

Chief Justice and URA chairman receive honorary degrees from NUS

They are university's highest form of recognition for outstanding individuals

Taryn Ng

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) chairman Peter Ho received the highest honours from the National University of Singapore (NUS) on July 11.

Chief Justice Menon was conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws degree, while Mr Ho was conferred an honorary Doctor of Letters.

The honorary degrees were presented by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who is also NUS chancellor, at the commencement ceremony for 468 graduates from the Faculty of Science and the Lee

Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, the first of 31 such ceremonies held by NUS at the University Cultural Centre on its Kent Ridge campus.

The honorary degrees are the university's highest form of recognition for outstanding individuals whose service has had an impact in Singapore and globally.

Chief Justice Menon first graduated from NUS with a first-class law degree in 1986 and earned a master's degree in law from Harvard Law School five years later.

He began his career in 1987 with Shook Lin & Bok, where he later became a partner at age 27 in 1990.

Two years later, he co-founded WongPartnership, before moving

on to Rajah and Tann in 1995.

In 2003, he joined international law firm Jones Day, but returned to Rajah and Tann as a managing partner in 2009.

In 2010, he became Singapore's sixth attorney-general, and was appointed as chief justice of the Supreme Court in 2012.

In a citation, Professor Andrew Simester, the dean of the NUS Faculty of Law, said that Chief Justice Menon's life is a story of leadership. As attorney-general, he improved the rules of criminal procedure, especially in the law governing disclosure of evidence to defendants, he added.

"The Chief Justice has championed the cause of making Singapore a leading provider of legal services, not just to Singaporeans, but to the world," he said.

Recalling his law career in both



Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and URA chairman Peter Ho at the University Cultural Centre on July 11. Chief Justice Menon was conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws degree, while Mr Ho was conferred an honorary Doctor of Letters.
ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

the private and public fields, Chief Justice Menon said at the ceremony: "I look back at my life in law and feel so utterly grateful that I had the tremendous privilege of finding my purpose and living it."

"The pursuit of these endeavours has made the past 12 years some of the most fulfilling of my life. So, while I am deeply humbled that the university has deemed me worthy of this honorary degree, I must say it feels very strange and somewhat unfair to be honoured simply for living my purpose as best as I could – even more so when doing that has brought me so much satisfaction and joy."

Addressing the graduands, he said he could not have imagined 40 years ago the challenges of today's graduates.

Besides new challenges such as a decline in trust in public institutions and the dramatic growth of artificial intelligence, societies also have to grapple with longstanding

issues, such as the climate crisis, he said.

"While the law and justice systems around the world will play a key role in tackling the legal dimensions of these problems, we will need our best and brightest minds across all disciplines, collectively, to develop new and innovative ways to address these challenges and their wide-ranging implications."

He advised the graduates to engage with issues and imagine solutions that will benefit Singapore and the world.

"I encourage you to dream big, to find your purpose and pursue it with courage and conviction, and to always remain firmly grounded in your values and in the values of the communities that you serve."

The URA's Mr Ho was likewise recognised for his contributions to Singapore.

He was called "a man of many hats" in a citation by Associate

Professor Suzaina Kadir, the vice-dean of academic affairs at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Mr Ho was head of the civil service from 2005 until his retirement in 2010. His 43 years in the public service included permanent secretary appointments at the Defence and Foreign Affairs ministries, and the Prime Minister's Office.

He is currently also chairman of the National Gallery Singapore and senior adviser to the Centre for Strategic Futures in the Prime Minister's Office, among other roles.

"A Renaissance man, Mr Ho has many areas of expertise, from governance, urban development and scenario planning to strategic futures. After more than four decades of stellar service in the public sector, he has left an indelible mark on Singapore's public service, policymaking and governance," the citation said.

It added that Mr Ho recognised the complexity of "wicked problems" the Government was faced with and rallied agencies to tackle national challenges together.

"As URA chairman, he has taken urban planning to new frontiers and gained international recognition for Singapore's brand of urban planning. Overall, Mr Ho had strengthened the whole-of-government approach and strategic planning capabilities within the public sector."

A total of 15,958 students will receive bachelor's or graduate degrees this year from NUS at ceremonies taking place over 11 days till July 21.

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