

Lebanese caught between old and new \$100 banknotes

Author:

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BEIRUT: Lebanese money changers refusing to accept older \$100 banknotes, known as “white notes,” is causing confusion, particularly after some people were charged an extra \$5 fee for exchanging \$100 white bills.

Dozens of customers flocked to banks to learn more about the news, especially since some of the white \$100 notes were issued by banks.

A customer told Arab News: “Every Lebanese is keeping a stack of \$100 bills in their home for when they need them the most since the banks confiscated our deposits, and no one dares to deposit a single dollar in the bank nowadays.”

He added: “I went to my bank to inquire about this new rule adopted by money changers. My daughter told me that one refused to exchange the \$100 that she gave him, claiming it was an old edition and he had the right to take \$5 as commission if she wanted to exchange it. Who gave them the right to do this? I, my wife and my children all work and we save whatever we make in dollars. Does this mean that our savings have become worthless?”

He said: “The bank manager told me that the problem is with money changers, not banks, since they do not have instructions to stop dealing with the old \$100 bills; on the contrary, banks are using both the old and new editions. He suggested that I occasionally bring him \$200 to \$400, in exchange for which he would give me \$50 bills until the issue with money changers is resolved.”

Over the past few days, the topic of “old, white” \$100 and the “new, blue” \$100 banknotes has dominated conversation.

Money transfer companies were also said to have refused to deal with the older notes. Some money changers have taken advantage of the ambiguity to impose a \$10 fee for exchanging white \$100 bills.

The confusion was said to have been stirred by one of the largest money shipping companies, shut down after it was subject to a judicial investigation into smuggling funds abroad after Oct. 17, 2019 – when the financial crisis hit Lebanon, and in light of which Banque du Liban froze transfers inside and outside Lebanon.

Mahmoud Murad, former head of the Syndicate of Money Changers, told Arab News: “This fad has been circulating in the Lebanese financial market for about a week now. We do not know its source, nor who invented it. The problem is that people believe anything in Lebanon.”

He added: “People who come to my business to buy dollar bills only accept the

blue-colored edition now. We, as money changers, are buying and selling both the old and new editions; nothing has changed.”

Murad said: “If the \$100 notes are worn-out or torn, we buy them from people but never sell them again. Instead, we give them to shipping companies to return them to the US and replace them with brand-new ones.

“But everyone in Lebanon is now a money changer. The Lebanese, the Syrian, the Sri Lankan, the Bengali, the supermarket cashier, the butcher, all engage in exchanging money. Money changers should not be blamed for this.”

Murad said that the Syndicate of Money Changers met on Wednesday and stressed that all money changers follow legal and moral rules when dealing with customers.

However, Banque du Liban revealed in a statement on Wednesday that “some banks and money changers have charged fees for exchanging \$100 banknotes, claiming that they are outdated.”

It added: “The specifications of valid \$100 notes are determined by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, an agency affiliated with the US Treasury,” noting: “BDL alone determines the specifications of valid Lebanese currency.”

The US Embassy in Lebanon also stated on Wednesday that “it is US government policy that all designs of Federal Reserve notes remain legal tender, or legally valid for payments, regardless of when they were issued. This policy includes all denominations of Federal Reserve notes, from 1914 to present.”

Meanwhile, the Association of Banks in Lebanon announced that “after the great controversy surrounding some money changers taking commissions on old \$100 bills, ABL would like to clarify that Lebanese banks deal with banknotes without any amendment to existing procedures. No additional fee is charged for accepting white \$100 banknotes.”

OMT Exchange also stated that it “has not stopped accepting white \$100 bills, if they are in good condition, and no additional fee is charged at any of our centers. OMT does not accept any banknotes that are torn, burnt, yellowed, or even partially damaged.”



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Lebanon currency hits new low
Lebanon relaunches support programs for the vulnerable

[Kuwait detects first case of omicron variant](#)

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ARAB NEWS

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Wed, 2021-12-08 23:18

KUWAIT: Kuwait has detected its first case of the omicron variant of the coronavirus, state news agency KUNA reported on Wednesday. The variant was detected in a European traveler who arrived to Kuwait from an African country where the variant had been detected, KUNA reported, citing a health ministry spokesman. Speaking to KUNA, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sanad said the traveler had received both dosages of the COVID-19 vaccine previously and now he is under institutional quarantine, according to the health protocol.

