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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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U.S. says it 'hacked the hackers' to bring down ransomware gang, helping 300 victims

WASHINGTON, Jan 26 (Reuters) - The FBI revealed on Thursday it had secretly hacked and disrupted a prolific ransomware gang called Hive, a maneuver that allowed the bureau to thwart the group from collecting more than \$130 million in ransomware demands from more than 300 victims.

At a news conference, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland, FBI Director Christopher Wray, and Deputy U.S. Attorney General Lisa Monaco said government hackers broke into Hive's network and put the gang under surveillance, surreptitiously stealing the digital keys the group used to unlock victim organizations' data.

They were then able to alert victims in advance so they could take steps to protect their systems before Hive demanded the payments.

"Using lawful means, we hacked the hackers," Monaco told reporters. "We turned the tables on Hive."

News of the takedown first leaked on Thursday morning when Hive's website was replaced with a flashing message that said: "The Federal Bureau of Investigation seized this site as part of coordinated law enforcement action taken against Hive Ransomware."

'Not on my watch' - Biden attacks House Republicans' economic plans
U.S. toughens sanctions against Russia's Wagner mercenary group
U.S. Representative Schiff sets sights on fellow Democrat Feinstein's Senate seat
Hive's servers were also seized by the German Federal Criminal Police and the Dutch National High Tech Crime Unit.

"Intensive cooperation across national borders and continents, characterized by mutual trust, is the key to fighting serious cybercrime effectively," said German police commissioner Udo Vogel in a statement from police and prosecutors in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, who assisted in the probe.

Reuters was not immediately able to locate contact details for Hive. It is unclear where they were geographically based.

The takedown of Hive is distinct from some of the other high-profile ransomware cases the U.S. Justice Department has announced in recent years, such as a cyber attack in 2021 against the Colonial Pipeline Co.

In that case, the Justice Department seized some \$2.3 million in cryptocurrency ransom after the company had already paid the hackers.



The J. Edgar Hoover Federal Bureau of Investigation Building is seen in Washington
The J. Edgar Hoover Federal Bureau of Investigation Building is seen in Washington, U.S., February 2, 2018. REUTERS/Aaron P. Bernstein
Here, there were no seizures because investigators intervened before Hive demanded the payments. The undercover infiltration, which started in July 2022, went undetected by the gang until now.

OVER \$100 MLN IN RANSOM
Hive was one the most prolific among a wide range of cybercriminal groups that extort international businesses by encrypting their data and demanding massive cryptocurrency payments in return.

The Justice Department said that over the years, Hive has targeted more than 1,500 victims in 80 different countries, and has collected more than \$100 million in ransomware payments.

Although there were no arrests announced on Wednesday, one department official told reporters to "stay tuned."

Canadian researcher Brett Callow, of cybersecurity company Emsisoft, said that Hive was responsible for at least 11 incidents involving U.S. government organizations, schools, and healthcare providers last year.

"Hive is one of the most active groups around, if not the

most active," he said in an email.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said the FBI's operation helped a wide range of victims, including a Texas school district.

"The bureau provided decryption keys to the school district, saving it from making a \$5 million ransom payment," he said. A Louisiana hospital, meanwhile, was spared \$3 million.

Garland said the department's investigation remains ongoing



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LOCAL NEWS

China plays down COVID outbreak with holiday rush at full tilt

WASHINGTON/LONDON, Oct 7(Reuters) - The OPEC+ organization's decision this week to cut oil production despite stiff U.S. opposition has further strained already tense relations between President Joe Biden's White House and Saudi Arabia's royal family, once one of Washington's staunchest Middle East allies, according to interviews with about a dozen government officials and experts in Washington and the Gulf.

The White House pushed hard to prevent the OPEC output cut, these sources said. Biden hopes to keep U.S. gasoline prices from spiking again ahead of midterm elections in which his Democratic party is struggling to maintain control of the U.S. Congress. Washington also wants to limit Russia's energy revenue during the Ukraine war.

