

Media always publish fake propaganda

Taliban co-founder Baradar responds to his death rumours

AFP, Kabul

The Taliban co-founder and now deputy prime minister of Afghanistan released an audio statement yesterday saying he was alive and well after news of his supposed demise went viral on social media.

Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was last week named as a number two to Mullah Mohammed Hassan Akhund, blamed "fake propaganda" for the death rumours in an audio message posted by the Taliban.

Social media has been in a frenzy over the speculation -- particularly in India, where rumours swirled that he had been mortally wounded in a shootout between rival Taliban factions at the presidential palace.

"There had been news in the media about my death," Baradar said in the clip. **Bringing Peace to Afghanistan**

"Over the past few nights I have been away on trips. Wherever I am at the moment, we are all fine, all my brothers and friends.

"Media always publish fake propaganda. Therefore, reject bravely all those lies, and 100 percent confirm to you there is no issue and we have no problem."

It was not possible to authenticate the message, but it was posted on official Taliban sites -- including that of the spokesman of the political office of the new government.

The Taliban's supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, was also rumoured to have died for several years before the group's spokesman said he was "present in Kandahar" two weeks after they took power.

Chatter in Pakistan and Afghanistan had suggested he had contracted Covid or been killed in a bombing.



A Taliban fighter stands guard as a Pakistan International Airlines plane, the first commercial international flight to land since the Taliban retook power last month, takes off with passengers onboard at the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. *Inset*, people wait before boarding the plane.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghans face 'perilous hour'

Warns UN chief, urges donors to give them 'lifeline'

AFP, Geneva

UN chief Antonio Guterres yesterday called for countries to dig deep and provide desperately needed aid to Afghans, and to support women and others whose rights appear threatened by the Taliban.

Speaking to ministers gathered for a donor conference for the violence-torn country, Guterres insisted that "the people of Afghanistan need a lifeline".

"After decades of war, suffering and insecurity, they face perhaps their most perilous hour," he said at the UN's European headquarters in Geneva. "Let us be clear: This conference is not simply about what we will give to the people of Afghanistan. It is about what we owe."

He urged the world to raise \$606 million for Afghanistan. His comments came just under a month after the Taliban swept into power in Afghanistan, sparking a chaotic exit for the United States and its allies after 20 years in the country.

The half-day conference is seeking to raise the \$606 million humanitarian agencies say is urgently needed to provide life-saving aid to

millions of Afghans over the four final months of the year.

Among other things, the money is needed for critical food and livelihood assistance for nearly 11 million people and essential health services for 3.4 million.

Most of the requested funds had already been asked for at the end of last year as part of a \$1.3-billion humanitarian appeal for Afghanistan, which remains severely underfunded.

But nearly a third of the requested funds are fresh needs that have arisen with the Taliban's takeover.

Guterres stressed that Afghans were experiencing "one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world" even before the Taliban takeover on August 15. Some 40 percent of the country's GDP was already drawn from foreign funding, according to the UN.

And half of the population was already dependent on humanitarian aid.

Afghanistan is facing a devastating drought and mass displacement in addition to the impact of Covid-19.

2020 deadly yr for nature defenders

Report says 227 killed worldwide

AFP, Bogota

A record 227 people were killed worldwide in 2020 for their defense of nature -- more than four a week on average, and almost three-quarters of them in Latin America, environmental rights organization Global Witness said Sunday.

For the second year in a row, Colombia was the country with the highest number of killings -- 65 -- while Nicaragua had the highest per-capita rate, with 12 murders up from five in 2019, the group said in its annual report.

Seven of the 10 deadliest countries for land and environmental defenders were in Latin America, with 165 killings recorded, though Global Witness said the number was "almost certainly" an underestimate. After Colombia, Mexico had the second highest number of deaths globally, with 30.

It was followed by the Philippines (29), Brazil (20), Honduras (17), the Democratic Republic of Congo (15), Guatemala (13), Nicaragua (12), Peru (six) and India (four).

"This is a crisis against humanity," said the report. "Land and environmental defenders that have stood up to powerful interests have paid a heavy price -- with their freedom, livelihoods and even their lives."

MORE NEWS

Malaysian PM, opposition in deal to boost stability

Malaysia's new government signed an agreement to cooperate with the opposition yesterday in exchange for a promise of reforms, a bid to bring stability after intense political turbulence. Less than a month after taking office following the collapse of his predecessor's short-lived government, Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob has extended an olive branch to his rivals. The new administration's arrival has lowered the political temperature -- at least in the short term -- and fuelled hopes that officials will be able to focus on fighting a serious coronavirus outbreak. Ismail Sabri and representatives of the opposition, led by Anwar Ibrahim, signed the agreement in parliament, as the legislature convened yesterday for the first time since the new premier took power.

