

# Ex-medical school dean wins top science award

He helped establish emerging infectious diseases programme at Duke-NUS school

**Audrey Tan**  
Science Correspondent

A professor who helped lay the groundwork for research into infectious diseases in Singapore was yesterday honoured for his efforts.

Professor Ranga Krishnan, 64, received a medal under the President's Science and Technology Awards – the highest recognition for exceptional research scientists and engineers here – from President Halimah Yacob at the Istana.

Prof Ranga, who is now chairman of the Health Ministry's National Medical Research Council, had helped establish the emerging infectious diseases programme at Duke-NUS Medical School when he was dean from 2008 to 2015.

One of the school's five signature programmes, it has since yielded many breakthroughs during various outbreaks of infectious diseases, including the current Covid-19 pandemic.

For instance, researchers there have developed diagnostic test kits, treatments and even a vaccine to help the country tackle the coronavirus outbreak.



"We knew that viruses will cross from animals to humans and this was particularly a threat for our region and could have a major impact on the health and economy," Prof Ranga told *The Straits Times*.

"We were then lucky in being able to attract the best in this field, such as Dr Wang Linfa whose work on bat viruses, along with building

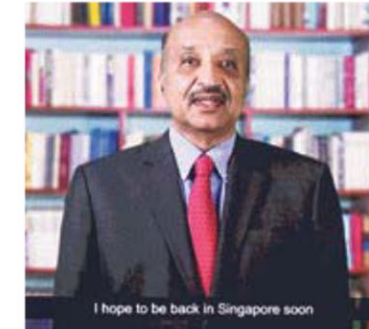
the facilities, turned out to be prescient in many ways."

Prof Ranga also contributed to the development of the health and biomedical sciences sector in Singapore in other ways. He had helped to promote the translation of fundamental research into beneficial applications by strengthening partnerships between health-

care and research institutions.

Prof Ranga said he was honoured, humbled and surprised to be selected for the award.

The President's Science and Technology Awards comprise the President's Science and Technology Medal, the President's Science Award, and the President's Technology Award.



Above: Professor Ranga Krishnan speaking from the United States, where he is heading the Rush University System for Health, in a video screened yesterday at the awards.

Left: President Halimah Yacob and chief health scientist Tan Chorh Chuan (far left) speaking to Young Scientist Awards recipients (from right) Dr Tan Si Hui, Dr John Ho and Dr Chew Wei Leong. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Madam Halimah presented the President's Science Award to the Agency for Science, Technology and Research's (A\*Star) Professor Liu Jianjun, 57, and a trio from the Nanyang Technological University comprising Professor Nikolay Zheludev, 65, Associate Professor Chong Yidong, 40, and Associate Professor Zhang Baile, 39.

The President's Technology Award went to Professor Dario Campana from the National University of Singapore.

The winners were picked by a panel of representatives from in-

dustry, academia and research.

They hail from fields like genetic studies, immunology and nanophotonics (the study of light on a nano scale), and were recognised for their contributions in making Singapore a world-class hub for science and technology, said A\*Star.

Three Young Scientist Awards were also given out by Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing during the event.

Recipients include A\*Star's Dr Chew Wei Leong, 35, for his work in gene editing therapy; NUS' Dr John Ho, 31, for his research in developing wireless healthcare technologies; and Dr Tan Si Hui, 35, for her research on cancer and stem cells. She was formerly with A\*Star till late this year and is now with Cargene Therapeutics.

Mr Chan congratulated the winners of the President's Science and Technology and Young Scientist awards, saying the science and technology community help make the impossible happen.

"You're the ones who allow us to compete on the basis of innovation, the quality of our ideas, the quality of our products, and not compete on the basis of our size or resource endowment," he said.

"Because of your contribution to our country, we can not only manage the current Covid-19 pandemic... but more importantly, you have allowed us to establish the foundations for the success of our future economy."

audreyt@sph.com.sg