

Carving out a role in public service

This MHA scholar discovers that every front-line operation is built on extensive research behind the scenes

Small, discreet and brightly coloured, the lipstick-sized Kpods give little hint of danger. Yet the effects of the etomidate-laced vape can unfold within a few minutes, leaving users disoriented, weak and unable to control their muscles.

Understanding the scale of this emerging threat to Singapore was the focus of Sheanna-Grace Tan's work during her recent scholars' vacation attachment internship with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

The MHA Civilian Generalist scholar was attached to the agency's policy development division from June to August 2025. She was tasked to research the risks posed by Kpods and how their abuse takes hold, particularly among young people.

Sheanna sifted through piles of international research papers and open-source information, helping the division piece together patterns across countries – from production methods to how sellers package and market new variants.

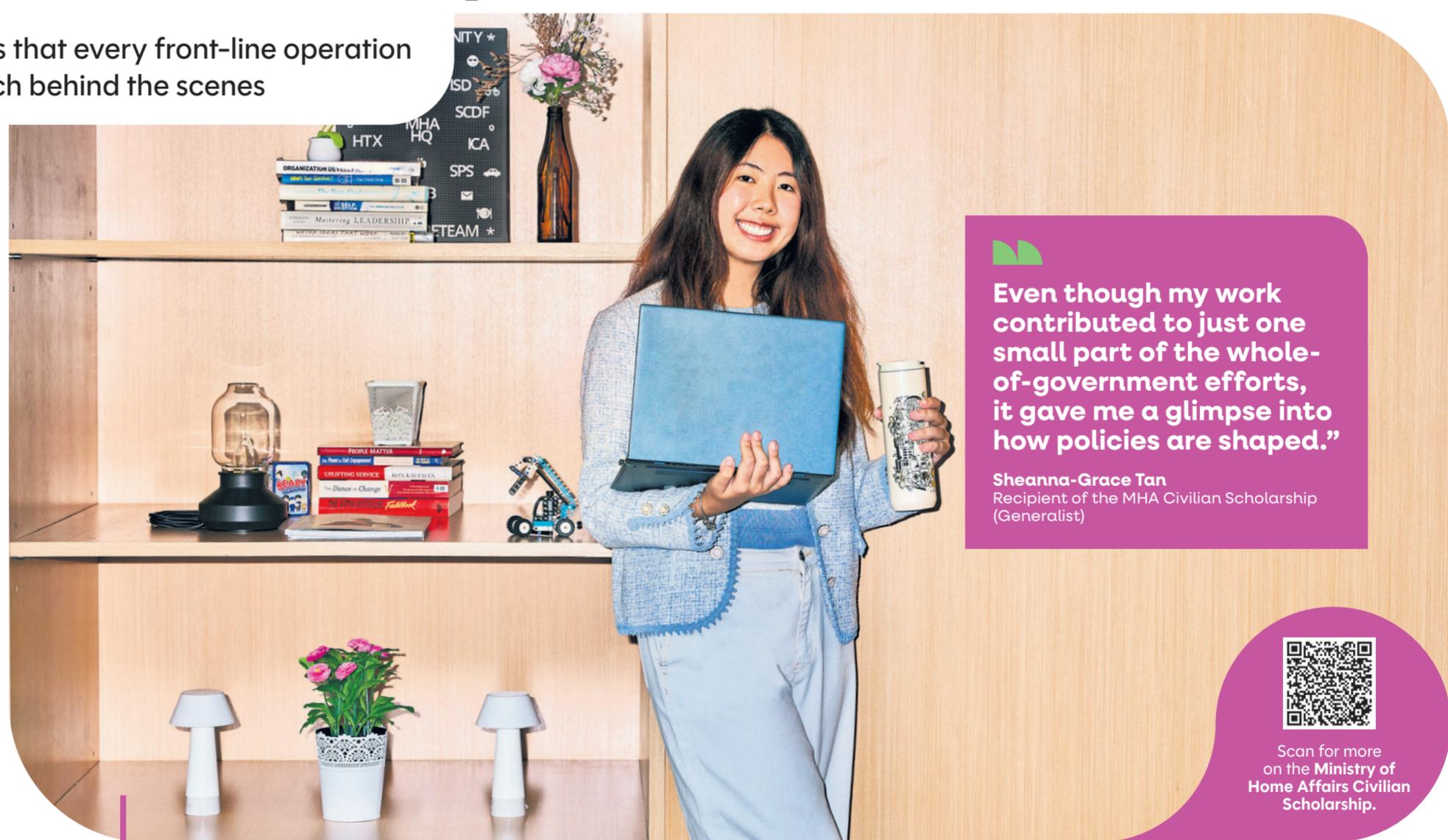
The aim was to give government policymakers a clearer picture of how new products and supply methods emerged, even as patterns of drug abuse evolved.

