

# Shahrizat to review Astro ruling

Minister meets disabled reps, promises to come up with realistic solutions to meet their needs

■ **By Suganthi Suparmaniam**  
news@nst.com.my

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The disabled may yet get to enjoy Astro satellite programmes together with Welfare Department aid.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Senator Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said the department would be reviewing the ruling that bars the disabled from getting aid if they had a television set or Astro service at home.

She said this at a meeting with 12 disabled people who came to see her at her ministry yesterday over the issue.

The disabled, who came in wheelchairs, were from the Disabled Persons Integrated Family Services (KIOKU), Independent Living and Training Centre and the Malaysian Animal-Assisted Therapy for the Disabled and Elderly Association.

"You are telling me to look at it, which I will. I think it's a reasonable request and I will look at it," she said, adding the ruling did not constitute discrimination against the disabled.

"We will come back with realistic answers."

Shahrizat was responding to a report in the *New Straits Times* yesterday on the disabled being barred from getting welfare aid if they had a



Senator Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil meeting with representatives from three organisations for the disabled yesterday. — NST picture by Yaziz Razali

TV set or Astro at home.

She said the ruling only applied to those under the Disabled Persons Unable to Work scheme, who were being given RM150 per month in aid.

"The underlying principle for welfare aid to the poor and needy is to ensure that their basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter, are met.

"As such, the ruling on Astro is applicable because it gives an indication of the affordability of the applicant to spend on something extra, in this case entertainment."

She said Astro was considered a monthly expense that would reduce welfare aid being used for basic needs.

Shahrizat said the ruling did

not affect the other two welfare schemes for disabled workers and people caring for a bedridden disabled person, who get RM300 a month.

She said action would be taken against officers who imposed the ruling on people in these two schemes.

Earlier, the mood in the waiting room at the ministry

was dark, with the disabled carrying placards condemning the ruling.

But the atmosphere changed when Shahrizat entered and shook hands with them, asked their names and their backgrounds before pulling up a chair to sit with them.

She said she understood the predicament of the disabled,

with most lying on a bed the whole day, with nothing to do but stare at empty walls.

Shahrizat said she would also speak to Astro to provide free services to the disabled as part of the company's corporate social responsibility. There are 28,608 disabled people registered with the ministry.