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 SUBJECT: Prisoners put together National Day funpacks



The 88 inmates at Tanah Merah Prison, all volunteers, are working as part of a collaborative effort, the first of its kind, between the National Day Parade committee and the Yellow Ribbon Project. ST PHOTOS: TERENCE TAN

## Prisoners put together National Day funpacks

By EISEN TEO

IF YOU are lucky enough to get a National Day Parade (NDP) funpack containing a yellow ribbon, know that an inmate from Tanah Merah Prison packed it.

Up to 35,000 of the 135,000 parade packs this year will be packed by 88 inmates – the first collaboration of its kind between the parade committee and the Yellow Ribbon Project (YRP), a national programme to reintegrate those who were prisoners back into society.

They set to packing the goodie bags for this year's NDP celebrations on Monday, with volunteers aged 30 to 55 working 8.30am to 5pm shifts.

Work will continue until Friday. The parade committee approached YRP as part of its efforts to engage the less fortunate this year.

The Straits Times visited packers at the prison's two workshops yesterday – one for assembly, one for quality control.

There, inmates moved quietly but efficiently, swiftly filling this year's convertible messenger-cum-tote bags each with more than 20 items; among them, an isotonic packet drink, face tattoos, a miniature Singapore flag, a



Volunteers aged 30 to 55 have been working 8.30am to 5pm shifts since Monday to pack 35,000 funpacks for this year's National Day Parade. They are expected to finish by Friday. The YRP funpacks will be distributed randomly with the rest of the packs.

hand-shaped drum and a heart-shaped lantern.

The YRP funpacks will be distributed randomly with the rest of the packs over the weeks leading up to Aug 9; at the National Education shows, the preview and the parade itself.

Ms Leonie Tan, secretary of YRP, believes this initiative is a good chance for the inmates to "play their part as contributing members of society" while serving time.

"Hopefully, Singaporeans can then give them a second chance and accept them when they are out of

prison," she added.

Her hopes are shared by one of the packers, who wanted to be known only as Ronald.

The 33-year-old has served seven years of his 14-year sentence for armed robbery, and is heading the inmates' five-day operation, overseeing logistics and inventory.

"We are glad that we are given the trust to do a good job, despite the mistakes we have made," he said.

"Many of us are helping out for National Day for the first time, and we are all very happy and encouraged to do so," he added.