The U.S. administration lobbied OPEC+ for weeks. In recent days, senior U.S. officials from energy, foreign policy and economic teams urged their foreign counterparts to vote against an output cut, according to two sources familiar with the discussions.

Amos Hochstein, Biden's top energy envoy, along with national security official Brett McGurk and the administration's special envoy to Yemen Tim Lenderking, traveled to Saudi Arabia last month to discuss energy issues, including the OPEC+ decision.

NYC mayor declares state of emergency amid migrant busing crisis
Analysis: Defeats in Ukraine stoke crisis for Vladimir Putin
Putin orders Russia to seize Exxon-led Sakhalin 1 oil and gas project
They failed to prevent an output cut, just as Biden did after his own July visit.

US officials "tried to position it as 'us versus Russia,'" said one source briefed on the discussions, telling Saudi officials they needed to make a choice.

That argument failed, the source said, adding that the Saudis said that if the United States wanted more oil on the markets, it should start producing more of its own. The United States is the world's No. 1 oil producer and also its top consumer, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The Saudi government media office CIC did not respond to Reuters emailed requests for comment about the discussions.



"We are concerned first and foremost with the interests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and then the interests of the countries that trusted us and are members of OPEC and the OPEC + alliance," Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz told Saudi TV Wednesday.

OPEC weighs its interests with "those of the world because we have an interest in supporting the growth of the global economy and providing energy supplies in the best way," he said.

Washington's handling of the Iran nuclear deal and withdrawal of support for a Saudi-led coalition's offensive military operations in Yemen have upset Saudi officials, as have actions against Russia after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

A U.S. push for a price cap on Russian oil is causing uncertainty, Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Bloomberg TV after the OPEC cut, noting the "lack of details and the lack of clarity" about how it will be implemented.

A source briefed by Saudi officials said the kingdom views it as "a non-market price-control mechanism, that could be used by a cartel of consumers against producers."

A Biden-directed sale of 180 million barrels of oil in March from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve put downward pressure on oil prices. In March, OPEC+ said it would stop using data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), a Western oil watchdog, due to Saudi-led concerns the United States had too much influence.

On Thursday, Biden called the Saudi decision "a disappointment", adding Washington could take further action in the oil market.

Editor's Choice



A model presents a creation by designer Giorgio Armani as part of his Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2023 collection show for fashion house Giorgio Armani Prive in Paris, France. REUTERS/Sarah Meyssonier



Music fans attend a public memorial for singer Lisa Marie Presley, the only daughter of the "King of Rock 'n' Roll," Elvis Presley, at Graceland Mansion in Memphis, Tennessee. REUTERS/Nikki Boertman



Afghan boys stand on a snow-covered street on the TV mountain in Kabul, Afghanistan. REUTERS/Ali Khara



A Ukrainian military helicopter is seen, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Donbas region, Ukraine. REUTERS/Oleksandr Ratushniak



A worker uses a crane to lift a statue of Eleanor Rigby, a character immortalized in a Beatles song of the same name after it was damaged in recent cold weather in Liverpool, Britain. REUTERS/Phil Noble



A worker uses a crane to lift a statue of Eleanor Rigby, a character immortalized in a Beatles song of the same name after it was damaged in recent cold weather in Liverpool, Britain. REUTERS/Phil Noble

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

We'll Be Dealing With Covid-Related Fallout As Long As There Is The Possibility Of New Variants

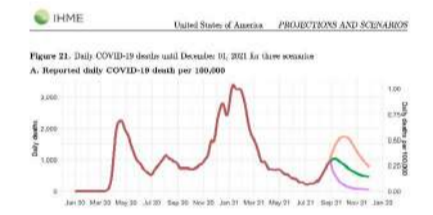
The 'New World' After The Pandemic - What's In Store?



