

New award for students pays tribute to war hero

Winners have excelled against the odds or shown leadership abilities

Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh

A war hero's name now graces a new award for tertiary students who embody his fighting spirit, 75 years after he died valiantly in battle defending Singapore.

The SMEF-Lieutenant Adnan Award from the Singapore Muslim Education Fund (SMEF) will go to students who have excelled in their studies in the face of adversity, or proven their leadership mettle in a uniformed group.

It pays tribute to Lt Adnan Saidi who died fighting the Japanese in the Battle of Pasir Panjang during World War II. His platoon in the Malay Regiment was vastly outnumbered, but Lt Adnan rallied his men in a battle to the bitter end.

SMEF chairman Ameen Talib told The Sunday Times yesterday: "Lt Adnan is a symbol of bravery, leadership, resilience and determination, which we thought were perfect virtues for our younger generation to aspire towards."

He noted that the introduction of the award was timely, coming on the 75th anniversary of the fall of Singapore.

The \$700 award was given out for

the first time yesterday, in a ceremony at Mamanda Restaurant in Kampong Glam.

Among the three recipients was 19-year-old Nurhaliza Ramli who, despite her troubled family background, has excelled in her media management course at Nanyang Polytechnic.

She has never met her mother, and her father, who was released from jail two years back and is partially blind, lives in a halfway house.

After her grandmother died in 2007, Ms Nurhaliza spent years shuttling between her relatives' homes. She now lives with her taxi-driver uncle and his family.

After she graduates, she plans to find a job to help her save up for part-time university courses.

"I want to support myself and lighten the burden on my uncle, who has to think of his three children too," she said. "Sometimes I do feel down, but I always tell myself to focus on the future. That's something I can control."

At the ceremony, Minister of State for Communications and Information and Education Janil Puthuchery gave out \$41,000 worth of awards to a bumper crop of 12 students.

This is the SMEF's largest disbursement since it was set up in 2013. Its initial focus was on supporting Malay/Muslim students pursue law and medicine overseas.



Ms Nurhaliza Ramli (left), and Ms Nursriwati Mohamed Yusri, both 19, were among the three recipients of the SMEF-Lt Adnan Award, which was given out for the first time yesterday. The award pays tribute to Lt Adnan Saidi (above) who had died defending Singapore during World War II.

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Yesterday, six medical students received the \$5,000 SMEF Medicine Award, while three law students were given the \$3,000 SMEF-Professor Ahmad Ibrahim Award, which is named after

Singapore's first attorney-general. Said Dr Ameen: "There were very few Malay/Muslim professionals in these fields, and so we wanted to encourage and support students doing law and medicine."

"Now, we want to look at other segments. We want to encourage those who have done their best against all odds, in any field."

asyiqins@sph.com.sg