

Sars 'better equipped' to catch tax evaders

JOHANNESBURG: The SA Revenue Service (Sars) has become much more aggressive about tracking down tax evaders and making them cough up what they owe – plus hefty penalties – an auditing firm said yesterday.

Sars had hundreds of new collectors on its payroll and the latest technology at its fingertips, which meant it was becoming increasingly difficult to evade tax, KPMG said in a statement.

“Now is a particularly bad time to try your luck,”

Yasmeen Suliman, associate director of tax, said.

Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan had revealed that Sars had collected R598.5 billion in the 2009/10 fiscal year – R26.8bn less than it had the previous year.

“Even more serious for Sars was that this amount was R60.8bn less than it had initially planned to collect.”

Suliman said Sars had started last August to beef up its collection capability.

It had spent “millions” merging its systems to make it easier to call up all the relevant information on a taxpayer, and could now use a taxpayer’s ID number to see for what taxes he or she was registered.

Sars could ascertain the number of properties and cars a taxpayer owned, memberships and directorships in close corporations, companies held and any trusts linked to them.

Sars was identifying and prosecuting delinquent taxpayers more aggressively and was focusing more on high net worth individuals.

“They can often be identified through the media if they have a high public profile, through assets like expensive properties or cars, or through being reported by a suspicious colleague or family member,” Suliman said. – Sapa