



TOMORROW'S WORLD: MSC student 'Grace' Hu Yu Ling in the 'iDorm' at the University of Essex, with the 'Tinl' computer, which controls the atmosphere of the room

Photo: CLIFFORD HICKS

## University scientists trip the light fantastic

MUHAMMAD Ali once claimed he was so quick on his feet that he could turn off the light switch and get into bed before the room went dark.

And thanks to researchers at the University of Essex it may not be too long before the rest of us can lay in bed and watch the lights go out without lifting a finger.

Computer scientists at the University's Colchester campus have developed the iDorm (Intelligent dormitory) which is fitted with tiny monitors and sensors which allow it to learn the user's preferences.

For example, the iDorm learns to switch off the light and close the blinds when the user lies down on the bed.

"The ground-breaking technology works by the gadgets interacting with each other intelligently to get to know the user's preferences and then carrying out tasks for them," said researcher Arran Holmes.

He added: "It could be used in future to improve the quality of life for elderly or disabled people."

A scaled-down version of the University's iDorm has been set up in the Family of the Future exhibit at the Tomorrow's World roadshow at Earls Court.

The university's exhibit also includes Dr Huosheng Hu's football-playing robot dogs, fresh from the Japanese RoboCup and a first-round exit.

Meanwhile, work continues back in Colchester to develop the iDorm, which is part of an EU-funded research programme, eGadgets.

PhD student Anthony Pounds-Cornish has spent two days living in the iDorm and further experiments are planned with the human guinea pig spending a week in the room.