

NUS honours eight for their contributions

By **KASH CHEONG**

AS A student in the University of Malaya five decades ago, Mr Gopinath Pillai “did everything except study”.

He was active in the university’s Socialist Club, organising political talks and writing articles for its publication *Fajar*.

Singapore was then in its last stages of shedding colonial rule, and many students were passionate about shaping Singapore’s future, he recalled.

“The world was undergoing change and there was a greater political consciousness,” said Mr Pillai, 78, who is now Ambassador-at-large for Singapore and chairman of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

“Things were more chaotic back then. It taught me how to deal with changing situations, for which there was no textbook.”

The economics student also met like-minded colleagues like Professor Tommy Koh, now also Singapore’s Ambassador-at-large. He nurtured a deep interest in international relations and community welfare.

Such exposure led him to take on many public service roles, including becoming the first chairman of super-market chain NTUC FairPrice from 1983 to 1993.

Yesterday, he was honoured with an award for outstanding service from

the National University of Singapore (NUS), along with real estate leader Seek Ngee Huat, 65. Dr Seek was president of sovereign wealth fund GIC’s real estate investment arm and founder of the NUS Institute of Real Estate Studies.

Said NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan: “Dr Seek and Mr Pillai... worked tirelessly, over decades, to expand the space and opportunities for future generations. In their commitment to excellence and service to the community, they are true exemplars of the NUS tradition and spirit.”

Six others were also honoured for their contributions. Among them was chemical and biomolecular engineering professor Neal Chung, 63, who received the Outstanding Researcher Award for being the co-inventor of membranes for Newater. History professor Brian Farrell, 54, received the Outstanding Educator Award for teaching students to think critically and argue independently.

The School of Computing’s Associate Professor Ben Leong Wing Lup, 42, received the Outstanding Educator Award, and Professor Gan Wee Teck, 43, from the science faculty, won the Outstanding Researcher Award.

The Young Researcher Award went to Dr Goki Eda, 34, of the science faculty, and Dr Zhang Rui, 38, from the engineering faculty.

✉ kashc@sph.com.sg



Prof Neal Chung (left), co-inventor of membranes for Newater, received the Outstanding Researcher Award, while Ambassador-at-large Gopinath Pillai, the first chairman of NTUC FairPrice, received an award for outstanding service. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM