NTU to train largest batch of China officials

BY GRACE CHUA

NEXT month, the largest batch of senior officials from China's powerful Central Organisation Department will arrive in Singapore to attend a new executive training programme by Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

Some 35 officials from the department, which oversees personnel appointments, will take part in the two-week-long Mayors' Programme.

These director-general-level officials are roughly the equivalent of directors in Singapore's civil service.

Details of the new programme were announced yesterday at a gala dinner to mark the 20th year that NTU has trained such Chinese officials.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat was the guest of honour at the dinner at Shangri-La Hotel, which was also attended by Minister Counsellor Dai Bing of the Chinese Embassy here.

NTU conducted its first executive training course in 1992, and then branched out into what are now its flagship Master of Science in Managerial Economics and Master of Public Administration programmes.

To date, more than 12,000 officials from nearly all of China's provinces have been through these programmes, and many now hold senior positions.

Dr Wu Wei, director of NTU's Nanyang Centre for Public Administration, which runs a variety of executive training courses and two master's programmes, explained that more senior officials were coming here for executive training instead of degree programmes.

"Senior officials are often too busy to come here for a whole year," he said.

The new Mayors' Programme can be customised to meet officials' needs.

For instance, the first batch of officials from the Central Organisation Department are slated to be urban planners, so their curriculum will focus on urban management. They are sponsored by Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A second batch will comprise mayors from Liaoning province.

Besides urban planning, China is also keen to know more about how Singapore manages issues such as environmental pollution, economic restructuring and clean governance, said Dr Wu.

And the learning applies both ways, he added.

The new programme will include visits to Singapore's government agencies, so local officials will hear about China's needs and gain insights into its mindset and culture.

Chinese officials will also get to attend lectures by former ministers and dignitaries, such as former Ministry of Finance permanent secretary Ngiam Tong Dow and former transport minister Yeo Cheow Tong.

In his speech at the dinner last night, Mr Heng said such programmes are effective platforms for the two countries to learn from each other.

He said to the Chinese officials: "Not all of Singapore's development experience will be applicable to China, but perhaps our story can stimulate further ideas that would be relevant to you.

"The learning is not a one-way process: By welcoming our Chinese friends to Singapore, we also benefit from your experiences and your perspectives."