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MIT contest aids tsunami homeless
By Christopher Cox

It's not a typical architectural competition: The criteria for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology contest call for a low budget, basic materials and mass production.

But the winning practical design will make a world of difference for thousands of Sri Lankans left homeless by the Dec. 26 tsunami.

"We are looking for some innovation," said Penzin Priyadarshi, founding director of the Prajnopaya Foundation, an all-volunteer Buddhist nonprofit collaborating with MIT's SENSEable City Laboratory on the affordable-housing project.

"Most of the time, MIT kids work on very abstract designs," added Priyadarshi, 25, the Buddhist chaplain on campus. "This is not a theoretical model. If the design is acceptable, it will be mass-produced."

Hopefuls must plan a single-family home of 400 to 500 square feet that can be built of local or recycled materials for just \$1,200 per unit. The winning design will be announced in May.

In conjunction with a Sri Lankan relief group, Prajnopaya hopes to build 1,000 of these homes along Sri Lanka's southern and eastern coastlines, where more than 30,000 people perished in the tsunami.

“Most civilians are still staying in tents, temples or schools,” Priyadarshi said.
“We’re hoping to get them back in their own homes. The need is tremendous.”

For information on Prajnopaya Foundation and its tsunami-relief program, go to www.prajnopaya.org.

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