"It was an incredibly exciting experience because it happened at a time when the issue was gaining national attention," says the 22-year-old.

"Even though my work contributed to just one small part of the whole-of-government efforts, it gave me a glimpse into how policies are shaped."

Beyond research, the vacation attachment internship showed Sheanna how policy teams work with front-line officers to review case patterns and understand enforcement constraints to refine policy recommendations.

She also saw how research underpins discussions across MHA



Currently pursuing studies in psychology with a minor in forensic science at the National University of Singapore, Sheanna-Grace Tan will join MHA as a Civilian Generalist officer when she graduates. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

and other agencies, helping to frame issues clearly and bring different perspectives into the same conversations.

Growing up, Sheanna heard about the Home Team's role in protecting people through her father's work with the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB). He has worked there for over 30 years. Through him, she came to understand the importance of the Home Team's mission, and how the safety Singaporeans enjoy is built on years of dedication by the officers working at the front lines and behind the scenes.

Her father's passion for his work at CNB left a strong impression on

her. It also made her think about joining the public service.

"My dad showed me how much thought and discipline goes into the work that most people never see," she says.

Her own path became clearer when she took up a minor in forensic science at the National University of Singapore.

Through her classes and interactions with professors and Home Team officers involved in her coursework, she found herself drawn to issues related to law, safety and security, prompting her to apply for the MHA Civilian Scholarship (Generalist).

When she joins the ministry as

a Civilian Generalist officer upon graduation, she will have the opportunity – through structured rotations – to take up roles across MHA headquarters and 10 Home Team agencies, as well as across 12 domain areas ranging from policy and international relations to communications, human resources and finance.

In addition to the vacation attachment internship, Sheanna also attended the week-long Home Team Scholars Vacation Programme, curated specially for MHA scholars.

Through this, she was not only exposed to different Home Team agencies and functions but

also had the opportunity to build connections with officers and fellow scholars in the process.

What struck her most was the coordination required to stress-test, refine and put policies into practice.

"Because life in Singapore feels so safe and seamless, it is easy to forget the amount of work happening in the background," she says.

This realisation has shaped how she views her own aspirations.

"My goal has always been simple: to do good, and to grow into the best version of myself. This scholarship has helped to provide clearer direction towards achieving that goal," she says.



Scan for more on the Ministry of Home Affairs Civilian Scholarship.

How CID officer built her career by staying authentic

From learning to ride a motorbike to leading crime scenes as a rookie – and now shaping policy – this scholar's path through the SPF has been defined by unexpected challenges and growth



othing in police training prepares you for the first time you come face to face with death. For Superintendent of Police (Supt) Natalie Yap, that moment arrived earlier than expected, when she was just 25 years old.

Fresh out of training as an Investigation Officer (IO) more than a decade ago, she stepped into a dim Housing and Development Board bedroom on her very first case involving a death – and froze. "It was my first time seeing a dead body, in a state of unnatural death," she recalls.

Grieving family members looked to her for answers while other uniformed officers waited for instructions. In that instant, she realised the uniform was not just a badge of authority; it was a big responsibility she had to rise to.

