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A HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL READING OF THE PHENOMENON OF COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY

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ABSTRACT
This study provides a historical and analytical examination of the phenomenon of counterfeit currency, one of the oldest economic challenges known to humanity. Counterfeiting activities emerged alongside the development of monetary systems, beginning with early metallic coinage in the first millennium B.C.E., where counterfeiters sought illicit gains through imitating official currency. Over time, counterfeiting techniques evolved from simple metal manipulation to highly sophisticated methods used in producing modern banknote forgeries.
Historically, the prevalence of counterfeit currency was closely associated with periods of political instability, economic crises, and armed conflicts, during which illicit funds were used to support illegal activities or undermine rival economies. Ancient civilizations, including Greek and Roman societies, experienced widespread coin counterfeiting, which contributed to currency devaluation, disrupted trade, and accelerated inflation.
In the contemporary era, the problem has grown more complex with the advent of advanced printing technologies, digital tools, and globalized financial networks, enabling the production of high-quality counterfeit banknotes that pose significant challenges to monetary authorities. Counterfeit currency continues to threaten economic stability, weaken public trust in financial systems, and inflict substantial losses on central banks, businesses, and individuals.
This paper emphasizes the ongoing need for governments and financial institutions to strengthen preventive measures through improved detection technologies, robust regulatory frameworks, and public awareness campaigns. Understanding the historical trajectory and modern dynamics of counterfeiting provides essential insights for developing effective strategies to combat this enduring economic threat.

Keywords: Counterfeit Currency, Monetary Systems, Economic Stability, Financial Crimes, Ancient Coinage, Currency Devaluation, Inflation, Detection Technologies and Forgery Techniques.

1. INTRODUCTION
The phenomenon of counterfeit currency is regarded as one of the most ancient economic problems in the history of humanity that is attained with the financial and economics systems evolution over the millennia. Counterfeiters tried to duplicate official currency since the first millennium B.C.E.

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with the advent of metallic coinage so as to gain illegal profits. With time, the methods of counterfeiting were also advanced to be more sophisticated and complex and this demanded governments and monetary authorities to take stringent measures to curb this phenomenon.

Traditionally, counterfeit currency was largely linked with times of economic and political unrest and war, when the need in such money rose to finance illegal actions. Cases of coin counterfeiting were common in many ancient societies, such as the Greeks and the Romans, which resulted in a decrease of the currency value, and an increase in inflation. The problem has become even more complicated in the modern world, as nowadays counterfeiters use advanced technologies to create high-quality counterfeits in the form of banknotes.

According to historical research, the counterfeit money remains a major problem to the economies of the world, influencing the financial market stability and leading to massive losses to central banks, companies, and individuals. Thus, there is still needed to have governments and monetary authorities increase their efforts to fight this phenomenon by creating new detection tools and educating the population about the dangers of it.

The Beginning of Counterfeiting

Counterfeiting of money first started to be manifested towards the end of the fifth century B.C.E. The counterfeiters would use deceptive coating, where they made coins that would be of the same size and shape as that of the official currency but would have a different metal composition. They made the core of the coin and covered the outer part of the coin with a precious metal using cheap metals. As an illustration, a one-dinar counterfeit coin can be produced using copper and then coated with gold to resemble a real gold dinar.[i]

In the fourth century B.C.E., the stamping coins with the name or mark of the official who made them was introduced in a bid to control the production of counterfeit currency. This action allowed detection of forged coins, and it was popularized by the Greek mints and was later spread to many Greek city-states.[ii]

As a result, the state became the sole authority in the control of coinage and the use of official seal to convert it to nomism -the Greek word that means that the coin was lawfully accepted. This was a step that reassured the citizens about the validity of the currency and made it circulate.[iii]

In order to prevent manipulation of weight and purity standards, the authority to mint currency became the exclusive right of the ruling power. At the outset, coin minting was carried out honestly, without counterfeiting, and the nominal value of a coin was equal to its actual market value. Therefore, when the owner of a coin decided to melt it down to make jewellery, the loss suffered was minimal which was called the minting fee. But such equality of nominal and intrinsic value was not always to be, particularly at the time of monetary crisis. Leaders would then print coins with less valuable metal like gold as compared to the official standard. The holders of such debased coins would lose because of the decrease in the amount of precious metal contained in them, but they tended to keep on being used because the issuing government had authoritative power and prestige[iv].

