



INSIDE

- Smart medicine to herald change > p10-11
- TCM to benefit from big data > p11



The contestants, guests and judges for the competition pose for a group photo at the award ceremony.

PHOTOS BY EDMOND TANG, PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY

HK orators set for national final

Two winners from regional contest in 21st Century National English Speaking Competition are headed for Hangzhou event

By NORA ZHENG

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Two students from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region talked their way into one of China's largest English-speaking contests on Feb 3 and will represent the city in the national final to be held in Hangzhou, East China's Zhejiang province, in April.

Katarina Shing Cheuk-yan of St Paul's Convent School and Barsa Rai Ga-sa from St Mary's Canossian College walked away with the top prizes in the junior and senior divisions, respectively, in the inaugural Hong Kong regional final of the 21st Century National English Speaking Competition.

The two winners will now compete against 32 other regional winners in the national final.

The regional contest, jointly hosted by China Daily Asia Pacific, VDO English and the Seeding's Culture Youth Exchange Centre, was open to students in Hong Kong for the first time.

"I had rehearsed for the contest more than 50 times but I still felt nervous," admitted Rai. "My teeth were chattering before my turn," she said after the award presentation ceremony on Feb 3.

Rai said she would gear up for the upcoming final. "I will seek advice from people experienced in speaking or debating."

The regional competition also saw Joyce Dorothea Schroeder from Christian Alliance S C Chan Memorial College and Ma Hiu-chun from Pentecostal Lam Hon Kwong School



Guests warmly applaud the winners.



Judges at the ready for the speaking competition.

as runners-up, respectively, in the junior and senior groups.

Lou Leung-hei from Kwun Tong Maryknoll College and Zoe Leung from G.T. (Ellen Yeung) College (Secondary Section) finished third in their respective sections.

Robert Ireland, senior adviser of China Daily Asia Pacific and one of the judges for the contest, described the competition as "pretty tough".

"Compared to the preliminary

rounds, the students have made much progress. Obviously, they took time to rehearse and learn better," he said.

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of China Daily Asia Pacific Zhou Li said the 21st Century National English Speaking Competition has an eye on the future.

"It encourages our young people to become full participants in an increasingly interconnected, glo-



From left: Senior-division contestants Ma Hiu-chun, Barsa Rai Ga-sa (champion) and Zoe Leung emerge victorious from the "pretty tough" competition.



From left: Top 3 winners of the junior-division competition Joyce Dorothea Schroeder, Katarina Shing Cheuk-yan (champion) and Lou Leung-hei.

balized and competitive world," Zhou said. The nationwide contest, launched by China Daily Group in 1996, aims to encourage young students to improve their English language proficiency and prepare them before entering society and the highly competitive employment market.

The regional competition is supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club (title sponsor), Hong Kong Disneyland (gold sponsor), Sun Kong

Tai International Culture Exchange (silver sponsor), the British Council and the Hong Kong United Youth Association. It also received backing from the Department of Educational, Scientific and Technological Affairs of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong SAR, as well as the Hong Kong SAR Government, including the Education Bureau and the Home Affairs Department.