Supt Yap's training took over: offering direction to her team, reassuring the family, handling the body with respect and processing the scene.

"You are a leader, no matter your rank or experience. People look to you because you are a Police officer," says the 35-year-old, who now heads the Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) Investigation Policy Branch.

Awarded the Local Merit Scholarship under the Ministry of Home Affairs Uniformed Scholarship (SPF) in 2009, Supt Yap pursued a double degree at the National University of Singapore, graduating with a bachelor of laws and a master's in public policy.

Those years equipped her with a deep understanding of how laws and policies are made, and how they shape the work of Singapore's Home Team agencies.

A "girl's girl" in a gritty world
A self-professed "girl's girl", Supt Yap is as comfortable in a pink off-shoulder blouse and soft curls as she is in a crisp Police bush jacket and with her hair neatly pinned up.

She laughs at the memory of her first day at Senior Officer Basic Course training – rolling a full suitcase into camp while everyone else carried

► Equipped with operational knowledge and front-line experience, Supt Natalie Yap uses her expertise to develop meaningful policies as Head of the Investigation Policy Branch at the Criminal Investigation Department.
PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

duffel bags. Inside were skincare products, shower gel and other beauty essentials.

"I don't think my instructors had ever seen someone drag in a piece of luggage," she says.

Reality set in quickly. From marching drills and regimented routines to catered meals at the mess hall, those months stripped away comforts she was accustomed to. It was a culture shock for her initially.

The adjustments did not stop when she completed her training. During her second foundational posting as a Patrol Unit Team Leader with the Traffic Police, Supt Yap faced another unexpected challenge: learning to ride a motorbike.

"Back then, I couldn't even ride a bicycle," she says. "Now I can do both."

From front line to global policy

Currently 12 years into her career with the SPF, Supt Yap has already journeyed farther than she had ever imagined.

One of her most formative experiences came in November 2021, when she spent a year in Vienna on attachment at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – her first overseas stint with the SPF.

"I had the opportunity to work with ambassadors, diplomats and multinational colleagues," she says.

"It also exposed me to global crime and drug issues, and allowed me to appreciate how these affect policymaking at home."



“Policing gives me the space to be myself. I can dress up for work without affecting how the work is done, and I still get to take on challenging work, like charting the policy path.”

SUPT NATALIE YAP
Recipient of the Local Merit Scholarship under the Ministry of Home Affairs Uniformed Scholarship (SPF)



LEARNING GROUND

Defining moments in the Singapore Police Force that shaped Supt Natalie Yap's leadership journey



2014

A trip to Nepal during her Senior Officer Basic Course training exposed Supt Yap to on-the-ground experiences and life beyond her comfort zone.

2016



2021

During a year-long attachment in Vienna with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Supt Yap worked alongside diplomats and multinational colleagues.

2022



2025

Today, Supt Yap leads CID's Investigation Policy Branch. She shapes investigative policies that streamline processes and support front-line Police officers.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SUPT NATALIE YAP & USE YOUR ROADSIDE FACEBOOK

About the Singapore Police Force Scholarship

► The Singapore Police Force Scholarship is one of the most prestigious scholarships offered by the Public Service Commission (PSC) to candidates who demonstrate strong leadership qualities and have a strong interest in policing work. Scholars will continue their learning journeys at world-renowned universities that provide intellectually, socially and personally enriching programmes. Upon graduation, scholars will be involved in shaping policies that address issues on public law and order, as well as play an integral role in protecting the country and its communities.



Scan for more on the SPF scholarship.



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Local Merit Scholarship
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Fast-tracking her career in sustainability

While pursuing a double degree, this NTU scholar also gets to meet top business leaders and will spend a year overseas at a prestigious university

Climate action, for Rajvi Sapre, began with a hands-on sustainability project that turned food waste into compost. She was 17 then, serving as vice-president of the Eco-Sustainability Leadership Academy at River Valley High School (Junior College).

