

Dr Tony Tan: We will never forget Tan Chin Tuan's generosity and kindness to us

Report by Chen Jinbo

Hundreds of grieving friends and relatives yesterday bade farewell to former OCBC chairman Tan Chin Tuan as he made his final earthly journey to the Mandai Crematorium.

The funeral car departed Mr Tan's home in Grange Road for the Mandai Crematorium, where more than 40 students from Anglo Chinese Junior College and ACS (Barker Road) awaited its arrival along the driveway, their heads solemnly bowed.

Thereafter, the mourners proceeded to Hall 4 for the last service. The ceremony was simple yet solemn. Sorrow filled the air; some sobbed, others' eyes were red with tears.

Mr Tan's nephew, former deputy prime minister Dr Tony Tan, and granddaughter, Ms Chew Gek Khim, delivered their eulogies. Dr Tan once choked on his tears as he recalled parts of his uncle's life. Likewise, Ms Chew was teary when she delivered her eulogy.

In his eulogy, Dr Tan recalled that Mr Tan was not just a businessman; he was also a philanthropist. He donated generously to charitable organizations and was an active supporter of education. The beneficiaries included primary and secondary schools, polytechnics, the National University of Singapore, and the Nanyang Technological University. His alma mater, the Anglo Chinese School, especially benefited from his generosity.

Mr Tan did not wait to be asked for help, but took the initiative to find out from those in trouble how he could help them. He not only offered financial help, but also gave spiritual support and guidance.

He said, "All of us who have had the benefit of knowing him will not forget his generosity and kindness to us."

Dr Tan added that his father had passed away at a relatively young age in 1962 and Mr Tan took on the role of a father figure to him and his family. He benefited tremendously from Mr Tan's spiritual advice and guidance.

Dr Tan recalled the time back in 1995, when former prime minister Goh Chok Tong requested him to rejoin the cabinet as deputy prime minister and defence minister. Dr Tan thought about it for half a year and eventually decided that he would serve the nation. Before announcing his decision to the public, he sought Mr Tan's advice.

He recalled Mr Tan's firm tone after he told him of his decision, "You have made the right decision. The security of our country must take priority over all other matters." Dr Tan was at that time the chairman of OCBC.

Mr Tan's granddaughter said that those who had dealt or worked with him knew how meticulous he was. No matter what one did, he would always try to improve on it. It was not because he was not satisfied with the work; instead, it stemmed from his innate desire to do better.

She added that Mr Tan wanted the younger generations to cultivate a more generous and forgiving spirit. He never reproached them, but tried to teach through example.

Mr Tan Chin Tuan passed away on the 14th November [sic] at the age of 98. A pioneer of OCBC, he was also its honorary life president. He became unwell on 6th November and was warded into the intensive care unit of the Singapore General Hospital the following day. He regained consciousness last Friday and asked to be discharged from the hospital. Back home, he appeared relaxed, but fell unconscious again on Sunday (13th November) and never woke up.