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Be wary of RM500 notes, says Bank Negara

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Bank Negara Malaysia has advised the public to be careful when accepting RM500 notes in exchange for smaller denominations following the disappearance of a shipment of such bills from the central bank recently.

In a statement faxed to the NST today, Bank Negara said the matter was under police investigation.

The statement added that all the notes carried the same serial number (ZW0000000) and the word 'Contoh' had been printed on both faces of the currency.

A spokesman contacted later clarified that the batch of RM500 notes was not of a new design but were specimen notes of the existing RM500 design in circulation.

"Members of the public who come across these specimen notes should refer to the police or the nearest Bank Negara branch," the spokesman said.

In a front-page report today, the NST said the disappearance of the RM500 notes was only detected by Bank Negara after one of the bills was surrendered by a local bank early this week.

Asked why the central bank's England-based printers, Harrisons & Sons, sent a shipment of specimen notes if they were indeed of the existing design, the spokesman declined comment.

Today's report said an unidentified person had turned up at a commercial bank branch in Sungai Buloh and handed a new RM500 bill for smaller notes before leaving.

The branch manager handed the note to Bank Negara on learning that notes bearing such a serial number had not been issued for circulation.

Bank Negara then contacted its printers in England who informed it that a shipment of 200 pieces of the RM500 note had been sent to the central bank via secured courier for its approval.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, when asked if there was a need to tighten security at Bank Negara following the incident, said: "Such a move has been implemented, yet it (breach of security) still happens.

"I am leaving the matter (the review of security) to Bank Negara," he told reporters after attending a Hari Raya gathering organised by the Maktab Sultan Abdul Hamid Old Boys Association (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor).

Dr Mahathir, who is president of the association, officiated the gathering at the Malaysia Tourist Information Centre at Jalan Ampang.

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