

Whiz kid coders

These students know 3D animation and they are only eight years old, as VICNAN PANNIRSELVAM finds out

AMRISH Pillay and Leam Ming Jiang, both eight years old, are the youngest participants in a coding competition for primary students.

They were taking part in this year's Code XtremeApps coding competition in the junior category.

They had to learn and write programming code to create an animation clip of up to two minutes.

The clips, based on the theme of promoting friendship through sportsmanship and fair play, were in line with the theme of the 2010 Youth Olympics.

Amrish had entered his competition with his brother Ajay. Working on their competition entry, they had to put in long hours and sometimes work past midnight.

Amrish and Ming Jiang were among the 47 children aged eight to 12 years who took part in the competition.

They were given three hours of train-

ing on a software called Alice after which they were given time to code their own application.

Alice was developed by Carnegie Mellon University to teach the basic concepts of programming.

According to the organisers, the Information Technology Standards Committee (ITSC), it is extremely easy to use.

Nonetheless, the kids weren't left stranded with Alice.

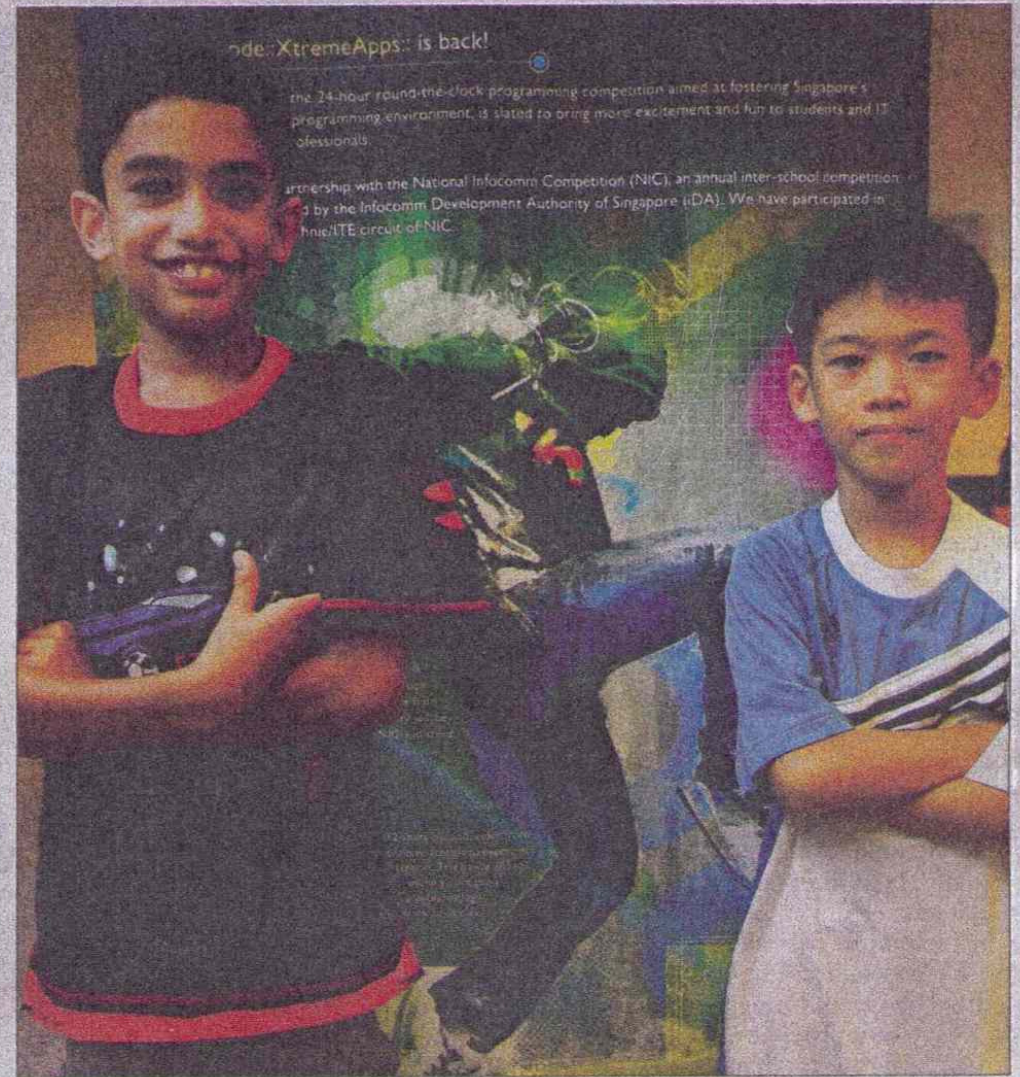
Members of the Nanyang Girls High School's infocomm club, who were also trained in Alice, acted as student mentors. The participants could call on their designated mentors whenever help was needed.

"They would call us at least 20 times a day. They would either send an SMS or talk to me on MSN," said Tay Choon Ting, 15, who had given her personal contact information to the young coders she was assigned to.

Started last year by the ITSC to interest Singaporeans in programming, Code XtremeApps is an intensive 24-hour on-the-spot challenge to code a Web-based application. The open event will be held on July 19 and 20.

This year, the organisers cast their net wider and created the junior category to include younger Singaporeans. The junior event aimed to make programming fun.

Winners of all the categories will receive their prizes in August.



ST PHOTO: A. B. RICHARD

Amrish Pillay and Leam Ming Jiang, both eight, had the help of older student mentors in the programming competition. They had to write code for 3D animation programs to win video game systems.