

New NUS chief to use Asian building blocks

By **LEE U-WEN**

[SINGAPORE] Singapore's oldest university welcomed its newest chief on board yesterday, and he wasted no time in outlining his plans to help the National University of Singapore (NUS) become a leading global university with a distinct Asian focus as a core strength.

The shift to be more Asian-centric is a "compelling" one, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan told reporters at his first media conference since taking over as president last month.

The 49-year-old renal physician took over the reins from Professor Shih Choon Fong last month after the latter stepped down to take the helm at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia.

Explaining why there was a greater need to engage Asia, Prof Tan said that as the region continues to grow, it would require more research and scholarship to face the many challenges ahead.

"Asia is rising very fast, it has the most dynamic economic growth areas. Over time, we can expect that Asia will become more dominant in research and development, and in global thought-leadership," he said. "We can take advantage of our location in Asia and the fact that we understand Asia."

The move to be a more research-intensive university is also one key reason why Prof Tan is spearheading the setting up of a new Global Asia Institute by 2010 to oversee multi-disci-

plinary research projects that address various large-scale research issues across Asia.

The university-level institute will have its own team of researchers and will also tap on the expertise of other research institutes in NUS such as the East Asia Institute. The plan is to bring experts together to deal with issues that affect Asia such as ageing, healthcare, energy and the environment.

"We are bracing ourselves for a prolonged period of uncertainty, but there are also many opportunities within this crisis to develop, recruit and retain excellent faculty, students and staff," said Prof Tan.

A search committee has already been formed by the university's provost to study a list of 30 of the



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edge and applications produced by the research in leading universities can transform our societies and power our economies. That is certainly the aspiration for NUS."

In the afternoon, Prof Tan was officially welcomed at a gala lunch that was attended by NUS chancellor President SR Nathan, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen and NUS Board of Trustees chairman Wong Ngit Liong, among other VIPs.

Prof Tan's rise to the top at NUS comes more than 30 years after he first enrolled at the university as a medical student back in 1978. He then became a lecturer at the medicine faculty in 1987 and became its youngest ever dean at the age of 38 in 1997.

world's top academics and researchers that could be enticed to work in NUS.

As far as curricula is concerned, a major review will be carried out across the different courses to further expose students to research and allow them to learn from different universities around the world, said Prof Tan. A review of medicine has already been completed, and next on the cards is the engineering and computing curricula.

He said: "From Google to the vaccine against cervical cancer, the new knowl-