

Traffic fine slash leads to huge rush

Abu Dhabi Traffic Department extends timing to midnight

- By Rayeesa Absal, Staff Reporter
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Abu Dhabi: The announcement of 50 per cent discount on traffic fines led to an unprecedented rush of drivers wanting to clear their accumulated fines.

This has prompted the authorities to extend working hours until midnight.

The Abu Dhabi police traffic department announced on Tuesday that motorists will need to pay only half of what they owe in fines to the department following a ministerial decree issued by Shaikh Saif Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior.

The traffic departments in the emirate, which include Abu Dhabi city, Musaffah, Al Ain and Gharbia (western region) have extended their working hours from 7.30am to 12 midnight. During the extended hours, only the fines payment section will function.

The sections in Abu Dhabi and Musaffah started following the new timings from yesterday while the Al Ain section will follow the timings from today.

On Tuesday alone, close to 4,000 people thronged the traffic departments to pay fines.

"More than 3,969 people cleared off their fines at the traffic departments in the emirate, inclusive of Al Ain and Gharbia (western region), on Tuesday," said Colonel Khamis Ishaq Mohammad, Deputy Director of the Traffic and Patrols department.

The reprieve comes after the amended traffic law, which stipulates hefty fines for traffic offences, left many motorists heavily indebted to the government, a senior traffic official disclosed.

"The discount on fines is not restricted to any certain point of time, but it will continue indefinitely," he said.

However, check measures to ensure those who enjoy the discount do not become repeat offenders will be put in place shortly, according to Engineer Ahmad Hussain Al Harthy, Director of the traffic department.

"Certain types of serious traffic offences will be exempted from the discounts too," he added.

Overwhelming response

The discount on fines is applicable to all traffic fines issued in Abu Dhabi, regardless of where the vehicle is registered. The discount is applicable to offences accumulated over years as well as fresh ones.

The official announcement about the discount came only three days after it was implemented.

"The news of the discount spread like fire. People assumed that it is some kind of a limited offer and they rushed to the department.

"We simply could not handle the rush ... It was overwhelming", an official at the traffic department's counter said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The total number of traffic violations recorded and the fines accumulated by some individuals are simply unbelievable," he said, without revealing exact figures.

When asked, the police headquarters declined to release the figures.

Dubai police revealed in April that they have Dh100 million in penalties to be recovered from drivers. The highest amount owed to Dubai police is from a company that had Dh305,200 worth of fines.

The highest amount owed by an individual is Dh186,900, owed by an Arab expatriate woman who no longer lives in the UAE.

Colonel Mohammed said that several traffic policemen were deployed to advise drivers to abide by traffic laws and not to repeat offences. Water and juice was distributed as a gesture of goodwill, he added.

Mixed reaction

The discount on traffic fines got a cautious welcome from residents.

While those who had amassed too many traffic tickets wholeheartedly welcomed the decision, others said it may lead to an increase in traffic offences.

"This is a great move. In the current economic situation, the government's decision is a very humanitarian one," said Naseem Faydulla, an engineer.

"I had Dh5,000 in fines collected over few years and did not know what to do. I just kept putting off the renewal of my car but now it's done."

Yajuan Chen, who works for a furniture shop said that their company car had Dh7,250 worth fines slapped over two years. "No one wanted to take the responsibility so the renewal was delayed," she said, after paying half the amount and clearing off the fines.

Another resident, Simon Stener said that he is strictly against the decision since it might trigger reckless driving.

"The leniency is likely to send out the wrong message and more drivers will resort to reckless ways," he said.

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