebook by the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), some people are seen using plastic pails and crates to hit a reticulated python at Boon Lay Place Market and Food Village.

The python, which appears to be

over 2m long, is taken to a food stall, where the man is seen using a cleaver to hack it.

He was identified on Wednesday by Chinese-language news outlet Lianhe Zaobao as Mr Ricky Cheong, a 54-year-old assistant at a cooked food stall in the market.

When contacted, he said he had no intention of killing the snake at first. He added he was closing the stall when he heard a commotion and thought a fight had broken out.

When he saw several people around a python, he stepped in to capture it because he felt it posed a danger as it "was big enough to eat a wild boar". He said the group's efforts to trap it with a pail and a blue crate were unsuccessful.

Mr Cheong said that when he picked up the snake, it bit his left arm, prompting the group to hurl empty boxes, a crate and a pail at it. After catching the snake, he noticed that it was ailing and wanted to end its suffering swiftly.

"It looked like it was in a lot of pain. It looked pitiful so I used my



A video showing a python being hit at Boon Lay Place Market and Food Village. Stall assistant Ricky Cheong said he did not intend to kill the snake, but saw that it was in pain and decided to put it out of its misery. PHOTOS: ACRES/FACEBOOK

cleaver to put it out of its misery."

On NParks' move to impose a fine, Acres said it is "deeply disappointed" over what it perceives as leniency in the punishment and lack of legal prosecution in the case.

Acres co-chief executive Anbarasi Boopal said there is videographic evidence showing a possibility of reining in the snake with a crate before the authorities arrive to handle the situation, instead of hitting it.

"Acres is unable to accept that the

reason to chop the head of the snake was to put it out of pain and misery, while the video shows the individual victoriously holding the dead snake up and giving a thumbs up.

"We sincerely hope that these statements were not accepted by the authorities as it runs counter to the factual (video) record," she said.

On the quantum of the fine, Ms Anbarasi said: "Based on the information and evidence made available for this case (videos, identity,

police camera footage) and outcome of this case, Acres would like to ask: What acts of cruelty or evidence proving intention to kill will qualify to exercise at least half of the maximum penalty or even imprisonment in Singapore?"

In August, Acres held a roadshow outside Boon Lay Place Market and Food Village to raise awareness on snake sightings and general wildlife etiquette, as part of the outreach campaign Our Wild Neighbours.

Mr Cheong said he wants to put this incident behind him, adding that the fine - which is almost one-third of his monthly income - would make him think twice about approaching a snake in the future.

"I won't appeal (against the fine)... I will just take it as a lesson and move on."

NParks said it would not take further actions against other individuals who were involved in the incident based on its findings from available evidence.

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What individuals should do if they encounter a snake

National Parks Board's group director of wildlife management Ryan Lee advises people to stay calm and back away slowly, giving the snake space to retreat.

"Do not approach or attempt to handle the snake. Any pets should also be kept on a tight leash for their safety," he added.

If people need assistance, they can call NParks' 24-hour Animal Response Centre on 1800-476-1600.

More information on snakes can be found on NParks' website.