

DAILY NEWS

EGYPT

Egypt diplomats worst traffic offenders, says London paper

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CAIRO: Egyptian diplomats along with their Saudi Arabian, Afghani and Sudanese counterparts are the worst violators of London's traffic laws, reported the Daily Telegraph on Tuesday.

According to the newspaper, "the driver of an Egyptian registered Mercedes C Class has racked up £10,000 in fines."

Over the last four years, foreign diplomats in London have amassed around £1.5 million in unpaid parking fees in central London, the paper added.

"The Sudanese Embassy has dodged 811 parking tickets since 2004 and owes more than £80,000 in unpaid fines. The number one culprit is the driver of a black Toyota Avensis who owes £37,000 for 349 tickets. The driver of a Saudi Arabia registered car owes £15,000 after refusing to pay 182 parking tickets and two Afghan diplomats owe the council almost £30,000 in 271 cases of unpaid fines.

"A Guinean diplomat who drives a £60,000 Mercedes S Class also owes £11,000 for 111 outstanding tickets ... and a diplomat from Kazakhstan who drives a £55,000 BMW owes more than £10,000 for 105 unpaid tickets."

Councillor Danny Chalkley, cabinet member for environment and transport, told the Daily Telegraph that: "All motorists who break traffic laws should be subject to the same penalties, regardless of their citizenship or job title," and added, "We would like to see these diplomats respect the laws and regulations of the UK and paying their parking tickets."

The US had a similar problem in 2002, where the United Nations diplomats and the members of the consular community owed around \$18 million in traffic fines to New York City.

At the time, Egypt topped the US Department of Finance list of countries owing the most in fines with up to \$1.9 million, according to an Associated Press report in 2007. Kuwait was second with \$1.3 million.

As part of a 2002 agreement between the New York mayor's office and the Department of State, the US government was able to withhold the amount owed by each country in the form of aid, plus 10 percent on fines dating back to 1997, Associated Press reported.

A study by two economists at Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley, noted a correlation between the level of traffic violations committed by a country's diplomatic representation and its position in the Transparency International Corruption Index.

The research suggests that "cultural or social norms related to corruption are quite persistent: even when stationed thousands of miles away, diplomats behave in a manner highly reminiscent of officials in the home country.

Norms related to corruption are apparently deeply engrained, and factors other than legal enforcement are important determinants of corruption behavior," read the study authored by Columbia's Raymond Fisman and Berkeley's Edward Miguel. *—Additional reporting by Sarah El Sirgany.*

