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Universities like NTU play critical role in social compact, says DPM Heng at 30th anniversary dinner

DPM Heng Swee Keat said universities should not be ivory towers, but instead catalysts to create a better world.   ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

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SINGAPORE - Universities like Nanyang Technological University (NTU) play a critical role in providing educational access to those who might otherwise not have the opportunity, said Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat on Friday (July 1).

Over the years, NTU has taken in students from diverse backgrounds through bursaries and scholarships, and these help to strengthen the social compact, he said.

Just as important, he added, is the role that NTU students and alumni play in giving back to society.

In a video address at NTU's 30th anniversary dinner, Mr Heng said: "To each generation of NTU students and faculty, I urge you to continue to change our society and the world for the better.

"Universities should not be ivory towers. They should instead be catalysts to create a better world."

Mr Heng added that NTU has made good progress over the past three decades as it now ranks among the top universities in the world.

"Looking ahead, the pace of change will be even faster and the waves of disruption much larger," said Mr Heng.

One of these waves is society - the need to forge a stronger social compact.

Said Mr Heng: "The social compact is under stress in many societies. Disparities are widening, and many communities feel excluded from progress.

"Singapore is in a better position, but we are not immune to some of these forces."

This was also highlighted by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong earlier this week when he launched Forward Singapore, an engagement exercise between the Government and Singaporeans to refresh the social compact and shape the country's future together.

NTU president Subra Suresh announced on Friday that the university had raised more than $1.1 million through activities which were part of its 30th anniversary celebrations.

He was also speaking at the anniversary dinner held at The Wave, NTU's newest sports hall on campus.

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The monies - from over 4,000 donors - was raised through NTU's We Belong campaign that spanned two months from Jan 22 to March 31, said the university in a statement.

The campaign comprised NTU Service Week, where about 600 volunteers worked with over 30 community partners in service projects; Best Foot Forward, a virtual run that clocked 37,000km from 1,000 runners; and NTU Giving Day, which brought the entire university community together to celebrate the impact of giving and to support critical causes of the university.

The $1.1 million will go towards financial aid for students as well as support for the university's colleges, schools and programmes, such as the NTU Priorities Fund, School Advancement Funds, and the NTU Sustainability Fund.

The university kicked off its anniversary activities in September last year, which included the launches of a digital time capsule, a public exhibition, and a limited-edition book.

Concluding his address, Prof Suresh said: "I urge all of you to reflect on the communities around you and what they mean to you. You build a community, and then it builds you. It nourishes you with friendships and purpose.

"This is how greatness is achieved - not by individual effort, but by the collective strength and cumulative impact of small victories - as demonstrated by the rich heritage and remarkable accomplishments of Nanyang Technological University."

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