Family members came to celebrate with Daim during the first session of the convocation ceremony. Photos: Universiti Malaya

Dr Daim, flanked by Royal Education Award recipients Muhammad Madhi and Lau.

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Determined Daim's decade-long doctorate

TUN Dr Daim Zainuddin is the definition of determination.

The 81-year-old great grandfather and former finance minister has finally earned his doctorate – after 11 years of battling poor health and squeezing time out of his busy schedule.

During the journey, which he started in 2008, Daim took a five-year break from his research, after falling ill.

"When I started, I wasn't sick. I was strong. Now I'm walking with a cane," he said, chuckling softly.

The Kedahan, and lawyer by training, steered Malaysia through recessions and economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s.

He also chaired the Council of Eminent Persons, which was set up on a 100-day tenure to advise Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad on socio-economic and financial matters after Pakatan Harapan swept into power.

Daim, who already has honorary doctorates from Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Utara Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia, said he decided to pursue his PhD at Universiti Malaya's (UM) Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in 2008 – after receiving many invitations to speak.

"Before giving your views or analysis, you must have in-depth knowledge (of the topic).

"To give speeches, you must read and do research.

"The best place to do that is at university," he said, adding that reading and acquiring knowledge must be a life-long quest for everyone, no matter how old you are.

His thesis title was 'The Implementation of The New Economic Policy (NEP): Success and Failure, 1970 – 2008'.

The NEP was introduced by second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak in 1971 after the racial riots of May 13, 1969.

"There were a lot of successes but there were also failures.

"The most important thing is to learn so we don't repeat those failures and where there are successes, we must take advantage of them.

"My thesis puts on record what we have achieved and what we have failed to achieve.

"This should be a lesson for policy implementation agencies so that they don't make the same mistakes."

Declining to comment on the Budget 2020 because he wanted to "enjoy and celebrate this day", Daim was accompanied by his family.

Daim's scroll was presented by Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Muizzuddin Shah, who is also UM Chancellor at the varsity's 59th convocation ceremony on Oct 12.

A total of 6,562 students – 579 of whom were international students from 50 countries – graduated from the country's top varsity.

The majority, or 2,965, graduated with a bachelor's degree while 2,026 received their masters. There were 477 doctorate holders and 1,094 diploma recipients.

Penangite Muhammad Madhi Mohd Budiman, 25, and Perakian Lau Win Yei, 23, received the Royal Education Award.

Muhammad Madhi, who is already pursuing his masters, said it's important for students to know their purpose because that's what drives achievement.

"I learned that lesson the expensive and hard way after scoring only two As out of 11 subjects in my SPM," he said, adding that his goal is to see how social finance, an approach to managing money which delivers a social dividend and an economic return, can benefit the community.

Lau, who is working in the construction industry, plans to further her studies in law or IT.

Interest, passion and an action plan, are crucial to success, she said.

"You always have to fight for opportunities. They don't just come to you. Never let people tell you that you can't do something. Prove them wrong."

During the ceremony, the first woman to head a public university, Tan Sri Rafiah Salim, was conferred the honorary Doctor of Laws.

Prof Dr Phang Siew Moi, Prof Dr Mohd Ali Hashim and Prof Datuk Dr Tan Chong Tin received the title Emeritus Professor.

In his speech, Sultan Nazrin said in the last 58 years, the number of UM graduates had increased by almost 1,300%.

There are 20 public universities and 467 private institutions of higher learning nationwide. Of the 1.3 million youths in higher education, over 500,000 are in public institutions.

In the last four decades, Malaysians aged between 17 and 23 in higher education increased from 14% to 44%.

It's estimated that public varsities – most of which were set up after 1990 – have produced some three million graduates in the last 30 years, he said.

This is encouraging for our country's education and an achievement that the world may have yet to see, he said, adding that Malaysia may have the highest number of graduates per capita in Asia, if not the world.

Varsities, however, should not just look at churning out graduates. These institutions have a responsibility to build the character of graduates and to instil in them inner strength, good values, ethics, morality, accountability and integrity, as these prepare them to face real world challenges.

The higher your qualification, the greater the responsibility, he said.

"To give responsibility to someone who does not have, nor appreciates the value of trust, is like leaving wolves to guard your sheep."

From 2014 to June 2019, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission statistics show that more than half of 4,860 individuals arrested for corruption, are youngsters below 40.

"The image of a university is not merely coloured by the number and achievement of its graduates," he said, adding that if many of the graduates produced end up being charged in court or in jail, it would reflect negatively on the institution.

He reminded graduates that they are responsible and accountable not only to their teachers, lecturers, family and themselves.

"The real test is in fulfilling duties entrusted upon you.

"The values you hold will be that moral compass that determines whether you become an asset or a liability to the country."

IIUM students get scholarships

TWENTY International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students received scholarships from AmBank Group chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim.

The Azman Hashim-IIUM Ummatic Scholarship recipients comprising 15 Malaysian and five international students, were selected from various faculties, ranging from Law, Economics and Management Sciences, Information and Communication Technology as well as Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, after a stringent screening process.

The scholarship provides each recipient with a monthly allowance of RM600, annual book allowance of RM500 and a notebook worth RM2,500 for their use throughout the four years of their undergraduate studies.

In addition, the scholarship also covers the tuition and hostel fees for each recipient.

To date, there have been 60 recipients, of which 35 have graduated.

"I would like to congratulate all of the recipients and it gives me great pleasure to present this scholarship to them.

"It is my hope that this scholarship will serve as a motivation for them to achieve greater excellence in their studies," said Azman.

The scholarship, he added, is made possible through an innovative concept of the IIUM Perpetual Endowment Property Fund, which provides a sustainable method to generate scholarship funds for poor students who excel in their studies.

IIUM president Datuk Dr Mohd Daud Bakar and rector Emeritus Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak were also present.

Mohd Daud in his speech thanked Azman for the generous contribution to the programme, which has benefitted IIUM's students.

The scholarship award, which was first initiated in 2012, is funded by the net rental proceeds from the Azman Hashim Complex, located at the main IIUM Gombak campus.

The development of the building was sponsored by Yayasan Azman Hashim in 2008 and is managed by the IIUM Endowment Fund along the principles of endowment where only the proceeds from the rental income is channeled into the scholarship.

(From fourth right, seated) Azman, Mohd Daud and Dzulkifli with the scholarship recipients at Bangunan AmBank Group.