That experience taught her that responsibility begins with action, and sparked broader questions about how sustainability efforts can scale beyond small, local initiatives.

"Sustainability was something our generation always talked about, at school and with friends," says Rajvi, now 19.

When considering her next steps after completing her A levels, Rajvi initially thought about studying environmental science.

However, conversations with her father opened her eyes to how businesses, with their vast reach and resources, can be powerful drivers of large-scale social and environmental change.

That perspective nudged her towards a double degree. Rajvi decided to pursue accountancy, and data science and artificial intelligence at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

Accountancy, she explains, provides a clear window into how businesses operate, make decisions and allocate resources.

Meanwhile, data science and artificial intelligence are increasingly critical in a world that is driven by scale, complexity and vast amounts of data.

"Together, these skills will allow me to understand how decisions are made, and how sustainability can be embedded into them in an impactful way," she says.

Beyond academic studies, Rajvi also wanted global exposure, real-world perspectives and strong networks.

Her goals drew her to the Nanyang Business School (NBS) Global Leaders programme (NGL), a signature scholars' programme under the NTU Honours College. It is available to students enrolled in a four-year degree course at NBS.

Rajvi is among the inaugural group of 35 students in the newly introduced programme.

"I chose NGL because it allows me to differentiate myself in the job market," she says.

According to NGL's programme director Matthew Dearth, the scholarship is tailored for high-achievers looking for on-the-job training, customised mentoring and experiences that will prepare them to navigate a fast-changing global business landscape.

Preparing for a career

Key to the scholarship are opportunities to build relevant skills, including a one-year overseas immersion at a leading business school in the United States such as the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.

Scholars will also receive mentorship from senior business leaders, participate in industry workshops, engage in networking sessions and work on community impact projects.

"Being mentored by top business leaders while getting trained in leadership skills can help me develop the know-how needed to thrive in today's business world," says the NTU scholar.

Rajvi has just completed her first semester at NTU. As part of the curriculum, she and her coursemates have visited the Bank of Singapore to learn more about wealth management.

Explains Dr Dearth: "By stepping beyond the classroom into immersive, real-world experiences, our students learn to think critically, lead with a global perspective and create meaningful impact."

Adds Rajvi: "Our professor told us that some of the skills we will learn are things that senior executives wished they knew at the start of their careers."

Rajvi is looking forward to continue tapping into the programme's mentorship and overseas opportunities to better understand how sustainability plays out across industries, markets and cultural contexts.

In her second year, she and other scholars will embark on a one-week overseas trip to either China, India or a South-east Asian country to participate in a sustainability project.

"It is a chance for me to learn how corporate sustainability actually works on the ground and to collaborate with people from different backgrounds, so I am really excited about it," she says.

First-year NTU undergraduate Rajvi Sapre is eager to gain real-world exposure through the NBS Global Leaders programme.
PHOTO: SPH MEDIA



Being mentored by top business leaders while getting trained in leadership and communication skills can help me develop the know-how needed to thrive in today's business world."

Rajvi Sapre
Scholar in the NBS Global Leaders programme



Scan for more on the NBS Global Leaders programme.

Set your future in motion with a scholarship that fits you

Whether you are excelling in your studies or pursuing a passion, these scholarships can help you move forward. Start here and take the next step with confidence



Immigration & Checkpoints Authority

Under the Ministry of Home Affairs Uniformed Scholarship with Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA), you will have the opportunity to play a crucial role in Singapore's home-front security.

Keeping Singapore's borders safe and secure is your top priority, with many exciting roles in checkpoint clearance, intelligence, enforcement, immigration and national registration available.

As an ICA scholar, you are primed for key leadership positions through a structured programme of command and staff appointments that empower you to discover and develop your potential.

Not only will you be equipped with holistic skills to prepare for your future career in ICA's fast-paced and dynamic environment, you will also be exposed to a diverse range of functions in the immigration, enforcement and intelligence fields.



