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Envoys' parking ticket toll

By **GEOFFREY BEW**

BAHRAIN's diplomats are among the worst offenders for illegal parking in a study of foreign envoys to the United Nations (UN) in New York, US. But they always pay their fines, eventually, say researchers at the US-based Berkeley and Columbia Universities.

Bahrain was ranked as the 21st worst offending country out of 146 participants in the study, which covered all regions of the world including North and South America, Europe, Asia, Oceania, Africa and the Middle East.

The offences covered an eight-year period from 1997 to last year and included indiscretions such as vehicles parked in front of fire hydrants or found at expired metres.

Seven Bahraini diplomats worked during this period and committed an average of 37.7 violations each.

In order to appear in the database, the violation had to go unpaid for at least 100 days.

The study found that the 10 worst parking violators were Kuwait, Egypt, Chad, Sudan, Bulgaria, Mozambique, Albania, Angola, Senegal and Pakistan.

Meanwhile, countries with zero violations included the Scandinavian nations, the UK and Canada.

Saudi Arabia was ranked as the 27th

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worst offending country, while Iran was placed at 44, Jordan at 101 and Lebanon at 115.

The study's authors, Ray Fisman and Edward Miguel, focused on New York because diplomats to the UN, which is headquartered there, were not penalised for parking violations before November 2002.

The aim was to study their decision-making with a view to better understanding cultural aspects of corruption.

Diplomats from low-corruption countries, such as Norway, behaved "remarkably well even in situations where they can get away with violations", according to the study.

But those from high-corruption countries, such as Nigeria, committed many violations, "suggesting that they bring the social norms or corruption culture of their home country with them to New York City", it added.

"This setting is one in which diplomats can indulge their personal tastes for rule-breaking without punishment," continued the report.

"It appears that diplomats from countries where the US is unpopular derive positive utility from breaking US rules or suffer less disutility than other diplomats from doing so."

Following a furore over unpaid diplomatic parking tickets, New York acquired legal powers in late 2002 to prosecute diplomatic vehicles - including revoking their official UN parking permits, towing them away and having 110 per cent of the total fine deducted from US government aid to the diplomats' countries of origin. It was found parking violations fell substantially afterwards, although cross-country patterns remained similar.



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