

Ex-chief justice Chan Sek Keong honoured by NUS

Jolene Ang

Now aged 82, Mr Chan Sek Keong was the first local law graduate to be appointed attorney-general and later, chief justice of Singapore.

Mr Chan, who was among the first batch of law graduates from the University of Malaya – predecessor of the National University of Singapore (NUS) – played a major role in Singapore’s case against Malaysia in the Pedra Branca territorial dispute.

The International Court of Justice had judged that Singapore had sovereignty over Pedra Branca island while sovereignty over Middle Rocks islets belonged to Malaysia.

Yesterday, Mr Chan was conferred an Eminent Alumni award by NUS. It is for the university’s alumni who have “distinguished themselves nationally or globally for their exceptional and sustained contributions and achievements”.

Former top civil servant Ngiam Tong Dow was also given the award.

Mr Ngiam, also 82, spent 40 years in the public service, during which he was permanent secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office as well as various ministries, such as Finance, and National Development.

He was also a founding member of the National Wages Council, and chairman of several organisations, including the Economic Development Board.

Past recipients of the award include veteran diplomat Tommy Koh and former senior minister S. Jayakumar.

Last night’s awards ceremony, held at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, also saw Second Education and Finance Minister Indraneel Rajah receiving the Distinguished Alumni award.

She and five others were given the award for having “demonstrated impact in their respective fields, and rendered excellent and sustained service to NUS, its predecessor institutions or the community”.

The other five were former senior civil servant Ronald Hochstadt,



Ms Indraneel Rajah, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office and Second Education and Finance Minister, greeting former chief justice Chan Sek Keong at the awards ceremony. Next to Mr Chan is Dr Kelvin Ngiam, son of former top civil servant Ngiam Tong Dow. He received an award on behalf of his father. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND WEE

Changi Airport Group chairman Liew Mun Leong, Emeritus Professor Lim Chong Yah, Emeritus Professor Edwin Thumboo, and former head of NUS’ Social Work Department Ann Wee.

Also honoured was Ms Selly Amalina Muzammil. The 36-year-old Indonesian, who works with the United Nations’ World Food Programme (WFP), received an Outstanding Young Alumni award for outstanding contributions in her chosen field.

Ms Muzammil started working with the WFP in 2005. In 2007, she took a 1½-year break to do a master’s degree in international studies at NUS. She now heads its governmental partnerships unit at the regional bureau for the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

Ms Muzammil was inspired to

join the WFP after the Boxing Day tsunami that hit Indonesia in 2004.

On Christmas Eve that year, she was on a flight home to Jakarta when “the worst turbulence she had ever experienced” hit the plane.

“They were saying it was due to bad weather, but something felt strange. Days later, we woke up to news of the tsunami... I wanted to do something, but I knew money was not enough because it would be a drop in the ocean.

“That plane ride was a moment of reflection in my life because I felt like anything could have happened. And I survived while thousands of others (died in the tsunami).”

Ms Muzammil said her job gets more meaningful with time. “It’s become a way of life.”

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WAY OF LIFE

For me, it’s become a way of life. Knowing every contribution may have a far-reaching impact is what continues to drive me to do more, every day.



MS SELLY AMALINA MUZAMMIL, who works with the UN’s World Food Programme and received an Outstanding Young Alumni award.