Ministry of Home Affairs

A Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Scholarship stands apart. More than a study award, it's a journey.

MHA, commonly known as the Home Team, oversees Singapore's home-front and internal security. It comprises the Ministry Headquarters and 10 agencies with a common mission – to safeguard the nation.

An MHA Scholarship will open doors to uniformed and civilian careers in the Home Team. You will have the freedom to explore diverse academic interests in university while gaining valuable early exposure and mentorship to support your growth. Upon your graduation, you will become a Home Team officer, building a career where you will grow, make a difference and be part of something bigger.



Nanyang Technological University

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) offers a global education that helps students meet the challenges shaping tomorrow's world.

Choose from a wide range of signature programmes and scholarships, including the NBS Global Leaders Programme, Turing AI Scholars Programme, Renaissance Engineering Programme, CN Yang Scholars Programme, NTU-University Scholars Programme, NTU-NIE Teaching Scholars Programme, LKCMedicine Scholarship and Nanyang Global Scholarship.

High achievers may also be selected for the prestigious NTU President Award, which provides personalised mentorship, talent development opportunities and a fully subsidised four-year hall stay.

Take your learning beyond borders and realise your potential with a scholarship designed for you.



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As an SPFS scholar, you will continue your learning journey at a world-renowned university that provides intellectually, socially and personally enriching programmes.

Afterwards, you will be involved in shaping policies to address issues on public law and order and play an integral role as a guardian of homeland security.

You will also acquire investigation acumen and policy conceptualisation skills as well as command and leadership abilities.



SPH Media

Your journey into the media industry starts here. SPH Media Journalism Scholarships provide a head start in developing your craft, enabling you to tell meaningful stories and create impactful content that reflects the heart of communities. You will work side by side with experienced journalists and editors, learning what it takes to craft compelling print features, produce multimedia content and engage audiences in thoughtful, innovative ways. As Singapore's trusted news organisation, SPH Media provides a strong foundation in journalism, with immersive internships, guided mentorship and diverse pathways to begin a meaningful career in the media industry.



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'Behind the numbers is always a human story'

This SPH Media scholar learnt that every business decision affects real people – and journalism pushes the formerly shy student to tell their stories with confidence

The restaurant-bar was supposed to be on its last legs. Yet when the young reporter walked into Wala Wala Cafe Bar a week after breaking the story about its impending closure, she found it buzzing.

The Holland Village establishment was packed with both regular customers and patrons who had read about the closure.

For The Business Times

reporter Chong Xin Wei, the turnout underscored how journalism puts a spotlight on issues that affect the wider community.

"The story brought attention to the struggles of Wala Wala and other food and beverage establishments here," says the 24-year-old who covers the property beat.

Acting on a tip-off, she got in touch with Wala Wala owner Stanley Yeo.

He confirmed his plan to shut the nightspot after more than 30 years, citing rising rent and dwindling footfall.

Her exclusive story that was published in June 2025 set off an unexpected outpouring of support that eventually reversed Wala Wala's fortunes.

In August, Wala Wala announced on Instagram that its landlord had "kindly offered revised terms that make it feasible for us to stay".



As a journalist at The Business Times, Chong Xin Wei's job includes analysing facts and figures and interviewing top-level business executives. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

 It is a career for people who are curious about the world... You have to want to stick your nose in everybody's business.

Chong Xin Wei
Recipient of the SPH Media Journalism Scholarship

More than just numbers

That was the kind of impact SPH Media scholar Xin Wei never imagined when she first considered business journalism as a career.

"I thought business news would be dry and number-oriented," she admits.

In primary school, she was introduced to the basics of broadcast journalism, including hosting and interviewing, as part of a talent development programme.

However, it was only while awaiting university entrance that her interest in journalism was sparked during a six-month contract job as an administrative assistant with The Straits Times Schools team in 2020.

Having experienced the newsroom first-hand, she discovered an affinity with the fast-paced environment and thought journalism was a career she could pursue.

