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## New institute to tackle global and Asian issues

New NUS-Global-Asia Institute part of plans to build NUS into a leading global university that is centred on Asia. -ST

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The Straits Times

BY 2010, a new research institute will be set up at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Kent Ridge campus.

Called the NUS-Global-Asia Institute, it will bring together the best minds to work on issues that impact on Asia - from the environment to the economy.

The institute, a brainchild of NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan, will be key to his plan to continue building NUS into a leading global university, but one that is centred on Asia.

Details are still being worked out by a task force that has been set up, but Professor Tan said the research taken on by the institute will be 'large-scale issues important globally as well as in Asia'.

'It will conduct research that will deal with complex and interlinked questions, often beyond the scope of existing research centres,' he added.

Prof Tan, who took over the helm of the 103-year-old university this month, explained why he thought it was important for NUS to focus on Asia.

'Globally, Asia's dramatic rise in importance continues. Asia is also where humanity will face some of its greatest challenges such as environmental degradation, ageing and burden of chronic disease. There is a huge unfulfilled need for better research and scholarship to understand critical issues within Asia and to find suitable solutions.'

By building expertise on Asia, he hopes his alma mater can create its own distinctiveness - 'to differentiate itself in an intensely competitive global higher education landscape'.

Singapore and NUS, he said, both have certain advantages.

'We are international, English-speaking and can address issues of importance to India, China and South-east Asia. We can also leverage on Singapore's dynamism, reputation and innovative public policies,' he said.

To staff the institute, NUS will continue to recruit world-class faculty in strategic academic areas with special expertise in relation to India, China, South-east Asia and other parts of Asia.

Right now, out of the 2,100 professors, 50 per cent are from overseas. His eventual goal: For NUS to become the 'preferred partner for scholars and industry seeking partnerships in Asia'.

He also has a plan to help his faculty and NUS reach greater heights.

The 'New Research Horizons Award' will be set up to fund faculty with unconventional research ideas which have the potential to make exciting breakthroughs.

'The goal is to support faculty whose research can help define thinking in the field, whose work can open up new lines of inquiry,' he said, citing the example of German Nobel prize winner Dr Harald zur Hausen, who identified the human papilloma viruses that cause cervical cancer.

'Very few people believed that a virus could be the cause of cancer of the cervix. But this did not deter Dr zur Hausen who proved that this was indeed the case.'

What is needed is encouragement and recognition of novel research ideas, particularly when 'these go against accepted thinking', he said.

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