He added that the ministry has taken necessary precautions since several nations announced discovering the new variant. Currently, the pandemic situation in Kuwait is stable, according to Al-Sanad, however, citizens and residents have been advised to take the booster shot to help the ministry curb the spread. Studies have shown that current vaccines are effective against omicron, he stressed. On Wednesday, health authorities recorded 18 recoveries, one death and 33 new coronavirus infections, bringing the cases to a total of 413,588 in Kuwait.



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Kuwaiti people look forward to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit
Oman, UAE, Kuwait and Egypt ban travelers from southern African states over COVID-19 variant

[French ambassador tells Aoun:](#)

Implement Jeddah Agreement

Wed, 2021-12-08 01:17

BEIRUT: On Tuesday, at the request of President Emmanuel Macron, French Ambassador to Lebanon Anne Griot briefed Lebanese President Michel Aoun on Macron's Gulf tour, especially his visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which "expressed its commitment to helping Lebanon, pointing out the need to implement the commitments that have been undertaken," as stated by the media office of the Lebanese presidency.

During the meeting, Griot stressed that "Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries are ready to undertake the required steps, and that for its part, Lebanon should undertake what is required from it and prove its credibility in its commitment to reforms, especially the structural reforms that require new work tools to confront the deep crisis."

The meeting held last Saturday in Jeddah between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Macron saw the issuing of a statement concerning Lebanon, in which the pair stressed the "need (for) the Lebanese government to undertake comprehensive reforms."

The two sides also stressed the "need to limit possession of arms to legitimate state institutions," and that "Lebanon should not serve as a base for terrorist acts that destabilize the security and stability of the region, or a base for drug trafficking," further stressing "the importance of strengthening the role of the Lebanese Army in maintaining the security and stability of Lebanon."

The pair had made a joint phone call during the meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

During her talks with Aoun, Griot stressed the importance placed by the international community and France in the legislative, municipal, and presidential elections due next year.

In response to the Saudi-French statement, on behalf of Hezbollah, former minister Mohammed Fneish said on Tuesday that the group "will not ... substitute the symbol of our dignity and freedom with bare essentials of living conditions.

"The attempts to make us relinquish the resistance and its arms in return of resolving the economic crisis is something unacceptable to us," he added.

BACKGROUND

The meeting held last Saturday in Jeddah between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Macron saw the issuing of a statement concerning Lebanon, in which the pair stressed the 'need (for) the Lebanese government to undertake comprehensive reforms.'

Cabinet sessions have been suspended since Oct. 12 over Hezbollah's stubbornness over the investigation into the Port of Beirut explosion. Judicial investigator Tariq Bitar is accused by the group of being biased against it, according to its chief, Hassan Nasrallah.

On Tuesday, the Civil Court of Appeal of Beirut, headed by Judge Randa Harrouq, rejected a lawsuit submitted by former minister Youssef Fenianos against Bitar "for lack of qualitative jurisdiction."

Harrouq decided to "fine the plaintiff an amount of 800,000 Lebanese pounds (\$530) and inform Judge Bitar of the content of the decision, which entails that he continues his investigations related to the file of the Port of Beirut explosion."

A judicial source told Arab News that the defendants have exhausted all the steps that could be undertaken at the Court of Appeal, and that they might resort to the Court of Cassation to obstruct the interrogation of 4 former ministers in addition to former Prime Minister Hassan Diab.

Bitar has not yet undertaken any indictments despite the fact that nearly 16 months have passed since the disaster.

According to another judicial source, Bitar has rejected all attempts to remove the brief from him and to refer the ministers and the prime minister to a court that would be formed by Parliament to try presidents and ministers, a request made by Hezbollah and the Amal Movement.



