

# Universities play critical role in social compact: DPM Heng

They should not be ivory towers, but catalysts to create a better world, he says

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Political Correspondent

Universities like Nanyang Technological University (NTU) play a critical role in providing educational access to those who might otherwise not have the opportunity, Deputy Prime Minister Swee Keat said yesterday.

Over the years, NTU had taken in students from diverse backgrounds through bursaries and scholarships, and these helped to strengthen the social compact, he said.

Just as important, he added, was the role NTU students and alumni played in giving back to society.

In a video address at NTU's 30th anniversary dinner, Mr Heng said: "To each generation of NTU students and faculty, I urge you to continue to change our society and the



NTU president Subra Suresh (fifth from far left), leading toasts during the university's 30th anniversary dinner yesterday. DPM Heng Swee Keat (above) delivered a video address. PHOTOS: SYAMIL SAPARI, ST FILE

world for the better. Universities should not be ivory towers. They should instead be catalysts to create a better world."

Mr Heng added that NTU had made good progress over the past three decades as it now ranked among the top universities in the world.

"Looking ahead, the pace of change will be even faster and the waves of disruption much larger," said Mr Heng.

One of these waves is society – the need to forge a stronger social compact.

Said Mr Heng: "The social compact is under stress in many soci-

eties. Disparities are widening, and many communities feel excluded from progress. Singapore is in a better position, but we are not immune to some of these forces."

This was also highlighted by Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong earlier this week when he launched Forward Singapore, an

engagement exercise between the Government and Singaporeans to refresh the social compact and shape the country's future.

NTU president Subra Suresh announced yesterday that the university had raised more than \$1.1 million through its 30th anniversary celebration activities.

He was also speaking at the anniversary dinner at NTU's newest sports hall on campus, the Wave.

The monies – from more than 4,000 donors – were raised through NTU's We Belong campaign from Jan 22 to March 31, said the university in a statement.

The campaign comprised NTU Service Week, where about 600 volunteers worked with more than 30 community partners; Best Foot Forward, a virtual run that clocked 37,000km from 1,000 runners; and NTU Giving Day, which brought the entire university community together to celebrate the impact of giving and to support critical causes of the university.

The \$1.1 million will go towards financial aid for students as well as support for the university's colleges, schools and programmes, such as the NTU Priorities Fund, School Advancement Funds and the NTU Sustainability Fund.

The university kicked off its anniversary activities in September last year, which included the launches of a digital time capsule, a public exhibition and a limited-edition book.

Concluding his address, Prof Suresh said: "I urge all of you to reflect on the communities around you and what they mean to you. You build a community, and then it builds you. It nourishes you with friendships and purpose."

"This is how greatness is achieved – not by individual effort, but by the collective strength and cumulative impact of small victories – as demonstrated by the rich heritage and remarkable accomplishments of Nanyang Technological University."

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## Suicide among youth at new high even as total reported cases fall

**Malavika Menon and Zhaki Abdullah**

The number of suicides among youth aged 10 to 29 hit a record high of 112 cases last year, up by 11 cases from the year before.

A spokesman for suicide prevention non-profit Samaritans of Singapore said that the number of suicide cases last year among those in this age group was the most reported since the Samaritans' earliest recorded data in 2000.

The last time there was a spike in the cases reported was in 2015, when 106 cases were recorded among those aged 10 to 29.

The rise in suicide among youth comes against the backdrop of an overall fall in the total number of reported suicides last year. It fell to 378, down 16.3 per cent from the figure for 2020.

Figures from the Samaritans showed that suicide deaths among those aged 60 and above also declined, from 154 two years ago to 112 last year.

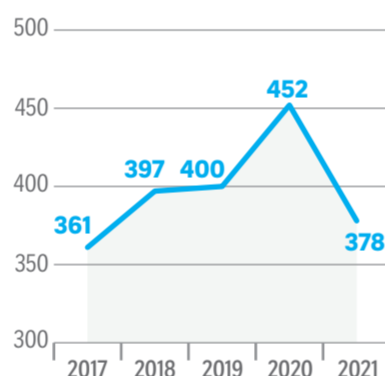
In a media statement yesterday, the Samaritans attributed this to efforts by the authorities – together with the mental health sector and the community – to prioritise mental well-being and suicide prevention in the light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health.

