Parliament told how Ngee Ann Poly students asked MP:

Why is Ngee Ann City using our name?

By Leong Ching

WHEN MP Seng Han Thong spoke to a group of Ngee Ann Polytechnic students, they asked him, "Why is Ngee Ann City using our name?"

As a director of the Ngee Ann Kongsi, which owns 75 per cent of the mall, he was taken aback.

"The name is the same," he explained, but it is the poly which has taken the name from the Kongsi.

In Parliament yesterday, the MP, a Teochew, elaborated: "'Ngee Ann' is actually an ancient word for Teochew. 'Kongsi' means 'sharing', or 'company' in Teochew. Thus, Ngee Ann Kongsi can be translated into 'a Teochew company'."

The Ngee Ann Kongsi today is a foundation which donates millions of dollars to educational causes. The bulk of its donations go, by law, to Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Yesterday, the Ngee Ann Kongsi Ordinance was amended to give the Kongsi more flexibility to donate to other educational institutions as well as charities.

MORE CAN BENEFIT

Moving the bill, Minister of State for Education Gan Kim Yong revealed that each year, the Kongsi earns $23 million from its stake in the Ngee Ann City development.

And over the years, the coffers of Ngee Ann Polytechnic's endowment had swelled to $119 million — placing it close to that of Singapore Management University.

The amendment allows the Kongsi to give 25 per cent of its earnings to Ngee Ann Poly, 40 per cent to other educational causes and 10 per cent to other charities. "So while the proportion remains at 75 per cent, the donations can benefit more types," said Mr Gan.

Mr Gan said that the Kongsi can recommend and suggest beneficiaries, and the Minister will make the final decision, taking into account the Kongsi's wishes.

He also assured Mr Seng that "due credit" will be given to the Kongsi.

Supporting the amendment yesterday were two Teochew MPs - Dr Lily Neo (Jalan Besar GRC) and Mr Seng (Yio Chu Kang).

Dr Neo, who is the Government Parliamentary Committee chairman for Education, applauded the generous spirit of the pioneering Teochew merchants.

They rode the "tail winds of progress" and had the foresight to transform a burial ground for Teochews into a thriving, vibrant commercial development.

Mr Seng, who also sits on the council of Ngee Ann Polytechnic, noted that Teochews are known for their strong support for education.

He cited business leader Li Ka Shing, a Teochew, who donated $19.5 million to Singapore Management University in 2002. This year, he donated $100 million to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Mr Seng said: "Ngee Ann Kongsi can do the same in a big way and benefit not only the Teochews but the whole population."