The experience inspired her to apply to the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) after her A-level results were released.

At NTU, she joined the student-run news publication Soapbox SG and eventually applied for the SPH Media Journalism Scholarship, which she was awarded in 2022.

The scholarship provided Xin Wei with more than just funding; it gave her a road map. Through structured internships, she explored different beats and story formats – from daily news to long-form features.

"That exposure was crucial in shaping the path I am on now," she says.

Xin Wei pivoted to business journalism after a seven-month-long internship at The Business Times in 2023.

"What is behind the numbers is always a human story," she says.

"A rent increase is a hard number, but behind those numbers are business owners who have to close shop and customers who now have to seek alternatives."

Journalism also pushed her beyond her comfort zone and helped the soft-spoken and shy Xin Wei to develop self-confidence.

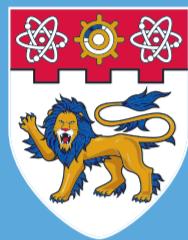
Besides delving into facts and figures, her job includes interviewing C-suite executives who are usually formidable figures in their fields and much older than her.

"Some anxiety is bound to follow me but I always try to remember that no one is going to judge you," she says.

When researching her stories, Xin Wei not only asks questions and clarifies concepts, but also believes the defining trait of a journalist is curiosity, or being "kay-poh" (nosy).

"It is a career for people who are curious about the world, who enjoy connecting with different people and hearing their perspectives," she says.

"You have to want to stick your nose in everybody's business."



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Under the CN Yang Scholars Programme (CNYSP), Jun Yan studied at top universities, including Harvard and Edinburgh, and interned with biopharmaceutical leader AstraZeneca, where he deepened his passion for medical sciences.

Take your learning beyond borders, like NTU-University Scholars Programme (NTU-USP) student Nurin, whose research on cultural diversity led her to China, and Rajvi, who will embark on a year-long immersion at a leading university such as UC Berkeley through the NBS Global Leaders Programme (NGL).

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How front-line experience prepares her for policy work

Entrusted with responsibility early in her career, this MHA Uniformed Scholarship holder has learnt that leadership is less about rank and more about making sound decisions when it counts

Being a newly minted Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officer, Lee Wei Ting's first real test of leadership did not come in a briefing room. It happened on a crowded afternoon at Woodlands Checkpoint when a woman suddenly collapsed in the middle of the bus hall. Wei Ting was the team leader overseeing the bus zone.

The then-23-year-old felt the weight of dozens of officers waiting for instructions, hundreds of travellers watching, and seconds slipping away.

Closing a checkpoint cluster was not a small decision. But hesitation, she knew, would be far worse. She closed a few lanes so officers could move in to administer first aid with the portable automated external defibrillator.

"I thought I would struggle under pressure," recalls Wei Ting, now 26. "But when it happened, I knew I had to make the call – and stand by it."

"Our job is to protect lives as part of our duty to secure the borders. Responding to incidents is a part of our duty too."

Before stepping into her first posting as a group leader at Woodlands Command, Wei Ting had already made a deliberate choice about the kind of career she wanted.

A law graduate from the National University of Singapore who had received the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) Uniformed Scholarship, she joined ICA in 2022 as an immigration officer, drawn by the agency's blend of service, security and law enforcement.

"I grew up loving mystery and crime stories," she says.

"For my career, I wanted to do something meaningful – something that would let me contribute to the community."

Empowered to take charge

That motivation led her to ICA where she spent six months after graduation completing the ICA Basic Course (Inspector) at the Home Team Academy.

The training provided essential foundations, covering everything from immigration law to front-line and first-responder duties, including firearms handling and contraband detection.

Yet, she soon realised that applying these lessons in real-world situations was where the learning deepened.

"Training will prepare you for the basics," she says. "But once you are at the checkpoint, you are learning while leading."

In her early days at Woodlands Checkpoint, Wei Ting was responsible for managing a team while having to familiarise herself with the physical layout and operational flow of one of the world's busiest land borders.

