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NTU pays tribute to Koh Boon Hwee, Singapore's longest-serving university chairman



Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat (left) presenting Mr Koh Boon Hwee with a book marking his service. PHOTO: NTU



Ng Wei Kai

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SINGAPORE - Nanyang Technological University (NTU) paid tribute to its longest-serving chairman Koh Boon Hwee on Friday evening (Nov 26), against a backdrop of sharks, manta rays and other fish.

The event, held at Ocean Restaurant in Sentosa which has a glass wall facing an aquarium, was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Mr Heng, who was Minister for Education from 2011 to 2015, said: "The standard of education and research in NTU has reached new heights, and NTU is now one of the most highly regarded universities."

Addressing Mr Koh, he added: "You have done so well that all education ministers have refused to let you go. So you had to serve 28 years - an amazing record."

Mr Koh held the post for longer than any other university chairman in Singapore, and stepped down in March this year.

During his long tenure, he oversaw various milestones at NTU, including the establishment of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine in 2013 and the university's rise in international rankings.

Since 2015, NTU has been ranked between 11th and 13th in the QS World University Rankings, a leap from the 74th place it occupied on the same list in 2010.

Mr Koh spoke about his firm belief in education as a route towards social mobility and creating social equality.

Reflecting on his long leadership, he said the Government's decision in 2005 to allow Singapore universities to become autonomous enabled the university and the board to "control the levers" to achieve its goals.

He said: "I'd like to think on reflection that we used the tools that we were given well."

Mr Koh added that it was his ambition as a young man to become a university professor, and while that dream never panned out, he said: "I firmly believe that NTU will one day produce a Nobel Prize winner."

Also at the event were former members of NTU's board of trustees, including former MP Inderjit Singh and Mrs Lee Suet Fern.

Mrs Lee, who stepped down from the board of trustees in March after 15 years, said NTU had managed to use its unique heritage as a Chinese and technological university to become a globally recognised university today, adding that it has been a journey to remember.

Mr Heng also presented Mr Koh with a book marking his service titled *The Visionary Chairman: How Koh Boon Hwee Steered NTU From Fledging To Fast-Rising*.

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Mr Koh, who joined the NTU council in 1991, also oversaw efforts to grow the university's philanthropy support, and personally donated \$2.5 million to NTU in 2010.

The Government matched the sum dollar for dollar and the money was used to establish a \$5 million endowment fund in support of the University Scholars Award, which NTU later renamed the Koh Boon Hwee Scholars Award in recognition of his generosity.

Mr Koh was succeeded by National Arts Council chairman Goh Swee Chen, who took over in April.

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