

Yemeni riyal on rebound as people voice optimism over new government

Author:

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AL-MUKALLA: The Yemeni riyal has recovered by 20 percent after positive news about the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and the formation of a new government, giving a long-awaited boost to the chaotic exchange market.

Local moneychangers told Arab News on Sunday that the Yemeni riyal bounced to 750 against the US dollar in the government-controlled areas, rising from 925 about 10 days ago, and reviving hopes about bringing the market under the government's control.

The riyal's rebound began on Dec. 11 when the Arab coalition announced the Yemen's internationally recognized government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council agreed to withdraw their forces from Aden and Abyan.

The exchange market was given another positive boost last week when Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi issued a presidential decree announcing the formation of a new government of 24 ministers, equally represented by southerners and northerners, including the separatists.

The formation of the government has ended more than a year of political wrangling and deadlock related to the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, which was designed to defuse hostilities between the Yemeni government and the separatists.

The devolution of the Yemeni riyal during the past couple of years has pushed up prices of basic commodities and fueled public anger against the country's political establishment that had failed to address the problem.

At the same time, Yemen's new prime minister, Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed, said on Sunday that his government would return to Aden within a week after swearing in before the Yemeni president and winning a vote of confidence from parliament. Saeed told Al-Ayyam daily newspaper that his government would work "as hard as it could" to alleviate the suffering of the Yemenis and bring to life crumbled government bodies.

In southern Yemen, local officials and military commanders said on Sunday that government troops and separatists that had withdrawn from contested areas in Abyan and Aden began trickling into battlefields with the Iran-backed Houthis in the southern provinces of Abyan, Dhale and Lahj.

Fuad Jabari, Dhale front spokesperson, told Arab News that military forces that withdrew from Abyan have joined flashpoints in the province to reinforce fighters who fight off relentless attacks by the Houthis.

"The withdrawing forces have entered Dhale province accompanied by Saudi military officers. More military forces are on their way to the

battlefields,” Jabari said, adding that the Houthis have escalated attacks on southern resistance forces in the province since warring sides agreed to pull out of Aden and Abyan.

“The Houthis are using more advanced weapons nowadays. They replaced bomb drones with modern drones that fire missiles and moved back to their areas,” he said.

People in Aden, the Yemeni city that had borne the brunt of sporadic deadly fighting between government troops and separatists, and other Yemeni cities voiced their optimism with the formation of a new government and urged new ministers to fix services and create jobs.

Hanan Al-Ameri, an activist from Aden, told Arab News that the new government should immediately return to Aden to address corruption in state bodies, long power cuts, severe shortages of drinking water and skyrocketing prices.

“Regarding our demands, we want the government to fix services and then give jobs to young people and empower them in local authorities. We demand a decent life, services and protecting our violated rights,” Hanan said.

Yemeni politicians and experts echoed the same optimism about the implantation of the Riyadh Agreement and the formation of a new government, arguing that the government has unified the Yemeni forces against the Houthis and ended enmities that ruined anti-Houthi forces.

Najeeb Ghallab, undersecretary at Yemen’s Information Ministry and a political analyst, told Arab News on Sunday that the Riyadh Agreement has managed to turn antagonism between warring factions into partnership.

“Riyadh Agreement has rebuilt the forces and sent reassurances to political parties that they would not be left out. It enables the Yemeni government to assert its control over the land, have unified military forces and speak with one voice with the international community,” Ghallab said, adding that the Riyadh Agreement proved that the Arab coalition is able to bring Yemenis together if they cut off ties with foreign forces such as Iran.

“It sends a message that Saudi Arabia and the UAE can bring peace to Yemen provided the Houthis sever ties with Iran,” he said.



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[Survey reveals alienation of Kurdish youth in Turkey](#)

Author:

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ANKARA: A survey conducted by YADA Foundation, Kurdish Studies Center and Rawest Research Company reveals the growing alienation of the Kurdish youth in Turkey.

