

SINGAPORE

70%

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(From left) President Halimah Yacob with Singapore Council of Women's Organisations president Junie Foo; infectious diseases expert Leo Yee Sin, one of seven women newly inducted into the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame; and Hall of Fame resource panellist and 2014 inductee Geh Min at the Istana yesterday. PHOTO: SINGAPORE COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS



International Women's Day

Seven female trailblazers inducted into Hall of Fame

They include infectious diseases expert Leo Yee Sin and music icon Nona Asiah

Chin Soo Fang
 Senior correspondent

Infectious diseases expert Leo Yee Sin, who has been at the forefront of Singapore's battle against Covid-19, was one of seven women inducted into the Singapore

Women's Hall of Fame yesterday. Their addition means there are now 174 women honoured in the Hall of Fame, which was started in 2014 by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) to recognise women who have made an impact on Singapore through their outstanding achievements and contributions.

Among the high-fliers this year are Ms Koh Soo Boon, the first Singaporean woman to break into Silicon Valley and the founder of Singapore's first female-led venture capital firm iGlobe Partners; and Professor Lily Kong, president of Singapore Management University and the first Singaporean woman to head a Singapore university.

The other trailblazers are Malay music and film icon Nona Asiah; golfer Kee Bee Khim, who dominated women's golf in Singapore

and the region for nearly three decades; pioneering biomedical researcher Ding Jeak Ling; and pioneering social worker and family violence specialist Sudha Nair, who started the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence.

President Halimah Yacob presented the inductees with trophies at the Istana yesterday morning, which was International Women's Day.

Professor Leo, 62, who is executive director of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID),

started the first HIV centre in Singapore.

She said: "This honour is both a recognition and an appreciation of our work at NCID and the work of the healthcare sector. I hope that this recognition will serve as an encouragement for women to take up leadership roles and to acknowledge the great contributions they make in the healthcare sector."

Madam Asiah, who is in her 90s, was represented by her son, music director Indra Shahrir Ismail, at the ceremony.

He told The Straits Times: "This is really a great honour. My mother's drive and dedication not only shaped my siblings and me, but led her to contribute much to the children and community too."

His mother began singing as a young girl during the Japanese Occupation and went on to become a singer, narrator and host for Radio Malaya.

She later became a vocal coach and mentor to young talent. She was awarded the Cultural Medalion in 2016.

SCWO is the national coordinating body of women's organisations in Singapore, with over 60 member organisations representing more than 600,000 women here.

President Halimah, who is also SCWO's patron, said Singapore has made huge strides in enabling women to realise their potential.

"Though there is much to celebrate, we must not lose sight of our collective goal to build a fairer and more inclusive society, where Singaporeans have equal opportunities to achieve their fullest potential."

Madam Halimah said a White Paper on women's development will be presented in Parliament soon.

Expected to outline a range of policies and programmes designed to further gender equality, it builds on the year-long series of Conversations on Singapore Women's Development, where 6,000 women and men shared feedback and ideas on issues affecting women.

chinsf@sph.com.sg

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Effects of Myanmar coup hit women especially hard: UN

Tan Hui Yee
 Indochina Bureau Chief
 In Bangkok

Myanmar's military coup last year brought unprecedented hardship upon its population, and the women are bearing the brunt of it.

A new United Nations survey has found that women are more

likely to be the ones eating less and selling their personal assets to help their families survive.

The turmoil in the country and the Covid-19 pandemic are also forcing women to stay away from jobs and healthcare services. About 30 per cent of women do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods during the day. A higher proportion - 34.9 per cent - feel unsafe even in their own homes at night.

The survey, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN entity for gender equality, UN Women, was based on interviews with 2,200 women from November to December last year.

"The pandemic and heightened insecurity from the military takeover have gravely impacted women's finances and health," Ms Kanni Wignaraja, UNDP's regional director for Asia and the Pacific, said in a statement yesterday.

"Without investments in their safety, agency and capacities, women will be unable to take ownership of their lives and take care of their families. This will have a direct adverse effect on future generations and on the overall prosperity of Myanmar."

Over half a million people have

been forced to flee their homes since the military seized power on Feb 1 last year. Parts of Myanmar showing the stiffest resistance to junta rule have been targeted by air strikes and arson as the military inflicts collective punishment on entire communities.

The crisis has sent the economy into a nosedive. The World Bank projects that the Myanmar economy will grow 1 per cent in the year to September 2022, after contracting 18 per cent last year.

The UN survey showed how the coup and pandemic threatened progress on gender equality made during Myanmar's democratic interregnum.

While households in general have been cutting food consumption to cover other living expenses, in 34.6 per cent of the families, the women

are more likely to eat less. In six out of 10 households that took a loan, it was the women who borrowed.

"The military takeover is likely to reverse the progress made over the last decade," the report said. "The institutional and societal changes necessary to dismantle persistent gender discrimination are unlikely to take place under military rule."

Past crises have shown that increased unemployment tends to encourage people to go back to traditional gender roles, forcing women to take on more domestic and caregiving work.

To help mitigate this regression, the report suggested that development groups give direct income support to women, and support women owned and led businesses.

tanhy@sph.com.sg

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