School's out, time for relief missions

Many students are spending break helping overseas disaster victims

BY AILEEN LAI

THE holidays are here and many students are getting ready to jet off — but not to scenic tourist spots or cosmopolitan cities.

Tertiary institution students are organising humanitarian aid expeditions to areas hit by last December's tsunami.

Elisha Teo, 22, is a second-year business student at Nanyang Technological University and acting president of the Red Cross Humanitarian Network (NTU Chapter). He has been on relief missions to tsunami-affected areas such as Aceh and Trincomalee in Sri Lanka, and earthquake-hit Niias island in Indonesia.

He said: "The youths of today have very big hearts. They understand the need to help our neighbours."

Elisha is planning to lead another team on a humanitarian mission to Meulaboh in Aceh during the break.

Singapore Management University (SMU) has raised $50,000 with sponsorship from Luxasia for its Shelter for Humanity project, which builds communal shelters and provides humanitarian aid. Over the past two months, SMU's team of 46 students and seven staff were in Khao Lak, Thailand, to help build a childcare centre.

Rebuilding teams are also imparting skills to local communities. The SMU team is teaching soil-cement brick technology — developed by the Thailand Institute of Science Technology Research — to help residents build infrastructure on their own.

The Singapore International Foundation is sending 15 volunteers to Sri Lanka next month, to refurbish a school in Galle and build a temporary shelter in Hikkaduwa.

One of them, Mr Quek Kian Leong, 25, said: "Every experience is a meaningful exposure and it reaffirms my commitment to help, not just on our home ground, but in other parts of the world as well."

The writer is a graduate in mass communications from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.