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## New Iraq currency delivered to banks

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BAGHDAD (Agence France-Presse) -- U.S. armored trucks fanned out yesterday across Baghdad on final deliveries of the new currency, which does not bear the face of ousted President Saddam Hussein and is due to be put into circulation tomorrow.

Convoys drove through the crowded streets of the capital, escorted by Humvees from the 1st Armored Division and helicopters hovering overhead.

The convoys were delivering the new bank notes, printed in Britain, which had been stored in crates for safekeeping at Baghdad International Airport, where the U.S. military is headquartered.

Large planes have been flying into Baghdad from London several times a week for the last two weeks to transport the new currency. Smaller planes have been delivering new bank notes to Mosul in the north and Basra in the south.

Daily convoys ferry the money by road through the rest of the country from the three hubs.

At Baghdad airport, workers used forklifts to load about 30 wooden boxes -- each containing 50,000 bank notes in denominations of 25,000 or 5,000 -- into four armored trucks.

The total value delivered yesterday was 16.5 billion dinars, about \$8.25 million.

Basel Abushaban, who is in charge of the U.S.-led coalition's currency-exchange operations in Baghdad, said deliveries have so far been made to about 80 banks in the capital.

A total of 250 banks nationwide will be supplied with the new currency, he said.

The first stop yesterday was at the Rafidain Bank in the Mansur central neighborhood of Baghdad, where the branch manager said: "The introduction of the new currency in the market is a big event.

"One of the things [people] are looking forward to, with all this counterfeit money floating in the market, is that this problem will be eliminated," he said.

All banks throughout Iraq, many of which were heavily looted in the chaotic aftermath of the U.S.-led offensive that brought down the Saddam regime, are now guarded by Iraqi police, private guards and the U.S. military.

The second stop for the new bank notes was at another branch of the Rafidain Bank in the northern Ziwiyah neighborhood, where workers carried the crates, each weighing 110 pounds, down into the bank vaults.

Bank manager Maan Hussein Ali said he was eager to have the bank notes in circulation because of their new security features preventing counterfeiting.


"It is a serious problem we have now. Due to the fact that printing presses and papers were stolen, counterfeit money is very close to the real thing," said Mr. Ali.

"It makes it very difficult even for experts. Vault keepers and longtime bank employees sometimes can't tell what is counterfeit and what is not," he added.

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