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Singapore Management University (SMU) president Lily Kong and Chief of Defence Force Melvyn Ong at the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the SMU Warriors Scholarship. The signing was witnessed by Mindef's deputy secretary (Admin) Elaine Ng and SMU Provost Professor Timothy Clark. ST PHOTO: KELLY HUI

SINGAPORE - Master Warrant Officer Chia Mui Sowe currently trains military recruits but come next year, he will be prepared for a job in corporate communications.

The officer commanding at Basic Military School 2 has completed a 15-month Master of Science in Communication Management programme he took up in 2018 under the Singapore Management University (SMU) Warriors Scholarship.

He is the first and only warrant officer among the 56 people who have received the scholarship since its inception in 2014.

The bond-free scholarship, given to military personnel who have been in service for at least 10 years, aims to help retiring servicemen transition into their next career.

The retirement age for Singapore Armed Forces officers is 50. It is 55 for warrant officers.

"When the career transition advisers told me that I could be the first warrant officer to take this scholarship, that motivated me to go ahead," MWO Chia, 54, told The Straits Times on Thursday (Jan 9). He added that he hoped more warrant officers will follow in his footsteps.

"After taking the master's, I realised that communications is not easy - the way you have to craft the message for different audiences, and answering to different stakeholders," he said.

On Thursday, SMU and the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) renewed the scholarship programme to co-sponsor up to 30 postgraduate scholarships at an estimated cost of \$1.5 million over the next four years.

This is the second renewal of the agreement since it was first inked in 2014. The last renewal was in 2017.

The signatories at SMU on Thursday were SMU president, Professor Lily Kong, and Chief of Defence Force, Lieutenant-General Melvyn Ong.

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Prof Kong said at the event that Mindef personnel bring with them an "enriching plethora of viewpoints, practical experience and diversity to the postgraduate learning experience".

She noted that the scholarship recipients continue to contribute to society in various domains, such as education, finance, entrepreneurship and social work.

Lt-Gen Ong said that the scholarship is a recognition of servicemen's contribution to the defence of the nation, and an affirmation of their knowledge, skills and experiences acquired over a military career.

"This continued partnership with SMU represents Mindef's and the SAF's commitment to equip retiring service personnel with market-relevant knowledge and skills, to help them successfully transition to a second career," he added.

The scholarship covers 15 postgraduate programmes at the university, such as a Master of Science in Economics and a Juris Doctor programme that leads to a first degree in law.

Applicants must meet SMU admission requirements, such as the Graduate Management Admission Test or its equivalent.

Another recipient is Colonel (Retired) Lai Hing Nam, 53, who took a Master of Science in Wealth Management in 2016.

After his retirement in August 2016, he took up his current role as director of operations at Cubic Technologies, which provides training services and support for the Singapore Army.

He said: "In the SAF, the concern was more about training, and less about cost and profitability.

"Now on the commercial side, the focus is more about how to deliver the best value to the customer... So the master's gave me this important perspective."