DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

DOCTORS in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) are roping in their American counterparts to help rehabilitate navy serviceman Jason Chee who lost his legs and left arm in a ship accident last month.

He is still warded in Changi General Hospital and a family member said Military Expert 2 Chee is expected to undergo the first skin-graft operation today.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen revealed in a blog post yesterday that SAF doctors have got in touch with specialists in the United States military “who have experience in rehabilitating veterans with lost limbs”.

“We want to get Jason up and about, independent as far as possible,” said Dr Ng who visited the 29-year-old last Friday.

“I reassured his dad, Mr Chee, not to worry about the hospitalisation and rehabilitation expenses – we would pay for all of this,” he added in the blog post.

The serviceman is an only child. His father, Mr Chee An On, 72, is a retiree while his mother died last September.

Dr Ng, who has been getting twice-daily updates on the condition of the serviceman, said Mr Chee should not be worried that the Defence Ministry (Mindef) support would wane after his son is discharged from hospital.

“The SAF and Singaporeans would be there for him and Jason in the long term,” he added.

Mindef’s director of manpower had previously said that it will pay for all medical expenses chalked up at public hospitals and clinics. ME2 Chee will also get compensation for any permanent disability.

He was on board warship RSS Endeavour at Changi Naval Base when he got caught between a motorised winch and a rope on Dec 10. Mindef is investigating and said preliminary findings indicated that faulty equipment could have caused the accident.

He is expected to undergo the first of several skin-graft operations from today, just days after he was taken off a respirator. He is breathing on his own again.

His relative, who did not wish to be named, said the naval weapons systems supervisor has been transferred from an intensive care unit to a high-dependency ward.

The serviceman is said to be “buoyant” about his recovery progress. The relative, a former sales engineer and semi-retired, said Dr Ng’s visit lasted 45 minutes, during which he spoke to ME2 Chee, his father and doctors.

Describing it as “a moment of relief and joy to be able to shake hands” with ME2 Chee, Dr Ng said the serviceman’s “resilience and fortitude” and that everyone is rooting for his recovery. “I said that there would be times when he might feel depressed about his injuries, but to please press on.”

Dr Ng also noted the outpouring of support and donations. The amount collected by the Thomson Shunfu Residents’ Committee has exceeded $370,000. SIM University, the private varsity that the serviceman is enrolled in for a degree course, is also raising funds.

“This generous spirit will encourage our SAF soldiers and lift their morale,” said Dr Ng.

Additional reporting by Poon Chian Hui

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SAF gets US experts to help injured navy man

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