Engineers’ academy elects 75 as fellows

They will promote profession and help revive interest in it

SINGAPORE’S best minds in engineering and science have been elected as fellows of the prestigious Academy of Engineering.

The list of 75 engineering-trained men and women will fly the flag for the profession, and look into how to revive students’ interest in engineering.

They will also provide strategic advice and policy direction on engineering and related sectors, such as the environment and alternative sources of energy.

The group was set up in September last year, but its members – which comprises many prominent personalities from academia and the industry – was not made known until now.

Engineering has become much more interesting and innovative,” said Tan Chong-Chuan, founding executive chairman of Singapore Airlines, Capitaland’s chief executive Law Hoon Kong, Temasek Holdings chief Li Song, former EDB chairman Philip Yeo, and Teo Heng Seng chairman Koh Boon Hwee, who is former chairman of SingTel, Singapore Airlines, and DSI.

They will work with the public and private sectors to promote engineering and science. The group was set up in September last year, but its members were not made known until now.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Chuan-Soon, an electrical engineer by training, is president of the academy.

Professor Cham, who graduated from Cambridge, said: “An engineering education is valuable in that it teaches you to take a systematic approach – to put things into boxes, and solve them,” said Mr. Liew, who graduated from the University of Singapore in 1970, agreed.

He said he had a “very rewarding and enriching career as a professional practising engineer in the building industry for many years”.

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The other projects are aimed at promoting engineering education.

The academy will propose extending the role of the science centre into a science and engineering innovation centre.

Prof. Cham said there is a need to improve public awareness and understanding of what engineers do, and to help students and parents better appreciate the number of career opportunities in engineering.

Prof. Cham noted that although engineering has played a big part in the growth of Singapore, the profession is increasingly being shunned by the country’s brightest sparks.

Surveys have shown that engineering has an image problem. Young people often describe engineering as “boring” and “a hard slog with little reward.”

Although the proportion of students in engineering courses has remained stable – the universities here continue to produce about 4,500 engineering graduates annually – many of the top students opt for medicine, finance and business.

This is a big change from the 70s and 80s, when engineering drew the very best students, said Prof. Cham.

Quoting the names of several eminent fellows who went from engineering to successful careers in business and medicine, the prime minister said: “The jobs market for engineers is much more exciting.”

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, an electrical engineer by training, is the patron of the academy.

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Quoting the names of several eminent fellows who went from engineering to successful careers in the corporate world, he said: “An engineering education prepares you well for a range of careers.”

Prof. Cham’s Mr. Law, who graduated with a first class degree from the University of Cambridge in 1973, agreed.

He said he had a “very rewarding and enriching career as a professional practising engineer in the building industry for many years.”

Another fellow of the academy, Singapore Examinations Council chairman Jubbala Tubs, feels that engineering education has become much more exciting.

Universities are broadening the curriculum and pitting it with disciplines such as design thinking, biomedical sciences, law and even the humanities and social sciences, he pointed out.

“An engineering education is valuable in that it teaches you to take a systematic approach – to put things into boxes, and solve them,” said Mr. Liew, who graduated from the University of Cambridge in 1973, agreed.

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