Set up varsity grouping: DPM Tan

He says this will help all 3 universities here forge ties with foreign institutions

By Ho Ai Li

SINGAPORE universities should consider forming an association as they forge ahead to build more links with their counterparts abroad, Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan said yesterday.

The association could serve as a “focal point” for the National University of Singapore, the Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore Management University as they set about establishing more exchanges and partnerships with foreign institutions.

The same grouping could also provide a platform for the universities here to discuss issues and present common views to the Government, said Dr Tan, who oversees university education.

Speaking at a press briefing after he was presented with a distinguished alumni award from his alma mater, the University of Adelaide, he said that with Singapore universities being granted autonomy by year-end, they have come of age and are now ready to “make a mark in the world as contributors to knowledge in a worldwide league of great universities”.

NUS, Dr Tan noted, was already ranked among the top 20 universities worldwide by The Times of London, behind only Peking University and Tokyo University in Asia.

Looking ahead, Dr Tan suggested that, as a first step, the proposed local university grouping could initiate meetings with the Australian association of universities on matters such as increasing academic and student exchanges. He said Singapore students needed exposure to other cultures. “It is a fact of life today that we must expect that our students in Singapore, when they graduate, to spend a large part of their time living and working outside Singapore.”

But such links should not be limited to Australia, he said, singling out the ties NTU has forged with Indonesian institutions and NUS with Malaysian ones.

University of Adelaide chancellor John von Doussa endorsed Dr Tan’s point about the role the proposed grouping could play, adding that exchanges between universities were fundamental to research and teaching excellence.

All three local universities welcomed Dr Tan’s suggestion.

NUS said: “As the university sector evolves and matures, each of the three universities will develop distinctive characteristics and strengths.” Each, it added, could take the lead in developing partnerships in different areas.

NTU said the proposal was in line with its goal to continually expand its collaborative network with foreign universities while SMU president Howard Hunter felt the proposed group would “champion the interests of our local universities”.