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An example with a significant illustration is when in the year 367 B.C.E., the king Dionysius (394-364 B.C.E.) diluted the silver content contained in the drachma by fifty percent replacing the rest with other metals. The drachma was then issued in half its face value, which enabled the state to utilize the difference to settle the state debt.[v]

The fact that coins were intrinsically valued was also compromised by the insatiability of some of the rulers who wanted to get personal wealth, and they did this by exploiting their power and the confidence of the people on the official minted coins. Because people seldom checked coins to determine their accurate weight and purity, rulers could easily become rich because of such activities.

The currency manipulation further persisted in the Roman Empire. The First and Second Punic Wars put the state under financial strain and massive coin weight reduction was made to cater to the financial requirements of the war. During subsequent times, the government revenues diminished, and emperors gave numerous gifts to the inhabitants of imperial capital. An example is Emperor Nero who dropped the weight of the coins in Rome and came out with plated coins that did not pose any difference to the coins in the eyes. Equally, Emperor Septimius Severus and his son, Caracalla, took advantage of purity and weight of Roman currency to alleviate the economic condition of the empire by lowering the amount of gold and silver in coins and minimizing their weight. This decline until in the termination of the third century C.E. the counterfeit and debased coins were rejected by the merchants. Emperor Diocletian, therefore, brought about significant reforms in 296 C.E., including major reforms to stabilize the currency system.[vi]

Counterfeiting in Arab Currency

The Arabs, both before and after the advent of Islam, continued to use the prevailing currencies of the time, which were struck by the Byzantines and the Persians. However, these currencies were at times subject to fraud and counterfeiting, and some of them reached the Muslim treasury (Bayt Al-alal) in a falsified form. It can be observed in the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), when the treasurer in Kufa was the 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud. Every time he discovered forged currency, he got them cut, saying: These are fakes struck by non-Arabs in which they cheated.[vii]

Coins also fell prey to counterfeiting through clipping where individuals would remove small portions of the coins and enjoy the extracted metal considering that coins were not weighed but counted in the early Islamic period. The Prophet {Peace be upon him} prohibited breaking coins of Muslims to make jewels, adornments, or utensils as this would make the money useless and it will deny the community its economic role.[viii]

It was also told as was narrated by 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him): Whoever finds his dirhams falsified, let him go to the market and purchase tattered cloth, and do not quarrel with men over it, but it is flawed. To stress the fact that counterfeit coins possess depleted value, he compared them with a used cloth.[ix]

Such counterfeits included the dinars that were thought to be minted during the Umayyad period of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan. It was mentioned that a soldier discovered a counterfeit dinar and

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carried it to Mu'awiya saying: O Mu'awiya, we have found your minting the worst minting. Mu'awiya answered in an intelligent way: I will take away thy stipend and dress thee with a dainty garment. [x]The present of the costly cloak was to hush the complaint, since it was of more value than the stipend of the soldier.

It is also mentioned in the historical sources that al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi, preceding the standardization of Islamic coinage under the formal caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, minted coins with the silver residue of the mint; quantities that did not contain enough silver to be minted, and produced poor-quality coins and counterfeit coins.[xi]

Such low-grade coins were dubbed al-makruha (the unliked), not because they did not have religious inscriptions on them, as some later authors have argued, but due to the sheer amount of fraud and impurity with which they were made. [xii]According to Nasir al-Naqshbandi, the name was created due to all the dissatisfaction with their adulteration.[xiii]

Apparently, coins that the Arabs used during the pre-Islamic days and the early Islamic era were not always accurate and unmanipulated. Much of the dirhams were of low metal and not very pure, and several caliphs and governors had to mend, restructure, coinage, and as far as was possible purify it. These endeavours were very fruitful. An example is that, when the governor of Kufa, Umar ibn Hubayra, demanded high-purity dirhams, which came to be referred to as al-Hubayriyya. Likewise, coins were called after their superintendents, e.g. al-Khalidiyya after Khalid al-Qasri and al-Yusufiyya after Yusuf ibn 'Umar. Islam currency continued high after the Arabization of money and during the early Abbasid era.[xiv]

This is the reason why the state cares about monetary integrity: the mints were directly controlled by the caliphs; they ensured the precise weights and the purity rates. During the reign of Harun al-Rashid, however, direct supervision was lessened, and he assigned the job to his vizier Ja'far al-Barmaki, who contaminated the coinage by decreasing the mass. At the execution of Ja'far, al-Rashid appointed the coin maker Al-Sindi ibn Shak that resumed the coinage to the high standards of weight and purity.[xv]

Later in the Abbasid era, politics disintegrated resulting in regional dynasties that were autonomous. This decentralization, lavish lifestyles, fiscal shortages and domestic strife undermined governmental control. This led to widespread counterfeiting and adulteration of money- as compared to the earlier times where Abbasid coinage was highly controlled.[xvi]

An example of this is that the gold dinars produced by Abbasid rulers of Egypt had a mass of about 3.72 g, which was less than the required mass of 4.25 g. Governors used the decline in weight to their benefit and to gain personal political advantages.[xvii]

There are many examples of fake money of this time stated. In 315 AH (927 CE), an Abbasid military chief named Ibn Abi al-Saj grumbled that he had been shipped 42,000 counterfeit dirhams and suffered disastrous losses because of this.

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Equally, the leader called Amir al-Umara al-Raiqi created dinars that contained high amounts of base metals making them less valuable economically.[xviii]

The manipulation and counterfeiting were also carried out under the Fatimid's. Jawhar al-Siqilli did away with the so-called white dinar in 359 AH (969 CE): this was a silver coin with a gold coating, with a value of ten dirhams. He ordered its value to drop to six dirhams, and it was lost extensively.[xix]

Another episode where a promise of 100,000 dinars was made by the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz to Hassan ibn al-Jarrah to give up the Qarmatians (363 AH / 973 CE) also occurred. When the payment was made ready, the officials put false dinars with counterfeit copper-gold-plated coins into the sacks to trick him and put them at the bottom.[xx]

In the late Fatimid period, silver dirhams of low purity (which are called al-sawda` al-sawda by the Arabic term: the black ones) were minted, with silver content of only 30 and copper content of 70 percent.[xxi]

Faking was high in the Buyid state. The coins of the reigns of Adud al-Dawla and Baha` al-Dawla had very low contents of gold purity. Mints of some dinars between 397-404 AH (1006-1013 CE) had less than 50-56% of gold content.[xxii]

Forged coins which were called as al-qita` and al-muzayada resulted in a great economic imbalance in 395 AH (1004 CE). Governments now ordered the people to take these coins to the mint to be rest rued--but to receive one standard dirham of them in place of every four forged dirhams, and this involved great individual loss to the people.[xxiii]

The government, on the other hand, made lots of profits out of the operation. Officials in effect confiscated close to 60 percent of the value of transactions when the cost of new dirhams was set at eighteen dirhams per unit of silver.[xxiv]

Buyid coins had become decreasingly pure, dinars called al-rukaynah, named after 'Ali ibn Buyah Rukn al-Dawla (430 AH / 957 CE), being at first half-copper, later 100 per cent copper. [xxv]

Another forgery of a gold dinar made of gilded copper was discovered in the Damascus Museum and was minted in 433 A.H during the Fatimid reign of al-Muntasir bi-Allah.[xxvi]

Extensive counterfeiting is also testified by Ibn Khallikan who reported how Iraqis used to rely on tiny counterfeiting coins referred to as al-qirada as well as the spoiled coins referred to as al-mathlum.[xxvii]

Ibn Jubayr (580 AH / 1184 CE) also condemned the Iraqis on clipping dinars.[xxviii]

The Ayyubid Saladin struck the al-Nasiriyya dirhams which was compromised with 50 percent base metals and had a greater nominal value than real value. Human beings were seriously victimized by their use and termed them as fake dirhams in Egypt and in Alexandria. The value of

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the silver dirham collapsed as another monetary crisis took place during the reign of al-Malik al-Kamil (630 AH / 1232 CE) because of extensive counterfeiting of coins. Silver coins gave place to copper coins in circulation, and this only stimulated the importation of foreign silver coins including Venetian and Florentine coins. The situation was used by Italian merchants to smuggle Egyptian silver to foreign countries to be minted.[xxix]

Counterfeiting, especially of fals coins of copper, was common during the reign of the Mamluks (648-784 AH / 1250-1382 CE). The coins issued by Sultan al-'Adil Kitbugha were underweight, leading for the first time to the use of copper coins by weight, and not by count, using a weight of two silver dirhams of copper coin per pound.[xxx]

The state of the population also worsened in the year 720 AH / 1320CE because of the popularization of debased bronze coins (zaghliyya). The counting of forty-eight fals to a silver dirham was done, which were the coins coined in the state mint. In the meantime, counterfeiters (the zaghliyya) minted coins (of less weight) outside the state mints which closely resembled the official ones. People in Damascus had a form of fals called al-qaratis, which Nasir Muhammad banned to unify currency with that of Egypt. As a result, fals made of lightweight were minted in Damascus. When these fake coins accompanied the merchants to Egypt and were mixed with the high quality fals, the percentage of light coins in the markets was more, which harmed the people, led to the increment of prices, and the shops were closed. This was brought about by an official proclamation which declared fals to be traded by weight, at half a pound of silver dirhams. The other proclamation stated that coins that were not used in transactions were those that had the official state seal in the mint, and those coins which had not been worn (tard) were to be rejected as well. These efforts, however, failed to discourage the counterfeiters, who made forgeries bearing a counterfeit of the official seal, which were like those that were issued by the government mint. It was then declared that all fals would be valued at a value of two and a half silver dirhams per pound.[xxxi] The counterfeiting went on, and the coins were brought out in shapes quite unlike the official fals which were just being struck; their material and construction were unreliable, and their weight gradually decreased. They were weighed on big scales (al-qabban) at 118 pounds per five hundred dirhams and their weight fell until it reached 111 pounds per five hundred dirhams. The old fals--which is neither struck nor impressed with the seal of the sultan--they were made of red and yellow copper pieces. They were selling at two dirhams per pound, however, at one point the cost dropped to one and a half dirhams per pound.[xxxii]

Definition of Counterfeiting (al-Tazyif)
A layer of adulterated or defective dirhams is called al-zayf specifically in Arabic. Zafat al-dirahim signifies the frauds that were refused in them. Ibn Sidah says: Zafa al-dirham yazifu zayfan wa-ziyufan: it was rejected. A forged coin is referred to as zayf and the plural is zuyuf. As Imru` al-Qays said:

"... And among the people is a false one, like counterfeit dirhams."

Therefore, linguistically, tazyif is to tamper or debase coins to render them flawed and of little worth. It refers to the act of making money adulterated, counterfeit, or unreliable.[xxxiii]

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The Concept of Counterfeiting in Islamic Jurisprudence

Jurists have given various definitions to counterfeiting, with one of them being the definition of Imam al-Ghazali. He described the counterfeit dirhams to contain no internal core whatsoever but are simply gilded or do not contain any gold at all as in the case of dinars. that is, they are neither made of true metallic purity, nor of any sign of genuineness; but they are plated, adulterated, or merely display an exterior aspect, which masks a poorer metal, or a deficiency of substance. This amounts to cheating and fraud in transactions.

According to what al-Ghazali defines, he meant by counterfeit currency the silver dirhams and this is what he meant by his words, that which does not contain nuqra in it. Nuqra is used to denote silver coins that are made using a metal that contains most of the silver, that is, they are pure and unadulterated. His words that which has no nuqra in it therefore means coins that are forged. Similarly, al-Ghazālī referred to gold currency when he said, “that which has no gold in it,” meaning coins plated with a precious metal despite being made from a base one. He further explained that the primary method of counterfeiting was through gilding, i.e. plating coins made from cheap metals with gold or silver.[xxxiv]

The al-Bahuti also defined the counterfeit coins, saying: Zayuf (counterfeits) is the plural of zayf, as fulus is the plural of fals, is the derivation of the saying, the dirhams became defective (zafat). They are the fake dirhams that were plated with mercury with sulfur, and of these there were no less in our times. This definition also narrows down to metallic money and the technique of counterfeiting- the plating technique that uses mercury and sulfur which changes the outward look of the coins and deceives the purchaser. These coins were referred to as counterfeit coins.

On the same note, al-Jahiz restricted his definition to metallic money and he distinguished between three major counterfeiting techniques: Clipping (al-qard): cutting small slices on the edges of coins with a scissor, gathering the coinslice, and gaining the benefit of the precious metal which is accrued. Plating (al-tila'): disguising the coin by coating it with another substance. Filing (al-taftit): a process of cutting down the surface of the coin with a file and retrieving the formed metal dust, thus creating a significant amount in the long term.[xxxv]

Based on these definitions, it is easy to understand that counterfeiting according to Islamic jurists, is composed of the modification of physical integrity of metallic money with a view to achieving illegal monetary benefit. This can be done by cutting away part of the metal of the coin and keeping the face value, or by leaving the base metal as it is of inferior quality and making it look like a coin of a higher denomination- e.g. copper being covered with silver. In either instance, the forger benefits on the difference between the intrinsic and the nominal values of a coin, once altered or plated with some more precious metal.[xxxvi]

The Legal Concept of Counterfeiting

Legislators have given counterfeiting the following definition: the diminution of part of the metal content of a coin, or the overlaying of it with any material which makes it look like a coin of greater value. In this definition, there are two primary types of counterfeiting which are debasement and plating. Debasement is the term used in reference to metal extraction of the coin that leads to the decline of the intrinsic value of the coin because of reduction in its weight despite the modes of

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action. Plating, however, is the act of making a coin look as though it was of a higher face by changing its colour that it looks like a coin of a higher value.[xxxvii]

According to the earlier description of the counterfeiting, the techniques of this practice can be summarized as under:

1. **Counterfeiting--Linguistic meaning:** A term that is used to refer to defective coins either in terms of mass or in terms of the metal used to make them.

2. **IN jurisprudence and law counterfeiting**: It is debasement or plating. Debasement comprises the ways in which the counterfeiters make coins lighter and gain the advantage of the extracted metal. Plating involves the use of chemical substances to metal to make coins look like those of greater value.[xxxviii]

3. **Counterfeit coinage (al-zayf)**: za`if is also a term used to describe debasement of dirhams that included imposture in the metals used and were thus rejected due to this imposture. It is a term used on any inferior type of coin that has its inside shape with misleading alloys that make it unacceptable in money transacting.[xxxix] It is mentioned that the plural of zayf is al-ziyuf, and means coins where the component of base metal is considerable. This kind of counterfeited coins was not accepted in the government transactions or in tax collection, and they were only accepted in their intrinsic value of metals in commercial transactions. Instead, it penalized their usage, meaning that they were issued by fake mints. Reportedly, it was the first man to corrupt the dirhams and mint it in debased shape (zayfan) in Islam, namely, when the person (named) 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad fled Basra in the year 64 AH. The counterfeits coinage consequently started to be rife in all the provinces during the reign of the Persians and especially under the Buyids and the Seljuqs.[xl] There was a classification of counterfeit coins in terms of the percentage of precious metal contained in the coins to the adulterated base metal. Some forged coins had more precious metal; this was acceptable, with the assumption that the value of the coin is determined by the major metal and that a small percentage of base could be ignored--probably because such a small percentage was necessary to provide strength and solidity to the coin. Other fake coins were made of a balance of precious metals and the base metals like copper or brass. Some still had a mixture where the base metal predominated over the precious metal; in these instances, the coins could not be used in any transaction before first refined since they were fraudulent.[xli]

4. **Al-Zaghl (Metal adulteration):** This is a term used to denote mixing and is used in reference to coins that have been adulterated with other metals like copper and brass. The practitioners of this were referred to as al-zaghliyin or al-zaghliya.[xlii] The zaghliyin were a copy in terms of the looks, sizes, and writing of real coins; therefore, the minting had to have engravers who were specialized in various areas like stamping and writing. Ibn Ba'rah wrote: He will have to specialize in something different besides engraving the inscriptions on the coins, so that he will know how to do it by doing it all the time, and it will be hard to get it imitated by the counterfeiters.[xliii] Ibn al-Qayyim also pointed out: The zaghliya are harmful to the interests of the community; their evil is too universal, and it is unavoidable. The leader cannot afford to overlook the issue and should punish them very harshly as their

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misfortune is huge and their harm is immense.[xliv] Circulation of zaghl dirhams was banned in the Mamluk Burji era (834 AH/1430 CE) because they had a huge amount of fraud and corrosion.[xlv] In 830 AH /1426 CE, a faction of zaghliyin had been apprehended on counterfeiting coins issued by the state.[xlvi] In cases where the zaghliyin were caught counterfeiting coins, they were beaten and imprisoned. An example is Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri who in 915 AH/1509 CE arrested and punished a group of zaghliyin.[xlvii]

5. **Al-Bahrajah / Al-Nubharjah:** A description of low-value dirhams, i.e. silver coins impregnated with cheaper metals. Substandard quality dinars were also known as such. Others were minted in the official mints of Buyid era, although they were not of pure metal. The coins were dubious and unacceptable owing to corruption and adulteration they included.[xlviii]

6. **Al-Sattuq / Al-Sattuqa:** Ibn Manẓur writes in Lisān al-ʿArab that sattuq means a fake dirham because it has impurities. These coins had high metal content of copper and brass. I think we should not call them dirhams but sattuqa is used for copper coins (fulus) not silver dirhams. The word dirham in the time of early Islam was for coins that were pure silver or mostly silver, and fulus was made of copper, much less value than silver. Since coins had mostly copper, they should be fulus, not dirhams.

7. **Al-Qirada (Clipping)**: Al-qirada is a derivative of qard which means cutting. The term al-qaradiyya is the pieces which drop off due to cutting as is the case in the clippings of gold. Al-Jahiz refers to al-qirada in the words of a trader who writes: When the dinars came in quarters and halves, he paid them out in crushed clippings, and he also writes: And when the dinars came in full, he paid them out most of them in pieces cut in half.[xlix] Clipping was applied not only to the dinar but also to the dirham itself and this act may be done either deliberately or accidentally. Indicatively, a destitute man could trim down the amount of dirham or dinar he had in his possession due to the fear of spending the whole coin. He would subsequently sell the cut part at the current market price of silver, and thus satisfy his pressing want, and receive the rest of the coin.
   But since this kind of clipping destroyed the integrity of the money, causing corruption and debasement because the coin had lost the weight it was supposed to have in law, those who participated in it were penalized. The punishment might involve losing a hand or even physical beating.[l]

Since clipping makes the coins worth less, they could be cut off their value, and this was a crime that got you killed or whipped. When they cut dirhams, it was seen as faking money especially when there was trouble in the land. The rulers often stopped letting these clipped coins go out and then they took them in and made new coins.[li]

2. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, counterfeiting money is a big money and safety problem that hurts the economy and makes people trust less in the money system. Over time, the tricks to do counterfeiting money keep changing, so the way to stop them also keeps changing. That is why the leaders of a country

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and the companies that print money should keep changing the way money looks and the safety features it has so the money and the people are safe from this dangerous phenomenon.

also, people need to know more about how to tell if money is fake and what to do if they see something wrong. other countries need to help too, counterfeiting is not just in one country, it can go past the border and needs to be stopped.

So, fighting fake money is what the government think, the bank think, and the people think to be done by all of us, we all must be done it quick and strong to keep the econ out of trout and the big coins safe.

Recommendations

1. Make strong laws to fight fake money and stop those laws well.
2. Tell people what bad fake money is and how to know it.
3. Ask banks and money places to use new tech to stop crime.
4. Work more with other countries to stop this crime that goes across borders.
5. Do more studies and work to find why counterfeiting happens and what it does to people. Make good plans to stop this crime.

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