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TechTalk

S E R V I N G T H E M I T C O M M U N I T Y

Reaching out in wake of tsunami

Students, staff raise money to help rebuild Southeast Asia

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and
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News Office

MIT has about 300 students and many other researchers and alumni from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia and other countries in Southeast Asia where coastal areas were destroyed by the tsunami. Many of these members of the MIT community may have been visiting their homes when the tsunami crashed onto land Dec. 26.

Like countless families around the world, MIT is taking pains to contact students and other community members who were in the area during the disaster.

The International Students Office sent an e-mail to students from affected countries on Dec. 29, asking them to “let us know that you are okay.” Just over 80 of those students have responded to date, according to Danielle Guichard-Ashbrook, director and associate dean for international students. She anticipates hearing from many more students as phone and computer service is slowly restored to those areas.

“Though we are tremendously distressed as we see the rise in casualties and the horrific photos of the devastation, our deepest hope is that a natural disaster of this scale presents an opportunity for all nations to work together to assist their fellow human beings in need,” the letter said. “Our thoughts and prayers are with you,

your family members and your friends. Let us know if we can help in any way.”

The MIT Alumni Association has set up an electronic message board for alumni and other community members to gain information about friends and family from South Asia.

Community groups have also initiated fund-raising campaigns to send money to the regions hardest hit to support humanitarian relief efforts following the tragedy.

Student groups join together

Working together, three student organizations at MIT—the Association for India’s Development-MIT (AID-MIT), Sangam, and South Asian American Students (SAAS)—set up donation collection booths in Lobby 10 and the Student Center beginning Jan. 3, collecting donations to aid survivors of the tsunami that is estimated to have killed more than 156,000 people in 11 different countries.

The groups have raised close to \$2,000. They plan to use some of the funds to purchase a community fishing boat, along with a supply of nets. The supplies would be donated to a fishing cooperative so many fishermen would benefit. With estimates from AID’s contacts in Chennai, India, they expect the total cost to be around \$3,000, said AID’s Vidya Jonnalagadda, a postdoctoral associate in biological engineering who is from Hyderabad in southern India.

Jonnalagadda, who has been collecting donations in Lobby 10, said she felt overwhelmed by the generosity and caring she

has seen at MIT. “When we see students donating a crumpled dollar bill dug from the pocket of their jeans, it is really touching, because it perhaps represents their lunch money,” said Jonnalagadda, adding that some people have been very emotional, which has been especially moving. “Really, it is not the dollar amount of the donation that is so touching, it is the concern that they show,” she said.

AID is planning a dinner and silent auction to be held in Walker Memorial on Jan. 20 at 7 p.m. All proceeds will go towards tsunami relief. AID-MIT has also set up a web site to post updates from the volunteers at their Chennai branch. Donations can be made via the Sangam web site.

Sri Lankan students pitch in

Additional funds are being collected by the Sri Lankan Student Association (SLSA), which has raised nearly \$1,400 in donations they collected at a booth in the lobby of Building E25. They will continue to collect money over the coming months to help with the reconstruction effort, said former SLSA president and postdoctoral associate Sanith Wijesinghe, who received his Ph.D. in aeronautics and astronautics in 2003. He is from Colombo, Sri Lanka, just under 15 miles from the coast; he planned to travel to his country on Jan. 6 to assess the situation himself and report back to the SLSA on his findings.

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Reduction in chemo doses is a real possibility

Christina Yoon
Center for Cancer Research

MIT biologists may have found a way to decrease the dose of chemotherapeutic agents needed to tackle cancer, a feat that would also reduce toxic side effects.

Cancer cells are unique because they divide faster than ordinary cells; this also makes them susceptible to chemotherapy. While chemotherapy is an effective treatment against fast-growing tumors, it is also associated with toxic side effects because of the high doses required to be effective.

Researchers from MIT’s Center for Cancer Research have suggested a new approach to achieving the same response using a lower dose of chemotherapy, thereby limiting the harmful side effects of the drugs. Their approach involves making cancer cells more sensitive to these agents.

In a paper published in the Jan. 7 issue of *Molecular Cell*, a research

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PHOTO / DONNA COVENEY

Deborah Douglas, curator of science and technology for the MIT Museum, studies some of the 600 historic slide rules recently donated to the museum. Douglas is demonstrating a seven-foot slide rule that was used for teaching.

MIT Museum measures up

The MIT Museum now has more than 600 historic slide rules in its permanent collection, representing a major resource for scholars and collectors.

After several months of negotiations, IntelliCoat Technologies of South Hadley, Mass., selected the museum to be the permanent repository of the Keuffel & Esser Company Slide Rule Collection.

Through a series of mergers, IntelliCoat, which manufactures coated papers, films and specialty substrates, acquired the remaining assets—including the slide rule collection—of Keuffel & Esser of Hoboken, N.J., the most significant manufacturer of slide rules in the U.S. IntelliCoat executives Robert Champigny and Charles E. Quinby decided to find an appropriate home for the collection and selected the MIT Museum.

“We feel there’s no better place than MIT, one of the world’s premier engineering schools, for this historic collection,” said Quinby, director of quality, commercialization and technical support. “And we are very excited that it will be preserved and accessible. Visitors, especially younger people such as my children, will learn to appreciate the slide rule’s role in shaping our world.”

“It is a privilege to serve as the first steward of this collection,” says Deborah Douglas, the museum’s curator of science and technology. “It has a strong emotional appeal to the MIT community, but to be provocative, one could argue that the slide rule is the most important technology of the 20th century that historians have not studied.”

PEOPLE

PROFESSORIAL HONORS

Charles Stewart is the new head of political science. John Dower of history receives the prestigious Mellon Distinguished Achievement Award for scholarship.

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SCIENCE STUDENTS MAKE MARKS

Senior wins national math prize, and physics students represent the U.S. at historical conference.

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RESEARCH

DOING QUALITY WORK

Plastics help environmentalists monitor the health of Boston Harbor.

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THE FINAL FRONTIER

Giant telescope eyes other solar systems while scientists monitor spacetime warp.

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ARTS

CELEBRATED FAILURE

St. Louis’ infamous Pruitt-Igoe housing project is the subject of MIT exhibit.

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TIPPING THEIR WORLD

Alumna dancer returns to campus to tilt the dance floor beneath performers.

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