

# Duterte STOPS sending workers to Kuwait



## Manila

The Philippines suspended sending workers to Kuwait yesterday, a day after President Rodrigo Duterte said abuse by employers there had driven several domestic helpers to suicide.

Kuwait expressed surprise at the move and said it was in touch with Manila to try to resolve the issue.

Philippine Labour Secretary Silvestre Belo said no more Overseas Filipino Workers would be sent to Kuwait “pending investigation of the

causes of deaths of about six or seven of our OFWs. He did not refer to specific cases or say when the deaths took place.

There are more than 250,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, the Philippine foreign ministry estimates, most working as domestic helpers. There are also large numbers in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Duterte, who is hugely popular among the Filipino diaspora, said on Thursday the Philippines had “lost

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four women” in Kuwait, referring to domestic helpers he said had been abused and committed suicide. He said

he was aware of many cases of sexual abuse against Filipino women and wanted to raise it with Kuwait and “state the

truth and just tell them that it’s not acceptable anymore”.

Kuwait’s Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled al-Jarallah expressed “surprise and sorrow” over Duterte’s remarks, saying that legal proceedings had been taken in the cases of the four domestic workers mentioned by the president.

“We have begun immediate contacts with Filipino authorities to examine the extent of this statement and to try to refute the erroneous information that came in it,”

state news agency KUNA quoted Jarallah as saying.

Jarallah said there were more than 170,000 Filipino workers in Kuwait, all protected by laws that shield them from abuse.

More than 2.3 million Filipinos are documented as working abroad. Collectively they remit more than \$2 billion of their income back to the Philippines every month, money that fuels robust consumer spending in one of the world’s fastest-growing economies. (Reuters)

# India sends tax notices to cryptocurrency investors

## New Delhi

India has sent tax notices to tens of thousands of people dealing in cryptocurrency after a nationwide survey showed more than \$3.5 billion worth of transactions have been conducted over a 17-month period, the income tax department said.

Tech-savvy young investors, real estate players and jewellers are among those invested in bitcoin and other virtual currencies, tax officials told Reuters after gathering data from nine exchanges in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Pune.

Governments around the world are grappling with how to regulate

cryptocurrency trading, and policymakers are expected to discuss the matter at a G20 summit in Argentina in March.

The Indian government has issued repeated warnings against digital currency investments, saying these were like “Ponzi schemes” that offer unusually high returns to early investors.

But it has not so far imposed curbs on an industry estimated to be adding 200,000 users in India every month.

B.R. Balakrishnan, a director general of investigations at the income tax

department in the southern state of Karnataka, said notices were sent following the survey to assess the penetration and patterns of virtual currency trade. “We cannot turn a blind eye. It would have been disastrous to wait until the final verdict was out on its legality,” he told Reuters.

The tax department has asked people dealing in bitcoin and other virtual currencies such as ethereum and ripple to pay tax on capital gains. They have also asked for details about their total holdings and the source of funds in the tax notice seen by Reuters.

**India has issued repeated warnings against digital currency investments**

found that investors were not reflecting it on their tax returns and in many cases, the investment was not accounted for,” Balakrishnan said.

An Indian finance ministry official said a committee was looking into the possibility of imposing restrictions on virtual currencies and that eventually parliament would have to legislate a regulatory regime.

“We

Officials at Zebpay, India’s leading bitcoin exchange, said the industry was adding near 200,000 users every month with an estimated trade volume of about 20 billion Indian rupees (\$315 million).

“Many of our customers are treating digital currency like gold,” said Zebpay co-founder Saurabh Agarwal.

Aman Kalra, marketing head of Coinsecure, a bitcoin exchange in New Delhi, said more than 150 bitcoins were changing hands every week through its platform. The company has 100,000 registered users and is now launching a platform to sell ethereum and other digital currencies.

“I don’t think anyone in the government should label our business as a ‘Ponzi scheme’, we are not doing anything illegal,” said Kalra.

Tax inspectors said they sought help from experts in

blockchain, the technology that underpins bitcoin, to conduct the survey.

In some cases, tax officials themselves participated in the trade to identify loopholes after they found investors had poured in billions of dollars through unregulated exchanges.

The biggest worry for New Delhi, the finance ministry official said, was how to protect investors trading on offshore exchanges.

Already hundreds have gone to the police and courts with complaints of transactions in virtual currencies that turned out to be fraudulent, said Pavan Duggal, a Supreme Court lawyer specialising in cybercrimes. “Considering cryptocurrencies are here to stay, the govt must consider granting limited legality while ensuring that these are not used for crypto crimes,” he said. (Reuters)