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Mikati holds key meetings in effort to restore Arab trust in Lebanon
France's Macron says hoping for progress on Lebanon 'within next hours'

[Gazan who lost 6 family members in Israeli strike loses case against Gantz](#)

Wed, 2021-12-08 00:45

THE HAGUE: A Dutch appeals court on Tuesday upheld a lower court's decision to throw out a civil case against Israel's defense minister and another former senior military officer over their roles in a deadly 2014 airstrike.

The Hague District Court ruled in January 2020 that the case against Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz and former air force commander Amir Eshel couldn't proceed because the men have "functional immunity from jurisdiction."

The Hague Court of Appeal said on Tuesday that the lower court was right to rule that Gantz, who was military chief of staff at the time of the airstrike, and Eshel had immunity because they were carrying out Israeli government policies.

The case was brought by Ismail Ziada, who lost six members of his family in the airstrike that lawyers for the men argued was part of an Israeli military operation during the 2014 Gaza conflict.

**A military slaughter in Gaza. A legal slaughter in The Hague.
That's how it feels.**

Ismail Ziada

He wanted the Dutch court to order Gantz and Eshel to pay damages and his lawyers argued that the men didn't have immunity because their actions amounted to war crimes.

Ziada said Tuesday's ruling was "in contradiction with any sense of justice" and branded the judges "cowards" for their decision.

"A military slaughter in Gaza. A legal slaughter in The Hague. That's how it feels," he said.

Responding to the Dutch court decision while on a tour of the Gaza border,

Gantz said he was proud of his command of the Israeli military, which he said "adheres to values and human rights" and observes international law "with a real goal to protect the citizens of Israel and allow them to live in peace and calm."

Roy Schondorf, a deputy Israeli attorney general, welcomed the ruling.

"The appeals court recognized their immunity from civil prosecution for anti-terror activities in the framework of operation 'protective edge.' This is a very important legal precedent that protects all IDF (Israeli military) commanders from similar attempts," Schondorf tweeted.

The lower court also said Ziada was free to sue the men in Israel. At hearings in 2019, Ziada rejected the idea that he has access to justice in Israel as "farcical as well as vicious."

Ziada told an earlier hearing that he lost his mother, three brothers, a sister-in-law and a 12-year-old nephew in the airstrike.

Israel's Justice Ministry told the court before the 2020 decision that an internal Israeli military investigation determined the airstrike had killed four militants hiding in the house.

It said the attack was permissible under international law. Gaza's Hamas rulers themselves have said that two militants were in the building.

Ziada's lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld said the judges had taken a conservative interpretation of the law.

"They had the ... legal space to decide differently in our favor, legally speaking, but then there's no precedent," Zegveld said. "So they had to do something not so much new, but something that hadn't happened before."

The ruling can be appealed to the Dutch Supreme Court.



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Dutch court to rule on Palestinian's case against Israeli defense minister
Israeli defense minister apologizes for Palestinian's death

[Geneva sisters repatriated from Syrian desert camp](#)

Wed, 2021-12-08 00:27

GENEVA: Two Swiss half-sisters whose mother took them out of the country with her when she joined the Daesh militant group in the Middle East in 2016 have been repatriated from a desert camp in northeastern Syria, the Swiss Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

The older girl, now 15, had suffered a severe shrapnel wound to her leg, requiring three operations, while the younger was said to be in poor health.

The ministry confirmed that it had repatriated the two minors from the Al-Roj camp in northeast Syria.

“The children arrived on Swiss soil on Dec. 6 at Geneva airport, having passed through Iraq,” it said in a statement.

FASTFACT

The Al-Hol and Al-Roj camps hold nationals from some 60 countries who fled from Daesh’s last enclaves.

The repatriation, believed to be the first of its kind to Switzerland, was carried out with the consent of their mother.

The government has previously said she was still in the camp and has several nationalities, although her Swiss citizenship had been withdrawn for security reasons. The girls have different fathers in Geneva.

The case had been raised by UN human rights experts in April.

The experts said then that the girls had been allegedly abducted in 2016 by their mother who joined Daesh. A senior Swiss official said at the time that it was working hard to have the girls sent home.

More than 60,000 people, two-thirds of them children, are held in camps for families associated with Daesh. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which visits the camps, has described them as a “tragedy in plain sight.”



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