

Headline **Spirit of charity**
Date **08 Aug 2011**
MediaTitle **New Straits Times**
Section **Local News**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **136,530 / 330,000**

Language **English**
Page No **16**
Article Size **131 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **1,814**
PRValue **5,442**



Spirit of charity

AS people are in need of help on a daily basis, donating money, food or clothing to the less fortunate is necessarily a day-to-day affair. But because compassion for the poor and charity for the needy are given added weight during the fasting month, the inclination to give alms to paupers, feed the hungry, or make charitable contributions increases during Ramadan compared with other months. Perhaps it takes the pangs of hunger to understand what it truly means to be down-and-out and go without food and drink. But whatever the reason, the fact that people are more likely to open their wallets in this holy Muslim month provides much relief to the deprived and the disadvantaged. Indeed, thanks to the philanthropic gift of RM200,000 from public-spirited corporations and individuals, more than 600 orphans in Kuala Lumpur will receive *duit raya* of RM120 this year. But with more than 300,000 orphans in the country, according to the chairperson of the welfare committee of Bakti (Association of Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers) Toh Puan Dr Aishah Ong, it will take year-round year-to-year generosity from donors and selflessness from volunteers to feed, clothe, tend and educate them in the growing number of orphanages and care centres. It goes without saying that the same applies to the other target groups and institutions that are in need of continuing assistance, such as the disabled, single mothers or the childless elderly, and AIDS shelters, drug rehab centres or welfare homes.

But as social safety nets are also funded by the public purse, a greater degree of commitment is required from those who administer these financial assistance schemes. Of course, the recipients have to be registered and some means of test administered to determine eligibility. But when some continue to slip through the cracks because they do not appear on the list, and when there is a surplus from the zakat collection that has not been distributed, there is a need to work with local community leaders and grassroots organisations to identify the deserving and register them.

Above all, even if it turns out that it is not true that some poor Muslims turned to the churches for charity after being spurned by Baitulmal, the managers of public welfare programmes should put themselves in the shoes of those in need to better connect with them and understand their plight. In fact, in the true compassionate spirit of Ramadan, this is something everyone needs to do to help bridge the differences that continue to divide us.