

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Baitullah gives the lie to his death reports

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WANA: Chief of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Baitullah Mehsud was accorded warm welcome by people of his tribe on Friday when he appeared in a remote village of South Waziristan Agency (SWA) to quash media reports about his death.

Armed men from Mehsud tribe and local Taliban fired shots from rocket launchers and automatic weapons as Baitullah appeared in a small village 'Saam' to nullify his death reports, witnesses said.

The TTP leader was presented a traditional turban and garland, they said. Tufan Burki, a local political leader from 'Tehrik-e-Insaf' presented him a traditional turban and a garland. Mehsud also visited some other areas in South Waziristan, including Ladha, Kani Garam, Salai Rogha and Badr and the tribesmen hugged, they claimed.

BBC quoting Mehsud's deputy Zulfikar Mehsud reported that Baitullah had celebrated Eid by taking part in shooting and car racing competitions. Despite the denial of Mehsud's death by the Taliban, several journalists based in the NWFP and tribal areas believe otherwise.

They think the Taliban will announce his death once they find his successor. "I believe that he would have called journalists to tell them that he is alive... he had been in contact with several journalists. "But his mysterious silence make us believe that he may have died or has very serious health problems," according to a journalist.