

Hospital in Nias island opens

Tan Hui Yee
In Nias

In Nias island off western Sumatra is a convent where locals flock to for medical aid when an earthquake strikes this disaster-prone region.

Last Thursday, they crowded its compound for a happier reason: The small clinic and maternity home run by the convent had been turned into a 60-bed hospital with the help of Singapore donors.

The new \$3 million Stella Maris General Hospital, which opened to much fanfare in southern Nias, was largely funded by the Tidal Waves Asia Fund collected by the Singapore Red Cross for the 2004 tsunami victims. Other private donors include the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, which led the Singapore-Indonesian effort.

This is the second-last project to be completed with the \$89 million fund. Since 2004, the money has been disbursed through some 70 projects in affected places like Aceh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. When one more hospital in Meulaboh town in Aceh is completed early next year, the fund will be closed.

To document its projects, the committee overseeing the fund has produced a book *Beyond The Tsunami: Rebuilding Communities, Touching Lives*. It was launched yesterday.

Speaking to reporters in Nias last Thursday, the Red Cross' secretary-general Christopher Chua said: "I feel satisfied. All the money that was collected has been put to good use; we have done justice to our donors."

Nias, a famous surfing destination with about 800,000 residents, has been struggling to get back on its feet after the tsunami. After-shocks have destroyed infrastructure, and the most severe - an 8.7-magnitude quake in March 2005 - killed 1,800 residents.

In southern Nias in particular, where the dramatic waves off Saroke beach are popular with surfers, the lack of proper medical facilities has kept potential tourists away, said Mr Chua.



Running the new Stella Maris General Hospital are (front row, from left) Sister Stephanie, Sister Gertruda, who is the chief operating officer, Sister Karola, (back row, from left) Sister Elizabeth, Sister Gratiana and Sister Faustina. In the background, on the left, is the old wing of the formerly makeshift hospital, while the building on the right is the new wing added with the help of Singapore donors.

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TAN HUI YEE

Pharmacist Yeni Kosasih, 36, was one the locals who turned up last Thursday for a peek at the new hospital. With an accident and emergency room, delivery rooms and a pharmacy, it is much better equipped for future disasters, she noted.

One of her two family homes collapsed during the 2005 quake, leaving her uncle now limping from a leg injury.

Catholic Sister Gertruda Fau, 65, from Indonesian Sisters of Charity of Our Lady Mother of Mercy, runs the hospital together with five other nuns and other medical staff.

Beaming as she walked down the smart white corridors, she said: "The equipment is more modern, but we are also looking for surgeons and other specialists."

The only surgeon the hospital had was a volunteer from Germany, who left for home last week.

To meet manpower needs, the hospital is working with the Association of Voluntary Health Services of Indonesia to organise stints by foreign medical specialists there.

Meanwhile, Tan Chin Tuan Foundation's chief executive Eric Teng hopes Singaporean volunteers will continue their engagement with Nias.

Singapore is one of biggest funders of Nias' rehabilitation, having constructed several schools, villages, hospitals and an orphanage.

"The best way to keep in contact with the beneficiaries is for Singapore groups to include Nias island when planning community outreach activities," he said.