

Yoga gurus reach for Olympic goal

BY JILL ALPHONSO

BIKRAM Choudhury, founder of Bikram Yoga – a popular form of Hatha yoga that sees practitioners doing postures for 90 minutes in a room heated to about 40 deg C – has one big ambition: to turn yoga into an Olympic sport.

He and his wife, Rajashree, both recognised yoga champions from India, set up the International Yoga Asana Championships – a United States-based worldwide competition that got its start in 2003. The competition has now seen seven instalments, and is the first step towards Olympic recognition.

Singaporeans are making a name for themselves in the competition – which is a **controversial** event, because, to many people, the idea of competition goes against the philoso-

phy and spirit of yoga. Still, such competitions are common in the birthplace of yoga – India.

This year, two women from Singapore placed within the top 10 in their category in the US competition.

Ms Gloria Suen, 33, an associate director in consumer banking strategy and business development, took third place; Ms Eleanor Xu, 30, a yoga teacher at the Bikram Yoga City Hall studio, took seventh. In the youth division, Singaporean Madeline Lu, 12, took first place in the girls' category.

Last year, a Singapore representative, Mr Dev Kapil, took first place in the men's division.

Calcutta-born, Los Angeles-based Rajashree, 44, will head a yoga seminar – organised by Bikram Yoga City Hall – on March 6. The seminar will focus on both the physical and emotional **aspects** of yoga.

Rajashree, a five-time winner of the All-India Yoga Championship in India, spoke to *my paper* about the Olympic dream, and what yoga means to her.

A question for the unconverted – why do yoga at all?

Yoga is a way of life. Practice lays the foundation for a healthy body and a healthy mind. Regularity of practice creates a strong discipline for a **balanced life**.

Yoga also means “union”, the process of coordination between body, mind and soul. The physical function of yoga promotes health and has biochemical benefits by working on the body on a cellular level.

To me, yoga means to look

within. I use yoga to see how I feel, and to evaluate my state of mind. In this way, I can determine where I want to go and what my goals are at any given moment in time. It improves my relationship with myself.

You and Bikram have said it's your dream to make yoga an Olympic sport. Why is that?

The prestige and spirit of the Olympic Games can promote yoga. More people will then practise and experience the health benefits of yoga, which can help people everywhere.

How close are you to that goal? I understand that you are aiming for 2020.

It is too early in the process to say, but we are proceeding in the correct way.

You came to Singapore last year to judge the annual championships here. Could you comment on the level of the practitioners here?

Bikram Yoga was introduced by Bikram Yoga City Hall director Diane Lee in Singapore in 2006. Already, the practice (of Singaporeans) has reached an international level.

It's advertised that no yoga experience is necessary for your eight-hour seminar. Will it really be worth the time and money?

When you put a price on something, you put a **limitation** on it. Go beyond the limitation, and overcome the fear of limitation. Just come and have fun. Come especially to yoga with an empty hand and an open heart. Let your body and your mind feel the power of the unknown, which could be your strength on a physical level, and your faith, on a spiritual level.

jilla@sph.com.sg

◆ The Bikram Yoga seminar by Rajashree Choudhury will be held at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel from 9am to 5pm on March 6.

The seminar includes a lecture, yoga class, posture clinic where you will get a chance to have your posture corrected, and a group talk. No yoga experience is necessary. Open to all above the age of nine.

The cost is \$304.95, or \$267.50 for Bikram Yoga City Hall members. Discounts for groups of eight people and more available. Call 6339-6639, or e-mail info@bikramyoga.sg for more information.

HELPDESK 我的字典

Controversial: 有争议的
yǒu zhēng yì de

Aspects: 方面 fāng miàn

Balanced life: 均衡的生活
jūn héng de shēng huó

Limitation: 局限 jú xiàn

IN SYNC: Rajashree Choudhury and husband Bikram founded the International Yoga Asana Championships in the United States.

(PHOTO: INTERNET)



The Internet will make you smarter, say experts

LOS ANGELES

AN ONLINE survey of 895 Web users and experts found that more than three quarters of them believe the Internet will make people smarter in the next 10 years, according to results released last Friday.

Most of the respondents also said the Internet would improve reading and writing by 2020, according to the study, conducted by the Imagining the Internet Center at Elon University in North Caroli-

na and the Pew Internet and American Life project.

But 21 per cent said the Internet would have the opposite effect and could even lower the IQs of some who use it a lot.

“There are still many people...who are critics of the impact of Google, Wikipedia and other online tools,” said study co-author Janna Anderson, director of the Imagining the Internet Center.

The Web-based survey gathered opinions from scientists, business leaders, consultants, writers and

technology developers, along with Internet users.

The study was prompted in part by an August 2008 cover story in the Atlantic Monthly by technology writer Nicholas Carr, headlined “Is Google making us stupid?”

He suggested in the article that heavy use of the Web was chipping away at users' capacity for concentration and deep thinking.

Mr Carr, who participated in the survey, told the authors that he still agreed with the piece.

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