

Pictures of hope

hot

the **sunday** times May 21, 2006

A TRIP to Nepal moved her so much, she wrote and illustrated a book to raise funds for the people she met there.

"I always wanted to visit a Third World country after my A levels to learn more," says Ms Tan Wai Jia (right), 19, former vice-president of Victoria Junior College's student council.

Her volunteering spirit was inspired by a previous community project in Cambodia organised by her alma mater in 2004.

So, once her exams ended, she approached the Methodist Mission Society (MMS) for possible trips.

"They told me that nobody wanted to go to Nepal because of the political unrest," she recalls. Spurred by her desire to help, she agreed to fly out to Nepal where she stayed at an orphanage run by the MMS.

During her five-week stint there, she also met a Singaporean named Josephine who has been running soap and sewing factories

that have employed destitute and abused Nepalese women for 10 years.

She helped out at the factories and was moved by the stories these women had to tell.

This gave her the conviction to write and illustrate a book — an idea she has harboured for a while.

"It's in the style of Jimmy Liao, very poetic and lyrical. There are few words, but the message behind them is complex," she says. Liao is the Taiwanese cartoonist famous for his child-like, surreal drawings.

Titled *A Kitesong*, it is an allegorical tale of a girl who loses her kite.

Ms Tan spent about 10 hours a day drawing and painting for two months and is currently touching up parts of her illustrations.

The book was picked up by local imprint Landmark Books, which also publishes works by Alfi-an Sa'at and Gretchen Liu.

Says Goh Eck Kheng, publisher of Landmark: "It's a non-commer-



PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

cial endeavour, more of a collector's book, but I supported Wai Jia because it's a worthy cause and she's quite talented."

Landmark will be publishing 2,000 copies of the book, which cost \$20 each, in July, and they will be sold mainly in churches with limited copies available at bookstores.

Of her hopes for the book, Ms Tan says quietly: "I hope it will raise awareness of issues in the Third World, and I hope it will encourage other young people to step out and do what they believe in."