

Rwanda introduces new currency to deprive exiles of wealth

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KIGALI, Jan 3 (AFP) - The Rwandan government on Tuesday issued new banknotes and declared the previous ones no longer legal tender in a secretly prepared bid to deprive exiled former leaders of their wealth.

The aim was to render worthless the huge sums of money taken abroad, mainly to Zaire, by former government officials and soldiers routed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in July after three months of ethnic carnage.

Officials of the former Hutu majority regime of late president Juvenal Habyarimana, killed in a suspicious plane crash in April, have vowed to exact revenge on the Tutsi-led RPF, which established a coalition government.

The government's decision to issue new notes of 5,000, 1,000 and 500 Rwandan francs (from about 22 to two dollars) was only announced a day before the move was taken, fol-

lowing a cabinet meeting Monday.

The government stated that the exchange of currency would begin on Tuesday and end on Wednesday morning. The national bank has set up special offices in the capital Kigali and throughout the central African highland country.

The 100 franc note and coins remain valid.

The government also decided that nobody will be authorised to enter the country with more than 5,000 Rwandan francs. The dollar was trading in Kigali on Tuesday for about 225 francs.

Rwanda's Hutu Prime Minister, Faustin Twagiramungu, declared after the new government was formed that a new currency would be introduced.

The RPF accuses soldiers and extremist Hutu militiamen of the ousted regime of the genocidal slaughter of between 500,000 and one

million Tutsis and opposition Hutus in the months following Habyarimana's death.

Many former government officials, administrators and soldiers fled across the border to Zaire, with more than a million mainly Hutu people, and have been charged with attacking and intimidating Rwandans in

sprawling refugee camps and preventing them from returning home.

The UN Security Council has voted to establish a war crimes tribunal for Rwanda. UN officials and humanitarian aid workers have also accused some RPF soldiers of carrying out reprisal massacres.

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