Malay Mail : 7 November 2006 NOT fair. That&#65533;s how some members of the public feel about an SMS programme, run by AR Factor Resources Sdn Bhd, to raise funds for the 9th Far East South Pacific International Committee (Fespic) Games. The games, to be held in Kuala Lumpur from Nov 25 to Dec 1, will feature 4,000 paraplegic athletes from 42 countries.

The Malay Mail reader Baharom Aziz said he received the text message on Nov 3, asking him to donate RM1 to the games.

&#65533;The SMS states that if you want to donate RM1, ignore the message. But if you don&#65533;t want to donate, then type &#65533;KUL06 TIDAK&#65533; and send it to 33511,&#65533; said Baharom.

&#65533;It is unfair to the public because either way, we will still be charged. If we reply TIDAK to the number, we will be charged 15 sen by the telco for the SMS.&#65533;

On Oct 23, the Youth and Sports Ministry was reported to have denied employing AR Factor Resources to educate the public and raise funds for the 2006 Fespic games.

AR Factor Resources director Khairul Anuar Abdullah clarified that the company had been appointed by the Malaysian Paralympic Council (MPC) to run the SMS fund-raising programme.

In view of the feedback, he said, the company would put the programme on hold until it could be properly scrutinised.

The company would also come up with new procedures and seek the council&#65533;s approval before implementing it, he said.

&#65533;We will see how it can be made more simple and direct so that the public don&#65533;t feel short-changed in any way,&#65533; he said.

As for now, said Khairul Anuar, recipients would not be charged upon receiving the text message.

Instead, if recipients ignore the SMS, they will receive a second SMS after 48 hours as a reminder and confirmation of their participation.

&#65533;It is only after they ignore the second SMS that the RM1 will be deducted.&#65533;

If a recipient insists not to be charged the 15 sen to reply, they can call the hotline number listed in the text message, and we pay the charges in the form of a rebate within 13 days, said Khairul.

Head of communications for the KL&#65533;06 9th Fespic Games, Ahmad Effendi Abdullah, also agreed that the SMS process should be more direct and less confusing for the public.

&#65533;They should be able to ignore the SMS if they don&#65533;t want to donate,&#65533; he said.

However, National Consumer Complaints Centre director Darshan Singh stressed that such methods of procuring donations were &#65533;unethical&#65533;.

They don&#65533;t give consumers much choice. It&#65533;s almost like forcing them, he said, and such activities are becoming a big problem for the public.

&#65533;If you&#65533;re a pre-paid user, you won&#65533;t even realise that RM1 has been deducted from your credit and a post-paid user will only know if he scrutinises his bill properly,&#65533; he said.

&#65533;These kinds of programmes should be suspended until the telecommunications industry can ensure that some kind of protection is in place for consumers.

&#65533;If these activities go unchecked or unregulated, people will be short-changed on a daily basis.&#65533;