Attracting the bright lights

Professor B.V.R. Chowdari of NUS wins award for spurring the development of the business events industry in Singapore

PHYSICS lecturer Professor B.V.R. Chowdari (right) of the National University of Singapore has been responsible for inviting more than 16 Nobel Laureates to speak here in the last 10 years.

He organised the International Conference on Materials for Advanced Technologies (ICMAT) in 2001 to help the small but growing talent pool of materials researchers in Singapore to remain connected with overseas experts.

It was no easy task for Prof Chowdari, 67, who was then the vice-president of the newly-formed Materials Research Society (MRS) of Singapore.

“For a completely new professional society with limited membership, no financial resources, no experience, no track record and no credibility, organising a conference of this magnitude and complexity was a real challenge,” says Prof Chowdari.

“We had to get continued support from local and overseas experts while competing with more established and larger professional societies from all over the world. Attracting the same pool of conference delegates to come to Singapore year after year is even more challenging.”

He attended the annual meetings of MRS worldwide, giving presentations and videos highlighting the potential of Singapore as a tourist and conference destination. As a result, ICMAT’s attendance increased from 1,500 in the inaugural conference to over 2,200 last year when over 45 countries were represented. The public and students could attend the lectures by the Nobel Laureates free of charge.

Prof Chowdari also organised other scientific conferences such as the MRS-S Conferences on Advanced Materials and AsiaNANO 2008. He was recently elected as the President of the International Union of Materials Research Societies and conferred the title of “Officer in the Order of Academic Palms” by the Government of France.

Last night, Prof Chowdari was awarded the Business Event Ambassador Award by the Singapore Tourism Board. This award honours an individual from a trade or professional association outside the Mice industry who has contributed significantly to the development of the business events industry in Singapore.

He says: “This award certainly motivates me and my colleagues to take the lead in organising more major conferences and make Singapore a business destination.”

The ICMAT 2009 also won the Association Event of the Year in the Singapore Experience Awards this year.

Prof Chowdari says: “No major conference could be organised single-handedly. ICMAT is the unifying force of the entire materials community in Singapore and worldwide.”