NUS bursary honours ex-Cabinet minister

BY LIN ZHAOWEI

A $4 MILLION bursary has been set up at the National University of Singapore (NUS) in honour of Mr Ong Pang Boon, one of the country’s first-generation Cabinet ministers.

Initiated by his friends and former colleagues, it will award $10,000 each to as many as 20 financially needy students annually.

The bursary was officially announced yesterday at a ceremony – attended by Mr Ong – at the NUS University Hall. President S R Nathan, who is NUS’ chancellor, was the guest of honour.

A total of $2.28 million came from donors and the Government topped up the fund to $4 million.

Contributors included Mr Ong, 82, and former Cabinet colleagues such as Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s first prime minister, and former deputy prime minister Toh Chin Chye.

Organisations that helped out included the Singapore Totalisator Board, Hong Leong Group, Lee Foundation and Singapore Press Holdings.

Mr Ong graduated with a degree in geography from the University of Malaya, NUS’ predecessor, in 1954.

From 1959 to 1984, he served as minister in various portfolios – home affairs, education, labour and environment. As Education Minister from 1963 to 1970, he promoted the study of mother tongues and helped craft Singapore’s bilingual education policy.

He was the MP for Telok Ayer constituency for 20 years until his retirement from politics in 1988.

Last year, a few of his friends, including former MPs Tang See Chim and Lim Soo Peng, and former diplomat Pang Chien Lien, suggested setting up a professorship, scholarship or bursary in his name. Mr Ong agreed after much persuasion.

President Nathan said Mr Ong, during his stint as Education Minister, recognised the importance of ensuring that promising students have the opportunity to come to the top, regardless of their financial circumstances. “It is therefore fitting that this bursary is named after him, as a testimony to his spirit of service to the nation and helping the less privileged,” he said in a statement.

In a short thank-you speech, Mr Ong said he hoped the bursary could help talented but needy students become future pillars of society. “I am happy that the bursary fund can provide another source of financial assistance for them,” he said.