

## Preventive steps sought to end worker suicides

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As more and more suicide cases are reported among expats recently, preventive measures are being sought to protect workers from taking to such extreme steps. Since March, DT News alone reported seven suicide cases where expat workers ended their lives at their residences.

"There seems to have been a few reported lately in the Press but I can't really say much on the issue as it has always been very difficult to assess," Migrant Worker Protection Society Chairperson Marietta Das said.

"It is very hard to track whether any worker has suicidal tendencies and as far as my experience in ICRF is concerned, I have noticed that most of the labourers end their lives for financial reasons," Bhagwan Asarpota, Chairman of ICRF said.

"Most of the workers send money home to their families and if their sponsors don't pay them on time or hold on to passports, a helpless situation is created which force them to



commit suicides," he said.

"Suicide are not discussed in the Kingdom among the labourers. So we definitely need helpline and awareness programmes to prevent people from such acts," he said.

"It is also high time we put a system in place to tackle issues like these as it is difficult to track the number of expats who end their lives or for that matter to take preventive measures so that expats don't have to resort to suicides," he said. Asarpota have requested workers to contact ICRF or embassies before resorting to any extreme steps. Perhaps ICRF or embassies could help them get out of the problem they are facing.

# Companies not yet prepared for VAT, rollout, says survey

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Companies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are still not prepared for the implementation of Value Added Tax (VAT), according to a survey conducted by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and Thomson Reuters.

The report, 'Are GCC businesses equipped for VAT?', examined the readiness of GCC companies to adapt to VAT. The results showed that there was a "significant lack of preparation and awareness", ACCA stated. VAT will be implemented in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar in early 2018.

The results were underwhelming as only 11

per cent of respondents have understood the impact that VAT implementation could have on their company.

Forty nine per cent of the respondents said that they have not begun their impact assessment.

Thirty-eight per cent said they "lack in-house resources", while 44 per cent said that they have limited resources. When asked if they have made any provisions for VAT in 2017, 88 per cent said 'no'. Only 29 per cent of the companies surveyed said that they have IT systems in place while 18 per cent said

they were "partially ready".

Head of taxation at ACCA, Chas Roy-Chowdhury said: "The lack of preparation is a concern; companies should be using the pre-implementation period wisely to understand compliance, legal obligations and the financial risk associated with VAT," he said. "While the overwhelming majority realise it will affect their business, only a minority have a clear plan of how to effectively manage such a significant fiscal reform," he said.

Pierre Arman, Market development lead for tax

and accounting at Thomson Reuters, said: "Not being sufficiently prepared to manage VAT by 2018 could see organisations exposing themselves to the risk of compliance failures, as any tax legislation always carries penalties and other enforcement measures," he said.

"The introduction of VAT is positive change for this region as it will create a new source of stable revenue for governments while having the least negative impact on regional economies," he added.

## 55pc rise in ePayment transactions in 2016

DT News Network  
Manama

The number of online transactions has shown an increase of 55 per cent in 2016, an increase of 32 per cent in value terms at BD46 million, data released by Information and eGovernment Authority (iGA) said yesterday. The data took into account e-payment transactions on the national portal (Bahrain.bh), eGovernment Apps Store (Bahrain.bh/apps), and eKiosks.

The rise in epayment transactions follows iGA's continuous efforts to implement its strategy on online payments and eTransformation in phases to suit the needs of the public and employ the best technology.

The method of paying fees of government services online is a step in the right direction. The Authority has succeeded in providing faster and easier epayment services while ensuring security and privacy of users. 648,000 epayment transactions were conducted via Bahrain with a total amount of up to BD43 million in 2016,

according to data. Several payment services via the portal achieved an increase in the number of transactions and payments such as the services request for ebirth certificates, passport renewal etc. Such rise is due to the enhancements of the services and the impact of change management in achieving eTransformation within government services. Payments have also been raised via the Sijilat services due to the continuous collaboration amongst the authority together with the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism. The total number of visits to services available on the portal has exceeded 3.4 million visits - some of these services include the Pre-Employment Health Check-up appointments for foreign employees, Payment of Criminal Orders, Travel Ban and Passport Renewal.

During the same period, more than 51,000 payment transactions were conducted online via applications available in the Bahrain eGovernment Apps Store for nearly BD3 million which is equivalent to three times the amounts paid

through the apps during 2015.

Downloading apps have also increased by 6 per cent - most of which were for the apps Student Exam Results, followed by the Traffic Services and Electricity and Water Services. The total number of mobile applications by beneficiaries reached approximately 4.5 million users - an increase that reaches about 21 per cent compared to 2015. The list of the most frequently utilized apps was topped by the Gov Employee app, Student Exam Results app and the Traffic Services app due to the services of interest to a large segment of the public.

In regards to the eKiosk, which have had developed features of payment services since the launch of the revamped eKiosks in May 2016, more than 6,000 payment transactions have been conducted through it - with a total amount of nearly BD83,000. Majority of the transactions were for services like Request for eBirth Certificates and the service Issue Copies of Student Certificates

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