People here find many ways to help

By Maryam Mokhtari

ABOUT 100 durian lovers will gather in East Coast Road tomorrow to gorge on the best durians – Mao Shan Wang, D24 and Golden Phoenix – to raise $3,000 for Japanese relief efforts.

This is just one of several small-scale fund-raising efforts across Singapore to help those stricken by the March 11 disaster.

The urge to help is so strong that the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) has pushed back its Japan fund deadline from April 13 to April 30. Other small fund-raising efforts include a brownie baking blitz, online shopping spree and antique furniture sale.

Dr Leslie Tay, 42, the “Durian Degustation” organiser, said $30 of the $50 participation fee will go to the SRC. Registration has closed, with 100 people having signed up.

The doctor behind popular food blog ieatishootipost.sg said: “We already had a Durian Degustation planned, and since the disaster happened, a few of our readers suggested that we should organise a makan session to help raise some funds for the relief effort.”

Mr William Tan, 51, owner of Heart Bistro at Palais Renaissance, who is married to a Japanese American, is selling three antique cabinets, which are on display at Eastern Discoveries, an antiques shop in Outram Road.

One 1920s piece was bought at a charity auction a few years back.

“I thought I might as well pass it on, and let someone else have it for a good cause,” he said.

He hopes to raise at least $10,000, which will go to the Japanese Embassy.

Assistant Professor Kelvin Low of National University of Singapore’s sociology department said people here are now more engaged in giving to causes such as Japan, because of the frequency of natural disasters nearby in recent years.

“The fact that the disaster occurred close to home acts as a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities of life,” he said.

Singaporeans taking part in donation drives may be those who feel connected to Japan by work, education or relationships, he added.

Miss Stephie Tan, 27, feels such a link, saying: “I lived in Japan for a month a couple of years ago and the warmth and friendship of the Japanese people really touched me.

“I imagined myself in their position and the worry and stress they face, as well as those who were made homeless from the disaster.”

The freelance writer and owner of blogshop Stephie’s Shop held a 24-hour shopping spree, raising more than $1,000 – all of which was donated to The Japanese Association, Singapore.

Ms Alia Abdullah, 22, a law student at Singapore Management University, also chipped in with a three-day brownie sale at SMU and Nanyang Technological University, and raised $860.

“It’s a very fulfilling and empowering experience. You feel you can really make a difference,” she said.

Other fund-raisers say support has been “overwhelming”.

Ms Michelle Lauridsen, in her 40s and managing director of advertising firm Planet Ads and Design, said all 5,000 of the first batch of “Japan You Can” T-shirts designed by its art director Makoto Oishi, 28, and sold for $10 at Mos Burger outlets, were snapped up within two days, raising $50,000.

The second batch of T-shirts will be launched today.

“We’ve had an incredible amount of help from people here who want to make this a success,” said the Australian, who is married to a Japanese.

With fund-raising still going strong, SRC head of corporate communications Carol Teo said its fund-raising permit has been extended by a fortnight.

As of yesterday, SRC had raised $11 million. Mercy Relief, Singapore’s independent non-governmental humanitarian charity, has raised $1.16 million. The Japanese Association has raised more than $3.03 million.