She was called on to resolve incidents that could quickly spiral – from vehicle accidents blocking lanes and bus breakdowns paralysing access points to smuggling attempts requiring swift, coordinated action.

▶ Senior executive Lee Wei Ting's experience in safeguarding Singapore's borders has helped her to develop considered policies that impact the work of Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officers. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA



▲ Through various team-bonding activities, Wei Ting (second from left) has developed stronger camaraderie with her colleagues at Woodlands Checkpoint as well as her fellow officers in the organisation.

At ICA, officers like Wei Ting (centre) have a multifaceted role, from border security and law enforcement to helping the public with immigration issues. PHOTOS: ICA

"These incidents have the potential to escalate quickly into a major crisis and affect checkpoint operations and border safety, so keeping such situations under control is critically important," she says.

What struck her most was the level of trust ICA had placed in her when she first started out as a young officer.

"Even if we weren't familiar with a task, we were never left alone," she says.

"There was always someone to turn to – another officer, a supervisor – to consult with and receive guidance from," she says. "I have learnt so much on the job and I am proud of myself for being able to take charge and manage the challenges that I didn't think I could."

Exerting influence from the top

In March 2025, Wei Ting moved from Woodlands Command into a policymaking role as a senior



executive in the immigration policy and operations branch under ICA's policy and development division.

The move took her from split-second decisions on the ground to long-horizon thinking at the policy-development table.

"At the checkpoint, you are making decisions in seconds," she says. "Now, I look at the history and rationale behind policies, and how changes might shape operations and affect people over time."

Working alongside officers from MHA and other government agencies, she supports the administration and review of population-related policies – drawing on her operational experience in a very different way.

"I was taken out of front-line operations into a world that looks at the whole-of-government perspective," she says.

The confidence she developed on the ground carried through into her current role, where leadership looks less like issuing instructions and more like managing perspectives.

Her work includes reviewing a portfolio of policies, coordinating stakeholders and contributing to shared goals from various angles. She is not only well trained in border security operations but also influencing policies that support national interests.

That breadth of experience, she believes, is what sets ICA apart.

"We are not just enforcing the law, we serve the public too – issuing identity cards and passports to citizens, facilitating visas and long-term visit passes for people around the world – while safeguarding border security," says Wei Ting.

"This balance of service, security and policy is something I would not have experienced if I had chosen to go down a typical corporate route career-wise."

BEYOND THE CHECKPOINT

Lee Wei Ting shares moments from the role of an ICA officer that most do not see

1

Work that stays invisible

"ICA does interesting things that people would not normally think about because of how smooth the process is at the borders. Besides securing and safeguarding Singapore's borders, officers also work to ensure the country remains connected to the rest of the world."

2

Designing safer, smarter flows

"I once worked on revamping the bus queuing system at Woodlands Checkpoint's departure hall. By redesigning signages to 'signal' where buses were, we guided travellers into clearer queues, reducing chokepoints and making movement safer inside the checkpoint."

3

When saying 'no' matters

"As an enforcement agency, ICA refuses entry to individuals who do not meet entry requirements, even after understanding their difficulties. It can be disheartening, but I remind myself that I'm still an officer who has to uphold my duties and professional standards."



PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

"We are not just enforcing the law, we serve the public too... while safeguarding identification and border security."

LEE WEI TING
Recipient of the MHA Uniformed Scholarship (ICA)



Scan for more on the Ministry of Home Affairs Uniformed Scholarship (ICA).



▲ Wei Ting (centre) uses her front-line experience to guide her thought process when she crafts and works on policies. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA

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About the MHA Uniformed Scholarship

▶ Depending on your interests and aspirations, this scholarship will allow you to kick-start your leadership journey as a uniformed officer in one of five Home Team departments: Singapore Police Force (SPF), Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), Singapore Prison Service (SPS) and Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB), or as a paramedic with SCDF.

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Deepanraj Ganesan
Journalist
at The Straits Times



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