

Former president Tony Tan given top honour by NTU



Former president Tony Tan Keng Yam receiving the honorary degree from President Halimah Yacob during the NTU Convocation ceremony on July 24, 2018. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

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SINGAPORE - Former president Tony Tan Keng Yam received the highest honour from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) on Tuesday (July 24).

Dr Tan, who served as education minister from 1985 to 1991, was given the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from NTU for his contributions to the university and Singapore's higher education landscape.

In a citation, Mr Koh Boon Hwee, chairman of NTU's Board of Trustees, said that Dr Tan played an instrumental role in setting up NTU and the National University of Singapore (NUS) as the minister-in-charge for both institutions.

"Under Dr Tan's guidance, university education in Singapore became more globalised and was made accessible to more Singaporeans regardless of their family or financial background," said Mr Koh.

Apart from shaping university education, Dr Tan also played a key role in advancing research in Singapore as chairman of the National Research Foundation and deputy chairman of the Research, Innovation and Enterprise Council until 2011.

He was also NTU chancellor from 2011 to 2017, before passing on the role to President Halimah Yacob, who presided over NTU's main commencement ceremony on Tuesday for the first time.

At the event, former NTU president Bertil Andersson was conferred the title of President Emeritus, for his leadership from 2011 to 2017.

Two other individuals were presented honorary degrees - former head of civil service Peter Ho and Lee Foundation chairman Lee Seng Tee.

Mr Ho, who was awarded the honorary Doctor of Science, had a career in public service spanning more than 34 years, with 15 years as a permanent secretary in several ministries.

Now the senior adviser at the Centre for Strategic Futures, Mr Ho is also the chairman of the Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering, set up by NTU in partnership with NUS.

Dr Lee received an honorary Doctor of Letters for his philanthropic contributions to education. His foundation had given \$150 million towards the setting up of NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, which saw its first batch of 52 doctors receive their scrolls on Tuesday.

In recognition of the gift, the medical school was named after the foundation's late founder and Dr Lee's father, renowned business leader and philanthropist Tan Sri Dato Lee Kong Chian.

In an acceptance speech, Dr Tan encouraged graduands to keep learning within and across disciplines.

"Collaboration between disciplines is not only necessary to advance research - it is critical if we are to tackle the challenges of the future," he said.

"Medicine needs the humanities to stay ethical; even as technology enables great efficiencies, it is calling into question the very nature of work and what it is to be human."

In a speech, NTU president Subra Suresh said that the university hopes to play a role in discussing the benefits and potential negative consequences of technological innovation.

To this end, it is in the process of setting up the NTU Institute of Science and Technology for Humanity, which will address the impact of technology on society.

From the new academic year next month, undergraduates can also take modules on digital literacy, which will cover ethical and human aspects of digitisation.

A total of 9,755 graduands will be conferred their degrees over 20 ceremonies from Tuesday until next Thursday (Aug 2).