

Over 100 register for free cleft lip surgery

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD, Feb 11: More than 100 children with cleft lip or palate have registered for the free of cost surgery offered by a private hospital in Gujrat.

Dr Ijaz Bashir of the Bashir Hospital said at a briefing arranged by the Pakistan Cleft Lip and Palate Association (PCLPA) here on Saturday that the poor would get priority in the surgery camp to be held at the hospital from February 18 to 26.

British and Pakistani plastic surgeons and specialist nurses would conduct the surgeries at the free camps being held annually since 1994.

While the surgeons offer their services free, the hospital will provide free medical facilities and stay.

Dr Tony Brian told the gathering that he came from Britain to take part in the medical relief operations in the aftermath of the October 8 earthquake and has stayed on. "We need more people (volunteers) and funds to run humanitarian camps," he said.

Concerned citizens who attended the briefing announced donations of about Rs600,000

after his, and others', appeal.

According to the PCLPA officials one in every 530 children born in Pakistan is born with cleft lip or palate, or both. Most of them are born in poor families who cannot afford to pay the minimum Rs150,000 that plastic surgeons in the private sector charge for cleft surgery. Some private plastic surgeons just sew up the cut lip from the front to improve the face of the patient. Ninety per cent of such surgeries prove unsuccessful as they do not remove the poor patient's speaking and eating disabilities.

"In fact bad surgery makes subsequent corrective surgery more difficult", said Dr Akhtar Rehman, chief of the Islamabad chapter of the PCLPA. A PCLPA official said poor cleft lip patients who wanted to avail the offer of free surgery should register with Dr Ijaz Bashir or the staff at Bashir Hospital (Tel No. 053-3521102 and -3524139).

More than 5,000 patients have been treated and over 900 operated during the 14 camps held so far as charitable work, according to PCLPA.