The survey, which was carried out with support of the British Embassy and the Heinrich Boll Stiftung, was conducted in Istanbul, Izmir, southern Mersin and Adana, southeastern Diyarbakir, Mardin, Sanliurfa and eastern Van provinces with more than 1,500 young people between 15 to 29 ages.

Kurdish youth appeared pessimistic, with a lower rate of happiness and life satisfaction compared to the rest of the society. Those who live in the

western half of Turkey feel much more pessimistic due to the discrimination they face.

Besides supporting the national team, they feel strongly attached to Amedspor, the football team of Kurdish-majority Diyarbakir province, as a symbol of their identity.

Over half of Kurdish youth have been internally displaced in Turkey generally with their families whether in search of employment, fleeing fighting between the state and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and/or for education purposes.

Almost 70 percent of the Kurdish respondents say they have been subject to occasional or frequent discrimination because of their Kurdish identity. Those who are voters of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) experienced more discrimination than supporters of other political parties.

Some of the respondents said that they were prevented from renting a house when they were asked about their city of origin, or they couldn't buy even a bottle of water when they attended an Amedspor match in a western province of the country.

In a similar pattern, players of Amedspor have been frequently exposed to harassment by rival fans, while the team's Kurdish supporters were occasionally banned from attending matches.

Kurdish youth increasingly use Turkish in their daily communication with friends and family members after years of crackdown on cultural rights and after failed attempts to make Kurdish language as part of the educational system.

Kurdish respondents say they cannot even dream in Kurdish.

According to another survey, only about 18 percent of the 600 young Kurds surveyed could speak, read and write in Kurdish.

Kurds make up about 20 percent of Turkey's population of 82 million. But the survey found that only a third of Kurdish youth are employed, while a quarter are working as unskilled labourers and the rest are unemployed.

Their mother tongue is the top priority issue (38.4 percent) among Kurdish youth, followed by discrimination (24 percent), education (12.5 percent), unemployment (9.8 percent), freedom of speech (7.4 percent), injustice (5.5 percent) and identity (2.4 percent).

Regarding the failure of the short-lived "Kurdish peace talks" between the Turkish state and the PKK in 2015, Kurdish youth who are pro-HDP blame both their party and the PKK for the failed peace attempts, while 65 percent think that the infighting will never end.

The survey also found that the majority of Kurdish youth is inclined to de-radicalize while they consolidate their cultural identities as Kurds.

Roj Girasun, director of Diyarbakir-based Rawest Research, thinks that Kurdish youth is being de-radicalized because they are satisfied with the increased visibility of the HDP on the political arena as a legal actor.

“However, they mostly think that the current government is not able to resolve the decades-long Kurdish conflict in the country,” he told Arab News.

A new party looking to appeal to Kurdish conservative youth is launching soon, although the opposition claims it intends to divide Kurdish votes in Turkey.

The survey also found that, given the chance, the majority of Kurdish youth would emigrate to Western countries out of pessimism over both freedom of expression and employment.

While Twitter is a source of information for about 30 percent nationally, it increases to 44 percent among Kurdish youth.

“It shows that Kurdish youth feels disappointed by the mainstream media which doesn’t give enough space and visibility to their problems, and they refer to the alternative news channels to fill this gap,” Girasun said.

Although the use of Kurdish is on the decrease among Kurdish youth, they are still holding on to their political identity and demanding more cultural rights from the state authorities to keep their mother tongue alive because those living in the western provinces are increasingly forgetting their Kurdish.

Kurdish culture has generally been demonized over the years, with Kurdish language being categorized as “unknown language” in the judicial system.

“This atmosphere affects their romantic relationships. 44 percent of Kurdish respondents do not want to marry a Turkish girl. They are building very high walls around their Kurdishness vis-à-vis Turks,” Girasun said.

Apart from such social distancing, the restriction of academia and arts in Kurdish fuels disappointment among Kurdish youth. In July, Turkey’s Council of Higher Education banned students studying Kurdish language and literature at Turkish universities from writing their dissertations in Kurdish, and obliged all dissertations at Kurdish language departments to be written in Turkish.

