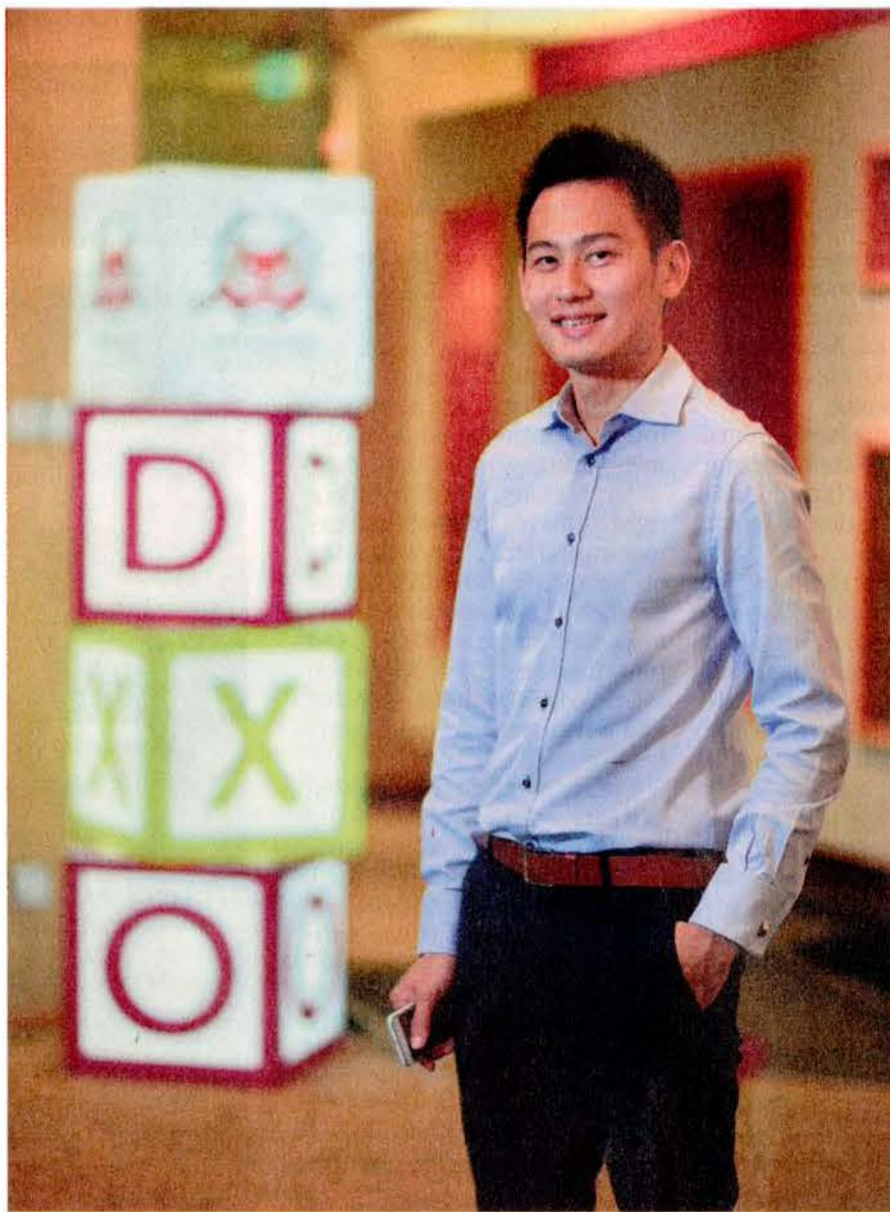


Living on the edge

Defence policy officer Eugene Lim Jia Jun's job combines his interest in global affairs and making an impact in peoples' lives



Formulating defence relations policies and strategies calls for astute observations of global affairs and balancing stakeholder interests, all to serve the nation's security interest, says Mr Lim. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

by eve yap

SAYING that the Ministry of Defence's policy officers live on the edge is "by no means an exaggeration", says Mr Eugene Lim Jia Jun.

Says Mr Lim, 27, a defence policy officer at the ministry's Defence Policy Office (DPO): "The life of a policy officer is never short of an adrenalin rush. You don't know what will happen next and have to react in a swift and decisive manner."

For example, the day he joined DPO on Nov 11 last year was the same day that Mindef and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) had to react to Typhoon Haiyan, which had just struck the Philippines.

It was both an eye-opener and a confidence booster, recalls Mr Lim.

"I witnessed first-hand the swift and keen abilities of SAF to respond when called upon. I also realised that I found the job that I wanted as it was a combination of fulfilling my passion, as well as making a real impact on lives."

But the role of a Mindef policy officer goes beyond quick-response disaster relief and humanitarian missions.

In broad strokes, policy officers "formulate defence relations policies and strategies to protect the nation's security interests", says Mr Lim.

More often than not, he says, policy officers must find the "sweet spot amid sometimes opposing considerations" to yield the best outcomes because "every policy recommendation we put up affects people's lives on the ground".

Mr Lim adds: "We have to be stringent yet retain flexibility, be fast but not forsake quality, and be meticulous but not get bogged down by details so as to keep the bigger picture in mind."

Legwork is a must before a proposal is even made. That includes taking on board not just information opinions of stakeholders but also keeping abreast of developments, for instance, in the political and defence spheres, around the world.

"It's important for policy officers to be keenly aware and updated on these issues while being cognisant of the possible repercussions these may have on Singapore's security," explains Mr Lim.

Copious research, rounds of consultations and checks to "cover all the bases" mean that policy formulation can be a long-drawn process.

Trips he makes as a "defence diplomat" provide a change in pace. These include trips where he supports his leaders in overseas meetings or when he visits SAF's overseas exercises and deployments to better understand their abilities and training needs.

Being in DPO gives him a helicopter view of what and how much we are doing to protect the people, says Mr Lim, adding that safeguarding the nation is not just about having the "biggest and meanest weapons in the world".

He is comforted to work alongside extremely driven and high-calibre colleagues and nurturing superiors in a close-knit fraternity, whose focus is to counter any threats that may emerge.

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— Mr Eugene Lim Jia Jun, defence policy officer, Defence Policy Office, Ministry of Defence

The former St Andrew's Junior College student, who considers himself a late bloomer, discovered his interest in global affairs, international relations and politics only in the second of his four-year course at Singapore Management University (SMU).

After graduating from SMU with a Bachelor of Science (Economics) with a second major in political science in 2012, he went on to the London School of Economics and Political Science.

He capped his year at the prestigious institution with a Master of Science (International Relations), with distinction.

His parents never drew out a career roadmap for him.

But they were happy that the elder of their two sons took a job that lets him contribute to society, says Mr Lim. In hindsight, so is he.