The Samaritans chief executive Gasper Tan said the overall decrease in number was encouraging, noting that more people are seeking help.

He said: "The data shows an overall decrease and is deeply encouraging, a trend we hope will continue. We must, however, not be complacent in our efforts to support individuals in distress, as we continue to see more individuals reaching out for support."

### Overall suicides down

Total number of reported suicides in the last five years



Number of suicides among youth\* in the last five years



\*Age group 10-29  
Source: SAMARITANS OF SINGAPORE STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

He added: "Comparing 2020 to 2021, our crisis hotline has seen a 127 per cent increase in calls from youths aged 10 to 19, expressing a strong cry for help that cannot be ignored."

About one in three cases of suicide last year was among youth aged 10 to 29, as suicide continues to cause the most deaths among those in the age group.

Experts, parents and counsellors The Straits Times spoke to said there was an urgent need to tackle the stressors affecting youth brought on by the pandemic, including social isolation, financial stress and educational challenges.

Dr Jared Ng, senior consultant and chief of the Institute of Mental Health's Department of Emergency and Crisis Care, said: "Young patients we encountered have been reporting various stressors in their lives, such as interpersonal issues with their family and friends, academic stress, achievement stress and future job stress."

Preventing youth suicides requires coordination among various sectors – such as education, social services and health – as well as support and guidance from family members and friends, Dr Ng said.

Secondary school counsellor Vickineswarie Jagadharan said the pandemic had presented unique challenges to youth, shutting off their avenues to socialise with friends and causing them to seek greater validation on social media.

PleaseStay, set up by six mothers who lost their children to suicide, is one of the advocacy groups that is calling for mental health awareness in the school curriculum and the promotion of youth mental well-being. PleaseStay member Valerie Lim said schools could consider increasing the number of counsellors and reducing class sizes so teachers would be able to better engage students.

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### Helplines

National Care Hotline  
1800-202-6868 (8am - 8pm)

### MENTAL WELL-BEING

Institute of Mental Health's

Mental Health Helpline  
6389-2222 (24 hours)

Samaritans of Singapore  
1800-221-4444 (24 hours)

/1-767 (24 hours)

Singapore Association for

Mental Health  
1800-283-7019

Silver Ribbon Singapore  
6386-1928

Tinkle Friend  
1800-274-4788

www.tinklefriend.sg

Community Health

Assessment Team  
6493-6500/1and

www.chat.mentalhealth.sg

### COUNSELLING

TOUCHline (Counselling)  
1800-377-2252

TOUCH Care Line (for seniors, caregivers)  
6804-6555

Care Corner Counselling

Centre  
1800-353-5800

### ONLINE RESOURCES

• mindline.sg

• My Mental Health

• Fei Yue's Online Counselling

Service

• Tinkle Friend

• Community Health

Assessment Team

## HIV self-test swab kits available for sale from Aug 1

Soon En-Bei

Self-test kits for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) will go on sale at two locations from Aug 1, even as new cases fell to 250 last year, the lowest in at least 18 years.

The National HIV Programme will introduce HIV self-testing to complement widely available tests at healthcare institutions such as polyclinics, hospitals and anonymous HIV test sites, said the Ministry of Health (MOH) and National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) in a press statement yesterday.

People using the self-test kits will use an oral swab, and results can be obtained within 20 to 40 minutes. The kits, which cost between \$20 and \$32, will be available at the Department of Sexually Transmitted Infections Control clinic and the Action for Aids (AFA) Anonymous Test Site, from next month.

Professor Roy Chan, president of AFA, said: "The self-testing programme does not replace existing testing programmes. But this is another way of reaching our target, which is to end HIV by 2030."