Dozens of abducted students freed in NW Nigeria

Nigerian gunmen have freed dozens of schoolchildren kidnapped earlier this month in northwest Zamfara State, according to a local government source and a video showing state officials with the children. The release of the Kaya school students on Sunday came after the army began a crackdown on criminal gangs in the state and local authorities shut down telecoms in Zamfara to disrupt communications between armed groups. More than 70 students and some teachers were snatched in Kaya on September 1 in the latest in a series of mass abductions at schools and colleges this year by heavily armed gunmen known locally as bandits. "A total of 75 hostages taken from the Government Junior Secondary School Kaya were released on Sunday evening," the local government source said. "They looked robust and unharmed." A video released by Zamfara State Governor Bello Matawalle's office showed him greeting buses full of students in the night and asking them if they had been harmed.



North Korea tests new long-range missile

North Korea test-fired a new "long-range cruise missile" over the weekend, state media reported yesterday, with the United States saying the nuclear-armed country was threatening its neighbours and beyond. Pictures in the Rodong Sinmun newspaper showed a missile exiting one of five tubes on a launch vehicle in a ball of flame, and a missile in horizontal flight. Such a weapon would represent a marked advance in North Korea's weapons technology, analysts said, better able to avoid defence systems to deliver a warhead across the South or Japan -- both of them US allies. The test launches took place on Saturday and Sunday, the official Korean Central News Agency said.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



Israeli medics stretch off a wounded man following a reported stabbing attack in Jerusalem yesterday. A Palestinian man stabbed two Israelis in Jerusalem before being shot by a border police officer yesterday, leaving all three wounded, police and medics said.

PHOTO: AFP



SEPTEMBER 14

1901 - US President William McKinley died from his wounds after being shot by an assassin on September 6.

1982 - Lebanese president-elect Bashir Gemayel was assassinated in a bomb explosion at his party headquarters in East Beirut.

1996 - Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk pardoned Khmer Rouge leader Ieng Sary for his role in the "killing fields" era of the 1970s.

SOURCE: REUTERS

Won't file detailed affidavit

Indian govt tells SC, cites nat'l security

TOI, New Delhi

The Indian government yesterday informed the Supreme Court that it is not going to file a detailed affidavit on petitions seeking inquiry into alleged use of spyware Pegasus. The government had asked for time to decide on filing the affidavit twice.

Appearing before the top court, Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta said that whether a "particular software was used or not is not a matter for public domain". He said the matter can be inquired into by a committee of independent domain experts and it can be filed before apex court.

"The Supreme Court has given a reasonable and fair opportunity to file detailed affidavit to know its stand on crucial issues linked to petitions. If the government does not, then the Supreme Court will hear parties and pass appropriate orders," a bench of Chief Justice of India NV Ramana, Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli told SG Mehta.

SG Mehta also said that the government

will constitute a technical committee of independent domain experts that will examine the phones of petitioners and those claiming to have been affected by Pegasus to determine if there was snooping or hacking. The experts will not have any employment contract with the government, he said, adding that panel can examine and submit a report to the Supreme Court.

The top court, meanwhile, said it will pass interim order on pleas seeking independent probe into alleged Pegasus snooping row. It asked the government to mention Pegasus case before it if it re-thinks over filing fresh affidavit as passing of interim order will take 2-3 days. It also told the Centre that "beating around the bush would not take the issue anywhere".

The court said if a committee is constituted and it files a report, it (the report) may come in the public domain. court to decide if the report will be put in public domain.

SECOND DOSE OF COVID VACCINE

India worried about growing complacency

REUTERS, New Delhi

India is worried that growing complacency as Covid-19 infection rates and deaths decline could lead to people skipping their second vaccine shots, leaving communities vulnerable to the coronavirus, said two health experts briefed on the matter.

India has administered more than 744 million vaccine doses - with 60% of its 944 million adults getting a first shot and 19% fully vaccinated with the required two shots.

India has the most partly immunized people in the world, according to the Our World in Data website, mainly due to a long gap of between 12 and 16 weeks between doses, as prescribed by the government.

"There's a concern among the highest quarters of an impending vaccine hesitancy, in view of most taking a single dose already and disease incidence at its lowest," said one of the sources, both of whom declined to be identified.

Large numbers of people skipping their second dose would be particularly problematic in areas with low numbers of previously infected people, meaning more people with fewer antibodies so those communities would be more vulnerable, the first expert said.

The second expert said the health ministry had told states to encourage people to get their second doses as soon as possible, so on the 12th week after their first dose, rather than waiting for the latest date, in a bid to ensure people don't miss the second shot.



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