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Dr M: Our medical personnel on par with rest of the world

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the successful separation of conjoined twins Azama and Azami Kamarul Zaman was a clear indication of the medical expertise available in the country.

The Prime Minister said he was proud of the surgeons and doctors who have proven beyond doubt that they were on par with the best in the world, if not better.

"Others may have reservations but I have never had any qualms. I have trusted myself to our surgeons as they are as qualified as anybody else. In certain instances, maybe they are better than other people.

"In this case, they are dealing with very small babies, and the operations are very complex, very delicate.

"The fact that they have succeeded is something that we can be very proud of," Dr Mahathir said after visiting Azama and Azami at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital.

The seven-month-old girls, who had shared intestines, bladder and liver, were separated in a 19-hour operation at the hospital on Nov 23.

The operation was carried out by a 46-member medical team, lead by paediatric surgeon Dr Zakaria Zahari.

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, said the girls were recuperating well after the operation.

"The smaller of the two (Azami) seems a little weak and may take a longer time to recover but their progress is good.

"The other baby (Azama) is doing very well," he said, adding that so far 17 such operations have been carried out in the country.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that there were sufficient local medical skills and expertise to carry out major operations and specialised treatments.

"But if people still choose to go abroad, we cannot do anything," he said, adding that no doctor in the world could guarantee a 100 per cent success rate.

On another matter, Dr Mahathir said it was not the Government's intention to stop people from donating to needy patients but such contributions should be co-ordinated to prevent abuse.

"We must have a single fund for this, whereby all donations and contributions are accounted for and distributed accordingly, as per the noble intention of the contributors.

"Sometimes, we really do not know if the money is used for the intended purpose or otherwise," he said when asked about complaints relating to tightened procedures on fund-raising through the media.

Citing the controversy over public donations amounting to more than RM300,000 for ex-TV3 newscaster Ras Adiba Radzi, Dr Mahathir said he, too, had contributed due to media publicity.

"The Press also collected, and because of Press publicity, I also went to visit the patient and contributed a few ringgit ...an affordable amount for me," he said.

Dr Mahathir also refuted claims that the terminally ill were not being accommodated at government hospitals, explaining that there were not enough beds for all of them as most were long-term patients.

"This is because of children who don't care for their elders, even some well-to-do ones just dump their parents at the hospital.

"If this trend continues, then our hospitals would be turned into old folks' homes," he said.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah also visited children at the Paediatric Cancer ward, handing out duit raya.