

Priorities

Much has been said and written these past few weeks on the subject of exempting the cars of our Members Of Parliament from Customs Duties. The ethics, necessity and legality, were discussed at length, costs were analyzed and various comparisons were made. Now one might wonder the purpose behind tackling this issue in a technology related article and if it has anything to do with IT; the answer is simple: it is a question of priorities.

Let us see how the figures add up. Our Lower House Of Deputies consists of 110 members while the Senate (which in all likelihood will also stand to benefit from such exemptions) consists of 55 members. In total, 165 members stand to receive an unrestricted cash advance of JD 35,000 each, which adds up to a stunning grand total of JD 5,775,000. This scenario is likely to be repeated every four years when a new House is elected.

Improving IT literacy, bridging the digital divide and e-education feature high on our list of national priorities and a number of initiatives are already well underway in those areas. Due to the national scale of such initiatives, most of them are funded either by donor grants or external loans with a very small portion of public funds involved. So in pure IT terms; JD 5,775,000 is equivalent to the purchase cost of over 10,000 personal computers for government schools. It is also equivalent to the cost of establishing 175 fully equipped modern computers labs complete with high speed internet access and wireless networks in as many government schools. Such labs will benefit thousands of students for years to come. Assuming for the moment that all our other national priorities (and there are many) have been totally fulfilled and implemented, the main question that springs to mind is the following: Is it possible that allocating JD 5,775,000 of public funds, from a cash strapped chronic deficit burdened government budget, and spending it on Members Of Parliament for the purpose of buying luxury cars is perceived as a higher national priority than buying 10,000 personal computers for government schools?

Jordanians should seriously contemplate respectfully requesting the government to allocate a non refundable cash advance of JD 35,000 for each and every citizen for his/her own personal use. After all, our constitution guarantees non-discrimination and the equality of rights and obligations of all citizens.

Alternatively, maybe our Members Of Parliament would consider donating the funds to worthy causes of their choice.