Those who test positive through the swab test should go to a healthcare provider to confirm the diagnosis and be referred for treatment, while those who test negative but engage in "high-risk sexual behaviour" are encouraged to test themselves regularly.

The new initiative comes even as the number of new cases fell from "about 320" each in 2018 and 2019, and 261 in 2020. Prof Chan said AFA has been working with "target key populations, such as homosexual men, sex workers and heterosexual men with multiple partners" on its prevention programmes.

Some 95 per cent of the new cases last year were male and 68 per cent were aged between 20 and 49 years old. Of the 250 new cases last year, 237 were infected via sexual intercourse. Some 57 per cent of the new cases last year were detected when the patients were already receiving medical treatment, either for HIV-related symptoms or unrelated ailments, and were typically at a late stage of HIV infection.

"Persons engaging in high-risk sexual behaviour, such as having multiple sexual partners or engaging in casual or commercial sex, are strongly advised to use condoms to reduce their risk of HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections," said MOH and NCID.

The public can go to [www.ncid.sg/nhivp](http://www.ncid.sg/nhivp) for more information about HIV self-testing.

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<p><b>12/130 ITALY &amp; CINQUE TERRE</b></p> <p>• Capri Island • Sicily Island</p> <p>• Italian Wine And Dinner • Isles of Capri</p> <p>• Train Ride in Cinque Terre</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19</p> <p>EVERY MON, WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>3188</b></p>	<p><b>11/130 NETHERLANDS / GERMANY / PARIS OR NORTH FRANCE</b></p> <p>• Giethoorn • Mont St. Michel • Brussels</p> <p>• Beause • Chateau • The Hague</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19, 21</p> <p>EVERY MON, WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>2488</b></p>	<p><b>80 KOREA, JEJU ISLAND &amp; BUSAN</b></p> <p>• 4-5* Hotels • Abalone Pot Meal</p> <p>• Universal Studios • K-Mall</p> <p>DEP: AUG 4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, 28</p> <p>EVERY THU, SUN</p> <p>fr s <b>1888</b></p>
<p><b>12/130 SPAIN &amp; PORTUGAL</b></p> <p>• SKY TOWN OR NORTH SPAIN</p> <p>• Spanish Suckling Pig • Madrid Tapas Dinner</p> <p>• Valencian Seafood Paella</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19</p> <p>EVERY MON, WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>2488</b></p>	<p><b>130 ROMANTIC ROAD (SOUTH GERMANY) STW01</b></p> <p>• New Swan Castle • Heidelberg • Free Beer Tasting</p> <p>• Wurzburg • 12 Special German Dishes</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28</p> <p>EVERY MON, WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>3488</b></p>	<p><b>80 KOREA, JANGWONDO &amp; MT. SORAK</b></p> <p>• Sky Walk • Everland • Mt. Sorak</p> <p>• 4-5* Hotel • Special Local Food</p> <p>DEP: AUG 4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, 28</p> <p>EVERY THU, SUN</p> <p>fr s <b>1588</b></p>
<p><b>11/130 SOUTH &amp; NORTH FRANCE</b></p> <p>• Arignos • Provence • Monaco</p> <p>• Palace of the Popes • Mont St Michel</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28</p> <p>EVERY WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>2788</b></p>	<p><b>110 SCENIC SWITZERLAND - ZERMATT STEGOS</b></p> <p>• Aletsch Experience • Jungfrau • Glacier 3,000</p> <p>• Gomsgrat (3089m) • Wine Tasting</p> <p>• Panoramic Train Ride • Chillon Castle</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28</p> <p>EVERY MON, WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>3988</b></p>	<p><b>80 SHIRAKAWA &amp; WAKAYAMA PITO</b></p> <p>• Nachi Waterfall • AMA Performance</p> <p>• Pearl Island • Shirakawa</p> <p>DEP: AUG 5, 19</p> <p>SEP 2, 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28, 30</p> <p>EVERY WED, FRI</p> <p>fr s <b>3288</b></p>
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