

► Jean Loo

MR JAMES Soh, who a week ago became the 10th Singaporean to be conferred the award of Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), dedicated his medal to the young people he has spent his life helping.

Mr Soh was presented with the award by Queen Elizabeth II last Saturday, during her state visit to Singapore at a private ceremony held at the Raffles Hotel's royal suite. His wife Helen and younger son Davin, 27, were present at the ceremony, along with Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh.

Said Mr Soh, 56: "It came as a surprise at first because I'm not a British subject, but I'm honoured to be accepting this on behalf of the young people in Singapore."

He joins nine other Singaporeans like badminton champion Wong Peng Soon and World War II heroine Elizabeth Choy, who have also received the award.

It was founded in 1917 to recognise service by civilians in World War I and is now widely conferred on civilians for public service.

Mr Soh, who is executive director of the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) Council, said that he had noticed how some Singaporean youths were excelling academically, but lacked life skills and respect for others.

"What really counts is the right attitude. It can carry you a long way, so we try to inspire them and put them on



BEING AWARDED the MBE came as a surprise to National Youth Achievement Award Council executive director James Soh, but he is accepting it on behalf of the young people in Singapore.

PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

UK award for man who put youth on right track

He dedicates Member of Order of British Empire (MBE) award, conferred by Queen Elizabeth, to those he spent his life helping

the right track.

"In my work, the satisfaction lies in grooming young people who become extraordinary, not for any awards."

The council is a non-profit organisation modelled after The Duke of Edinburgh's Awards scheme in Britain.

Started in 1992 here, the NYAA helps young people develop personal qualities like self-reliance, perseverance and a sense of responsibility through expeditions, community service, skills development and physical recreation.

Mr Soh recalls that it was the late Dr Tay Eng Soon, then senior minister of state for education, who asked him to spearhead a programme to balance a student's life.

He said: "We were determined to provide an equal playing field for students to be involved in the community whether they were from the neighbourhood schools or top schools."

From 150 students involved in the pilot scheme in 1989, there are now more than 126,000 young people aged between 14 and 25 engaged in the scheme.

"Talent is useless if you don't make use of it, so we want to help young people develop in areas where they show interest and talent."

His wife of 32 years, Helen, who is in her late 50s, finds her husband's passion for helping young people very meaningful. "To me, the most important thing is that he is enjoying himself helping them," she said.

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JBJ's failure to pay legal costs might ruin his election bid

OPPOSITION politician J.B. Jeyaretnam's bid to get himself discharged from bankruptcy has hit another snag following his failure to pay \$6,500 in legal costs as ordered by the courts.

As a result, Tuesday's hearing for his application to annul his bankruptcy is likely to be postponed. This could affect the 80-year-old's ability to contest the coming polls as undischarged bankrupts cannot stand for election.

On March 14, the High Court ordered Mr Jeyaretnam to pay an extra \$6,500 in costs for two previous discharge hearings which he lost. He was given up to last Friday afternoon to do so.

Next Tuesday's hearing for his application to discharge himself from a \$600,000 debt was made conditional on his paying the \$6,500 before the Friday deadline.

But he failed to do so. Instead, he filed an appeal against the court's order requiring him to pay the additional costs, said Mr Hri Kumar of Drew and Napier, who is representing some plaintiffs in the case.

The former chief of the Workers' Party was made a bankrupt in 2001 after he failed to pay damages to the organisers of the Tamil Language Week of 1995 and several People's Action Party ministers who had sued him successfully for defamation.