In October, the Turkish authorities banned a play performed in Kurdish in Istanbul by the Nobel prize-winning Italian writer Dario Fo over the allegations of terror propaganda.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently claimed that “Turkey has no Kurdish issue.”



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[Egypt cancels New Year's Eve celebrations due to coronavirus](#)

Author:

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CAIRO: Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities has canceled New Year's celebrations to avoid mass gatherings.

The decision came in response to Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly's directions, which were taken during the meeting of the Supreme Committee for the Management of the Coronavirus Crisis.

Assistant Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Abdel Fattah Al-Assy underlined the need to ban all "cultural" and "touristic" events or any celebrations on New Year's Eve to avoid mass gatherings.

He also called for “the strict implementation of the precautionary measures previously taken in the past period, while taking punitive measures against restaurants, cafes and hotels that do not adhere to implementing such measures.”

Prime Minister Dr. Mostafa Madbouly earlier headed the meeting, during which ministers and officials discussed efforts to counter the coronavirus as well as ways of providing the vaccine.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities renewed its warnings to the Chamber of Tourist Establishments to adhere to the opening and closing of tourist restaurants and cafes in accordance with the times set by the Cabinet. The ministry said that nightclubs would remain closed until a decision was made by Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Dr. Khaled El-Anany in light of the measures taken by the state to control the spread of the coronavirus.

Singing stars had already announced when they would be performing on New Year’s Eve so the latest decision put organizers and singers in a difficult position. Many organizers called for refunds for people who had reserved tables for New Year’s Eve parties.

Singers had set almost impossible conditions to perform at parties. Such conditions included a 50 percent deposit of their fees – often as much as half a million Egyptian pounds – non-refundable if the party was canceled.

Al-Assy said that the ministry had issued recommendations for tourist establishments to ban gatherings on New Year’s Eve. “We do not want to disturb people, but the whole world is implementing measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Such measures include banning gatherings and shutting down hotels,” he said.

“The ministry had issued recommendations for tourist establishments by banning gatherings on New Year’s Eve. The ministry’s teams are following-up on the implementation of the measures in such establishments.”

Al-Assy confirmed that nightclubs would remain closed until further a decision by the ministry in light of the measures taken by the state to counter the spread of the coronavirus.

The ministry stressed that weddings, parties, special occasions and gatherings would continue to be banned from being held in closed halls until a decision to reopen the halls was issued.



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Al-Azhar decrees prohibition of joining Muslim Brotherhood
Egyptian government denies privatizing spinning and weaving factories

[Al-Azhar decrees prohibition of joining Muslim Brotherhood](#)

Author:

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CAIRO: Al-Azhar Fatwa Global Center has said that joining the Muslim Brotherhood and other terrorist groups is forbidden according to Shariah and that God has forbidden division and disagreement.

The Egyptian newspaper Al-Watan quoted Al-Azhar as saying in its announcement that God forbids people from pursuing any path that distracts them from following the truth, explaining that keeping to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, in accordance with Shariah, was the only way to please God.

"It is clear to the public what these groups have done in distorting some texts, cutting them out of their context, and using them to achieve personal goals or interests and corrupting the land," the center said in the fatwa.

“Membership in these extremist groups is considered forbidden by Shariah.”

“Joining the terrorist Brotherhood is forbidden by law [and is considered] cooperating in immorality and aggression, for that group violates the law of God and is involved in terrorism,” said Abdullah Al-Najjar, a member of the Islamic Research Academy.

Hussein Al-Qadi, a researcher in religious affairs and Islamic movements, said that the fatwa is the first of its kind in the history of Al-Azhar.

“This fatwa has never been issued from Al-Azhar before. Various statements were issued by Al-Azhar describing the Brotherhood as being outdated. In fact, Imam Muhammad Mustafa Al-Maraghi, reformer and rector of Al-Azhar, demanded the dissolution of the Brotherhood,” Al-Qadi said.

