

Driving licences clamp slammed



■ Ms Dias



■ Mr Asarpota

RIGHTS activists and community leaders have launched a scathing attack on plans to restrict driving licences for expatriates earning less than BD500.

The proposal was contained in a bill unanimously approved by MPs last week that could see tough new punishments for motorists breaking the law.

Some fines have been quadrupled as part of attempts to reduce deaths and serious injuries on Bahrain's roads.

Parliament also wants the Interior Ministry to draw up a list of people earning less than BD500 who should be eligible for driving licences with-in new by-laws that will be issued later.

But the bill, which has been referred to the Shura Council for revision, has caused outrage among many.

By MANDEEP SINGH

"Hefty fines are welcome and we are all for it," said Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS) chairwoman Marietta Dias.

"There is a very strong need for the authorities to clamp down and try and reduce the number of accidents on Bahrain's roads."

But Ms Dias said restricting driving licences to people earning less than BD500 was not practical.

"It does not make sense," she said. "There are countless numbers of people who have their entire livelihoods dependent on driving."

"People need driving licences to keep their jobs and get new ones."

The activist recognised something needed to be done about increasing rates of traffic accidents.

"We have to curb rash driving, but I must say the expatriates are not the major culprits," she said. "The rule should be applied to all drivers."

Indian Community Relief Fund chairman Bhagwan Asarpota warned thousands of people could lose their jobs as a result of the driving licence restrictions.

"The fines will go high, I can live with that," he said.

"But people being denied licences just because they do not earn enough is absurd."

"There has to be better ways."

Mr Asarpota said thousands of jobs could be at risk if the plan becomes law.

Senior doctor and Salmaniya



■ Dr Cheriyan

Medical Complex Accident and Emergency department chief resident Dr P V Cheriyan said he hoped increasing fines for traffic offences would help stop people from flouting rules.

"I have treated thousands of people injured in road accidents over more than three decades at SMC and can safely say a majority of the injuries and fatalities could have been avoided if drivers had been more careful and followed the rules," he said.

"So many young lives could have been saved."

"This is a very welcome step and should have been implemented long ago."

However, Dr Cheriyan was also puzzled by the draft law.

"Who would be able to pay drivers BD500 as salary?" he asked.

Meanwhile, Bahraini economists and businessmen also rejected any such legislation.

Such a bill will tarnish the kingdom's reputation, they said.

Expatriates account for 35 to 40 per cent of the total car sales in Bahrain, car dealers told our sister paper *Akhbar Al Khaleej*.

Bahrain Car Dealers Association said the proposed law will affect many economic and trade sectors, particularly new and used car sales, car loans and insurance.

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