Tommy Koh honoured by Japan government

By LEE U-WEN

ONE of Singapore’s top ambassadors, Tommy Koh, has been conferred a prestigious honour – the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star – by the Japanese government.

The 72-year-old professor received the award at the Japanese Ambassador to Singapore’s residence at Tyersall Road during a ceremony last night.

The honour recognises Prof Koh’s contributions in promoting intellectual exchange and mutual understanding between Japan and Singapore, the Japanese Embassy said in a statement.

Prof Koh, who is ambassador-at-large with the Foreign Ministry, joins a list of just nine Singaporeans, including Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, who have received the Order of the Rising Sun since 1967. The latest recipient before Prof Koh was Spring Singapore chairman Philip Yeo in November 2007.

Prof Koh was also lauded for his work as chairman of the National Heritage Board (NHB) and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS).

IPS co-organises the Japan-Singapore symposium, which brings together experts and opinion leaders from both countries.

As NHB chairman and the first chairman of the National Arts Council, Prof Koh was praised for playing a key role in introducing and popularising Japanese culture in Singapore.

“His contributions to fostering bilateral relations extend to various fields, such as promoting Japan’s economic interest with his commitment to safe navigation in the Straits of Malacca, the lifeline of Japan’s economy, and enhancing bilateral cooperation with his dedication towards policy initiatives for the resolution of Asia-Pacific water issues,” said the Japanese Embassy.

Also sending congratulatory messages to Prof Koh were Japan’s Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and former Prime Minister Yoshibo Mori.

The Order of the Rising Sun was created in April 1875 as the first national decoration awarded by the Japanese government. The badge features rays from the rising sun.

It is the second most prestigious Japanese decoration after the Order of the Chrysanthemum. The latter, however, is generally awarded only to politicians, military leaders or royalty.