“Al-Azhar Al-Sharif published in 1965 a report refuting Sayed Qutb’s thought and showing that it is perverse. Qutb was a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. The fatwa issued today that prohibits joining the Muslim Brotherhood is consistent with Al-Azhar’s march in this direction,” he added.

“I think that this fatwa is an important step that deserves praise...and greater efforts should be based on this move,” he said.



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Egypt's Al-Azhar calls on international community to criminalize 'anti-Muslim' actions
Al-Azhar grand imam threatens legal action against those who insult prophet

No reason for delay in forming Lebanese government, says leading Christian cleric

Author:

Zaynab Khojji

ID:

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BEIRUT: There is no reason for delaying the formation of a new Lebanese government, the country's leading Christian cleric said on Sunday. Efforts to form a new government have been blocked by political factions, with Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai making a personal intervention to dissolve the stalemate.

Mustapha Adib quit as prime minister in September, less than a month after he was nominated to replace Hassan Diab, who took over from Saad Hariri at the end of January this year.

The cleric said that in all his communications during the past few days with President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister-designate Hariri and the head of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) Gebran Bassil, he had found "no reason for the delay in forming the government – not for a single day."

He stressed the need for a government that was free of quotas, counter-conditions, and obstructions that paralyzed its decisions.

"This government must be non-political and non-partisan, with ministers who are known to civil society for their competence, achievements, and expertise, provided this government is formed in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and through consultation and pure intentions between the PM-designate and the president within the framework of an agreement, partnership, and rotating portfolios."

Al-Rai said that the job of the new government was to "devote itself to implementing reforms, receive the planned and promised international aid, and prioritize rebuilding Beirut, which was destroyed by the (Aug. 4) explosion."

On Dec. 9 Hariri suggested to Aoun a cabinet lineup of 18 ministers but, since that date, there has been no progress in forming a new government.

The past 48 hours have seen increased tensions between the FPM and the Future Movement, giving the impression that the process of forming a government was becoming more complicated and that the patriarch's mediation would not lead to a breakthrough.

The FPM issued a statement accusing Hariri of “attempting to bypass the constitutional authority of the president as an equal partner in the process of forming the government and as the head of the country, in addition to insisting on heeding the covenant, not adopting clear and unified standards for dealing with all Lebanese people, having an intention to look right through national balances, and returning to a time of marginalization and eroding rights.”

Its statement added: “This cannot be tolerated.”

Information leaked to the media said the FPM would agree to the formation of a government in exchange for three major ministries – interior, defense and justice – that would put it in charge of Lebanon’s security portfolio.

The Future Movement accused the FMP leadership of “insisting on overthrowing the constitutional standard for forming governments.”

FPM lawmaker Ibrahim Kanaan announced after his meeting with Al-Rai on Sunday that the debates should not continue and that Aoun was ready to settle the government matter in accordance with the constitution and a French initiative aimed at rebuilding the country and salvaging the economy. But he did not give details.

He expected a meeting between Aoun and Hariri early next week in light of the clarifications and communication taking place, especially since the president was “determined to resolve the government formation issue” in accordance with the constitution and the French initiative.

Mustafa Alloush, the vice president of the Future Movement, addressed Aoun and his son-in-law Bassil on social media: “If the intention is to destroy the structure over everyone, then you have succeeded. But what is the point of passing the presidency down to the president’s son-in-law on the ruins of a homeland? All that deception of the constitution will not work. A government with a mission is the only way to stop the collapse and protect Lebanon – if you have a conscience.”

The squabbling and stalemate led Samir Geagea, who heads the Lebanese Forces party, to call for the president’s resignation.

After a meeting of his parliamentary bloc he said: “The ruling group is not fit to rule. It is corrupt, and this is what brought the country to where it is. If I were the president of the republic, I would have resigned. This applies to the whole group in power.”



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