S’poreans rooting for seaman’s recovery

BY VICTORIA BARKER

The Ministry of Defence and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) will “fully support” injured naval serviceman Jason Chee, even after he is discharged from hospital.

In a post on the Facebook page of the SAF’s Web publication, Cyberpioneer, yesterday, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said that Mr Chee’s hospitalisation and rehabilitation expenses will be paid for by them.

His comments came after he visited the 29-year-old at a high-dependency ward at Changi General Hospital last Friday.

During the visit, Mr Chee’s father, who is a retiree, told Dr Ng that his wish is to be able to “live out his remaining days with Jason, without having to struggle”.

Mr Chee is an only child and his mother died two years ago.

Dr Ng said: “I understood what he was worried about.”

He assured Mr Chee Kwok Chor, 72, that he should not worry that support would wane.

Dr Ng said: “The SAF and Singaporeans would be there for him and Jason in the long term.

“Already, our SAF doctors have got in touch with specialists in the US military who have experience in rehabilitating veterans with lost limbs.”

The aim, Dr Ng said, is to get Mr Chee “up and about, independent as far as possible”.

Mr Chee, who holds the rank of Military Expert 2, lost both his legs, his left arm, and as well as three fingers on his right hand in a horrific ship accident last month.

In the Dec 10 accident, the weapons-systems supervisor in the Republic of Singapore Navy was caught between a motorised winch and a rope on board warship RSS Endeavour, which was berthed at Changi Naval Base. He spent several weeks on a respirator in the hospital’s intensive-care unit (ICU), and was able to breathe on his own last week, for the first time since the accident.

Dr Ng said he has been receiving updates on Mr Chee’s condition twice daily, and was “extremely concerned” during the first two weeks he was in ICU. He said: “We were not sure then if he would pull through.”

He described “a moment of relief and joy” during the hospital visit “to be able to shake hands together”.

Dr Ng said: “I told him how Singaporeans from all walks of life – including those within the SAF and his Shunfu community, and his buddies – were rooting for his recovery.

“I praised his fighting spirit. I said that there might be times when he might feel depressed about his injuries, but to please press on.”

“I reassured (Jason’s dad) that he should not worry that our support would wane after Jason...went home.”

To date, public donations for Mr Chee have exceeded $370,000. Funds have been raised through donation drives by the Thomson Shunfu Residents’ Committee – he lives in Shunfu – and SIM University, where he recently enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics programme.

This generous spirit will encourage our SAF soldiers and lift their morale as they carry out their duty of defending Singapore,” Dr Ng said.

Acknowledging Mr Chee’s “long journey to recovery and independent living”, Dr Ng said that he was touched by his resilience and fortitude.

“Despite some difficulty breathing, Jason’s first words were to thank me for visiting him,” he said.

“Even in the depth of his struggle, Jason is thinking of others.”

Dr Ng’s post drew nearly 2,000 “likes” and over 150 comments from netizens as of last evening, with many expressing their support for Mr Chee.

Netizen Teng Theng Dar said: “(I) appreciate very, very much the assurance given to Jason and his dad by Minister Ng. I am sure it means a lot to Jason.”

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DR NG ENG HEN, ON ENCOURAGING INJURED NAVAL SERVICEMAN JASON CHEE

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DR NG, ON MEETING MR CHEE

PULLED THROUGH: Naval serviceman Jason Chee lost his legs and left arm in a ship accident last month.

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