

# Subsidies gone to waste for lack of creches

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Subsidies for lower-income civil servants will be wasted if delays continue to plague the setting up of creches in government offices.

Under a move approved by the Cabinet in January, civil servants with a household income of less than RM2,000 a month are entitled to a subsidy of RM180 per child, provided they send their children to day-care centres set up by the ministry or agency where they work.

However, according to Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, the public sector had been slow to set up creches.

"They (ministries and government agencies) are not making it a priority. They may have the intention but they're just not making it happen. It would be a shame for the subsidy to go to waste," she said yesterday.

The average fee for public sector day-care centres ranges between RM200 and RM250. To date, 93 creches have been set up in various ministries and agencies at federal and state levels.

Shahrizat, however, is far from happy with the number.

"My ministry will be pushing for more day-care centres in the public and private sector. Don't view this as a woman's issue. It's a national issue. If women retreat from the workforce just to



**Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil**

care for their children, there will be severe economic repercussions," she said after launching the ministry's Parenting@Work seminar programme.

Shahrizat said according to the Statistics Department in 2005, nearly 45 per cent of the country's workforce were females.

On the Parenting@Work seminars, Shahrizat said it would be held at ministries and agencies so that there would be no excuse for any civil servant, especially men, to be absent.

There will be 186 sessions between April and December under a pilot phase, which aims to reach nearly 12,000 participants in ministries and agencies at federal and state levels. It may eventually be extended to the private sector.

The first session is slated for April 5 for staff of the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit.