

Ghani fled with 4 cars, helicopter full of cash

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia's embassy in Kabul said yesterday that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had fled the country with four cars and a helicopter full of cash and had to leave some money behind as it would not all fit in, the RIA news agency reported.

Ghani, whose current whereabouts are unknown, said he left Afghanistan on Sunday as the Taliban entered Kabul virtually unopposed. He said he wanted to avoid bloodshed.

Russia has said it will retain a diplomatic presence in Kabul and hopes to develop ties with the Taliban even as it says it is no rush to recognise them as the country's rulers and will closely observe their behaviour.

"As for the collapse of the (outgoing) regime, it is most eloquently characterised by the way Ghani fled Afghanistan," Nikita Ischenko, a spokesman for the Russian embassy in Kabul, was quoted as saying by RIA.

"Four cars were full of money, they tried to stuff another part of the money into a helicopter, but not all of it fit. And some of the money was left lying on the tarmac," he was quoted as saying. Ischenko, the Russian embassy spokesman, confirmed his comments to Reuters. He cited "witnesses" as the source of his information. Reuters could not independently confirm the veracity of his account immediately.

President Vladimir Putin's special representative on Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said earlier it was unclear how much money the fleeing government would leave behind.

"I hope the government that has fled did not take all the money from the state budget. It will be the bedrock of the budget if something is left," Kabulov told Moscow's Ekho Moskvy radio station.



A US soldier (C) point his gun towards an Afghan passenger at the Kabul airport in Kabul yesterday, after a stunningly swift end to Afghanistan's 20-year war, as thousands of people mobbed the city's airport trying to flee the group's feared hardline brand of Islamist rule. PHOTO: AFP

Time for Joe Biden to 'resign'

AFP, Washington

Former US president Donald Trump called for his successor Joe Biden to resign on Sunday over the swift takeover of Afghanistan by Taliban militants, as US troops withdrew from the country after nearly 20 years on the ground.

"It is time for Joe Biden to resign in disgrace for what he has allowed to happen to Afghanistan," Trump said in a statement, also blasting him over a surge in Covid-19 cases in the United States and domestic immigration, economic and energy policies.

The Taliban have reconquered Afghanistan in a lightning surge 20 years after they were toppled by the US invasion.

They took control of Kabul on Sunday, more than two weeks before the August 31 deadline set by Biden to complete the withdrawal of American troops from the country.

Taliban to give Qaeda covert support: analysts

The Taliban will offer support to Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan more discreetly than during their first period in power when they openly embraced the terror network, analysts say.

After conquering Kabul for the first time in 1996, the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime provided Al-Qaeda with a safe haven to operate training camps, even describing its leader Osama bin Laden as a "guest" of the country.

But after being overthrown in 2001 in retaliation for the September 11 attacks in the United States, which were planned from Afghanistan, the incoming Taliban authorities in Kabul are expected to take a new approach this time.

"If the Taliban of 2021 are different from those of 2001, it's not because they have moderated their religious obscurantism, but because they don't want to make the same strategic error, which was their blind support for Al-Qaeda which cost them power," said Jean-Pierre Filiu, a jihadism specialist at Sciences Po university in Paris.

Filiu told AFP that he expected the Taliban to again offer safety to bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri and others, citing personal links between the two organisations.

The fathers of Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Yaqoob, both senior leaders in the modern-day Taliban, had past links to bin Laden, for instance.

When the Taliban's leader Haibatullah Akhundzada was appointed in 2016 Zawahiri showered him with praise, calling him "the emir of the faithful".



'UNDER PROTECTION'

Under a US deal brokered with the Taliban last year under former president Donald Trump, the Taliban promised to prevent jihadist groups from using the country as a base.

Then US secretary of state Mike Pompeo claimed the group had "made the break" from Al-Qaeda in an interview in March 2020.

But Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official and analyst at the American Enterprise Institute think-tank, said "the Taliban were never sincere about cutting ties with Al-Qaeda, nor should we have expected them to be".

"After all, this isn't a matter of two political or military groups cutting ties, but rather brother cutting ties with brother and cousin with cousin," he told AFP.

Edmund Fitton-Brown, the head of a UN mission to monitor the Islamic State terror group, Al-Qaeda and Taliban, came to the same conclusion.

"We believe that the top leadership of Al-Qaeda is still under Taliban protection," he told US news network NBC in February this year.

COVERT, NOT OVERT

Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, a security expert and fellow at George Washington University, predicted that the links between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda would be different this time round.

"It will be more covert. It won't be such an open presence. I don't think they will allow them to open training camps that could be detected from the outside and could face bombing attacks," Tamini told AFP.

"The Taliban might try to do something similar to Iran's policy, where they keep some AQ leaders under house arrest while giving them some leeway for example to communicate with affiliates."

Iran denies any links to Al-Qaeda or harbouring its operatives, although US media outlets reported in 2020 that the network's number two had been assassinated in Tehran by Israeli agents.

Rubin said the lightning Taliban takeover was a major intelligence failure that could augur badly for the West's ability to counter the new threat emanating from Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Another possible consequence of the Taliban takeover could be a battle against a local offshoot of the Islamic State group which was formed in 2014 by defectors from the Taliban.

SOURCE: AFP

'First concern is to grow my beard'

Says a fearful resident in Kabul

REUTERS, Kabul

Kabul's streets were deserted early yesterday, a day after Taliban insurgents took over the Afghanistan capital without a fight, but the airport was jammed with hundreds of civilians trying to flee.

Video posted social media showed hundreds of people scampering with their luggage toward the safety of the airport terminal with the sound of gunfire breaking out.

US troops deployed at the airport to safeguard the evacuation of US troops had fired in the air to deter hundreds of civilians running onto the tarmac to try to board a plane.

The nearby Wazir Akbar Khan embassy district was deserted with almost all diplomats and their families either flown out of the city or at the airport awaiting a flight. Government offices were also empty, residents said.

"It is strange to sit here and see empty streets, no more busy diplomatic convoys, big cars with guns mounted," said Gul Mohammed Hakim, one of the city's ubiquitous naan (bread) makers who has a shop in the area.

"My first concern is to grow my beard and how to grow it fast," Hakim added. "I also checked with my wife if there were enough burqas for her and the girls."

During the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule, men were not permitted to trim their beards and women were required to wear the all-enveloping burqa cloak in public.



It was under Trump that the US brokered a deal with the Taliban in Doha in 2020 that would have seen the US withdraw all its troops by May 2021, in exchange for various security guarantees from the militants.

When Biden took power earlier this year, he pushed back the deadline for the withdrawal and set no conditions for it.

Trump has repeatedly blasted Biden over the move, saying it would have been "a much different and much more successful withdrawal" if he were still president. "What Joe Biden has done with Afghanistan is legendary. It will go down as one of the greatest defeats in American history!" he said.

Malaysian PM resigns

Palace says Muhyiddin would serve as caretaker PM until a new one found

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's Muhyiddin Yassin stepped down as prime minister yesterday after months of political turmoil culminated in the loss of his majority, but his resignation is likely to open another chapter of instability in the absence of any obvious successor.

Muhyiddin's resignation ends a tumultuous 17 months in office, the shortest stint of a Malaysian leader, but hampers efforts to reboot a pandemic-stricken economy and curb a resurgence of Covid-19 infections.

The Southeast Asian nation's king appointed Muhyiddin as the caretaker prime minister until a new one is found, but did not set a timeline.

King Al-Sultan Abdullah ruled out



elections because of the pandemic, saying he would invoke his constitutional power to appoint a prime minister he believes is likely to command a majority.

Malaysia's ringgit currency fell to a one-year low on the news and the stock market slipped.

Muhyiddin said he resigned along with his cabinet after losing majority support in parliament. As caretaker, he added, he will have no cabinet, but will perform executive functions and advise the king until a new prime minister is appointed.

"I hope a new government can be formed immediately so that the administration of this country is not disrupted," he said in a televised speech.

