

## RAA says drivers not assessed properly before getting driving licenses

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As per the performance of Safe and Sustainable Road Transport, there are 147,295 driving license holders, of which 19,668 are professional driving license holders, and the rest are ordinary driving license holders.

The report indicated that the ordinary driving license continues to increase linearly, while there is no noticeable increase in the number of professional driving license holders in the country.

On an average, there is an increase of 7.6 percent (8,452) annually in the issuance of new driving license.

In terms of obtaining a learner license, there are no set eligibility criteria for obtaining learner license except for requirement to attain 17 years of age. However, RAA analysis of learner licenses issued data from 2015-2020 revealed 137 instances of learner licenses issued before attaining the eligibility age.

Without proper awareness on road safety, eligibility criteria and pre-course training before the issuance of learner license, and unregulated practice on highways and urban roads, it poses risk of lives and injuries to the learners and commuters, states the report.

The report point out that testing plays an important role in setting the competency levels required for licensing and judging a candidate's driving performance. Prior to qualifying for the actual practical test, the candidates must pass the theory test.

Thimphu regional office conducts the theory test online (e-Test) as part of the government's paperless initiative. Moreover, the e-Test will also speed up the written test process, since the results will be evaluated instantly by the computer system.

In addition, for those who can't read and write using computer, a paper based and verbal based test are also provided, the report stated.

The practical driving test is divided into two, box driving test and highway drive test, states the report, adding that the overall control of the vehicle and the point turning competency including the usage of triangle mirror vision is assessed while conducting the box-driving test.

The inadequacy in practical driving test does not ensure proper assessment of learner's ability to drive the motor vehicles. This results in issuing licenses to drivers who may not demonstrate minimum required skills and competence in driving.

Meanwhile, the Driving Training Institutes (DTIs) were established to impart professional driving skills through adequate infrastructure and instructors, wherein the training consists of basic curriculum for 3 months of theory and practical classes for ordinary driving learners and 21 days of professional driving courses.

As of March 2021, MoLHR has approved 28 DTIs which are spread across the country. Every year, the number of people registering to learn driving via the DTIs is increasing, the report states.

The Report further stated, "Inadequate and lack of driving training tracks in DTIs would compromise the quality of training as well as give rise to safety concerns as the trainees learn to drive on public roads without basic driving skills posing risks of traffic accidents."

RAA, on review of the detailed curriculum vitae of the trainers, noted that 28 DTIs in the country have a total 109 trainers, of which only four are certified Trainer of Trainers.

The report further revealed that the fatigue driving is one of the major and potentially growing risks to safety. Fatigue results from long trips and extensive periods of continuous driving, and also in short trips when the driver has previously been deprived of proper sleep or rest.

RSTA regulations restrict the drivers of commercial passenger vehicle from driving more than 8 hours with continuous journey, and also stipulate the requirement of having substitute drivers for routes requiring continuous driving hours of more than 8 hours.

Two drivers are required for any public transport bus service when the travel duration is more than 8 hours in a day. However, not all the bus operators abide by the aforementioned rules and circular, says the report.

RAA noted that the buses from Thimphu to Mongar and Phuentsholing to Bumthang ply without having two drivers, and there are more bus routes where the travel time takes more than eight hours.

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