NEWSIN brief

4 Palestinians killed in West Bank

Four Palestinians were killed yesterday in clashes with Israeli security forces at Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, where violence has escalated over a wildcat Jewish settlement. The Israel Border Police, which operates in the West Bank, said its forces came under fire during a search for a Palestinian suspected of involvement in alleged "terrorist" activities. "Heavy gunfire was opened at a short range by a large number" of people, said a spokesman for the Israel Border Police.

Gunmen kidnap 20 from Nigeria college

Gunmen have killed three people at an agricultural college in Nigeria's northwest Zamfara state and kidnapped 20 others, including 15 students, the school said yesterday, in the latest in a wave of mass abductions. Armed kidnappings for ransom now make almost daily headlines in Africa's most populous country, seven years after Boko Haram extremists shocked the world by taking 276 girls from Chibok. Schools targeted by criminal gangs in the north and centre of the West African country are usually in remote areas where students stay in dormitories with only watchmen for security.

'China's Fauci' probed for plagiarism

A top doctor in China's fight against the coronavirus is under investigation for plagiarism, weeks after making a social media post questioning the country's zero-tolerance strategy to control the pandemic. Beijing has basked in its success in bringing to heel a virus that first emerged in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, but was virtually extinguished through hard lockdowns, closed borders and massive test and trace campaigns. But Delta variant has breached China's defences, with record local infections.

COVID MISINFO

Sri Lanka axes health minister

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president yesterday demoted the health minister who publicly endorsed sorcery and magic potions to battle Covid-19, as coronavirus infections and deaths hit record highs.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office said Pavithra Wanniarachchi's health portfolio had been given to Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella who is also the government spokesman.

Wanniarachchi was in intensive care in January after contracting the virus despite publicly consuming and endorsing a "magic potion" against Covid-19 made by a sorcerer.

'Nothing to hide'

Indian govt tells SC it will constitute a panel to examine all aspects related to Pegasus row

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

The Indian government yesterday told the Supreme Court that there is "nothing to hide" in the Pegasus snooping allegations and it will constitute a committee of eminent experts to examine all aspects.

"There is nothing to hide. It needs examination by committee of experts. This is a highly technical issue. We will appoint eminent neutral experts from the field," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told a bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana and comprising justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose.

Earlier in the day, the government filed an affidavit in the apex court and said a batch of petitions seeking an independent probe into the Pegasus snooping allegations are based on "conjectures and surmises" or on other unsubstantiated media reports.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for veteran journalists N Ram and Sashi Kumar who have filed a plea seeking probe into the snooping allegations, said the affidavit filed by the government does not say whether the government or its agencies had used the spyware. "We do not want the government, which might have used Pegasus or its agency might have used it, to set up a committee on its own," Sibal said during the hearing.

Janata Bank Limited

Credit Rating

Credit Rating Report

Rating Mode	Long Term	Short Term
With Government Support	AAA	ST-1
Without Government Support	A+	ST-2
Outlook	Stable	
Date of Rating	30 June, 2021	
Expiry Date	29 June, 2022	

AAA	Best quality, highest safety and highest credit quality.
A+	Adequate safety for timely repayment of financial obligation.
ST-1	Highest certainty of timely payment.
ST-2	High certainty of timely payment.

The above rating has been done by Credit Rating Information and Services Limited (CRISL) on the basis of audited financial statements of 2018-2019-2020 and other available quantitative and qualitative information up to the date of rating declaration. The affirmed rating reflects the steadiness of business growth and consistency of fundamentals of the bank which are backed by its support from the government being a government owned bank, dynamic guidance of the Board of Directors, experienced management team, good liquidity position, good market share, diversified earnings and country-wide network of branches under CBS with all modules.

Notable progresses achieved in the year 2020:

- Deposit growth rate: 19.12%, well above the industry growth rate (13.12%);
- Loan and advances growth rate: 10.21%, above the industry growth rate (8.81%);
- Operating profit increased by Tk: 272.00 Crore;
- NPL reduced by Tk: 867.00 Crore;
- Total Assets of the Bank stands at Tk: 1,04,000.00 Crore.

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