Covid-19 Testing Site On The Streets Of New York City, January 2022. Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

As a virus-weary world limps through the third year of the outbreak, experts are sending out a warning signal: Don't expect omicron to be the last variant we have to contend with...

previous strains, but it is wildly infectious, pushing new case counts to once unimaginable records. Meanwhile, evidence is emerging that the variant may not be as innocuous as early data suggest.



Before any of that, the world has to get past the current wave. Omicron may appear to cause less severe disease than

It seems like we are constantly trying to catch up with the virus," she said. It's sobering for a world that's been trying to move on from the virus with a new intensity in recent months. But the outlook isn't all gloom. Anti-viral medicines are hitting the market, vaccines are more readily available and tests that can be self-administered in minutes are now easy and cheap to obtain in many places.



A medical worker waits for antigen test results at the Erez Crossing on the Israel-Gaza border in December. (Photo/ Kobi Wolf/Bloomberg)

In six months' time, many richer countries will have made the transition from pandemic to endemic. But that doesn't mean masks will be a thing of the past. We'll need to grapple with our approach to booster shots, as well as the pandemic's economic and political scars.

Is Covid-19 Here to Stay? "There is a lot of happy talk that goes along the lines that omicron is a mild virus and it's effectively functioning as an attenuated live vaccine that's going to create massive herd immunity across the globe," said Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

The sheer size of the current outbreak means more hospitalizations, deaths and virus mutations are all but inevitable. Many people who are infected aren't making it into the official statistics, either because a home test result isn't formally recorded or because the infected person never gets tested at all.

With daily cases peaking at an average

of more than 800,000 in mid-January, the number of underlying infections may have exceeded 3 million a day — or nearly 1% of the U.S. population, Bedford estimates. Since it takes five to 10 days to recover, as much as 10% of people in the country may have been infected at any one time.



Long lines Queues at a testing station in Seoul on Feb. 6. (Photo/SeongJoon Cho/Bloomberg)

He's not alone in projecting astronomical numbers. At the current infection rate, computer modelling indicates more than half of Europe will have contracted omicron by mid-March, according to Hans Kluge, a regional director for the World Health Organization.

And just because you've already had the virus doesn't mean you won't get re-infected since Covid doesn't confer lasting immunity.

vaccinated people. That would explain why places like the U.K. and South Africa experienced such significant outbreaks even after being decimated by delta. Reinfection is also substantially more common with omicron than previous variants.

"With omicron, because it has more of an upper respiratory component, it's even less likely to result in durable immunity" than previous variants, Hotez said.

Preparing for the next Covid strains is critical.

"As long as there are areas of the world where the virus could be evolving, and new mutants arriving, we all will be susceptible to these new variants," said Glenda Gray, chief executive officer of the South African Medical Research Council.



A child receives a vaccine shot in San Francisco on Jan. 10. (Photo/ David Paul Morris/Bloomberg)

Lockdowns and travel curbs aren't going away, even if they are becoming less restrictive on the whole.

"The things that will matter there are whether we are able to respond when there is a local surge," said Mark McClellan, former director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and director of the Duke-Margolis Center for Health Policy.

Inoculation is still the world's primary line of defense against Covid. More than 62% of people around the globe have gotten at least one dose, with overall rates in wealthy countries vastly higher than in developing ones.

(Article Continues Below)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

The 'New World' After The Pandemic - What's In Store?

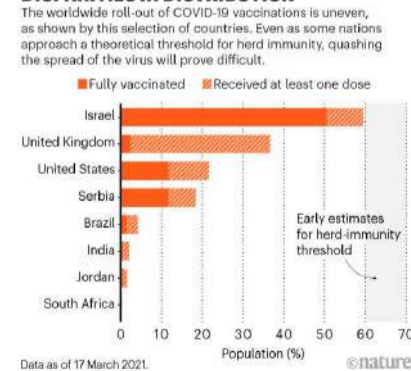
Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Results of trials on a daily pill to treat COVID-19 could be available within months. (Image/Unsplash/Halacious)

Uneven Access to Vaccines

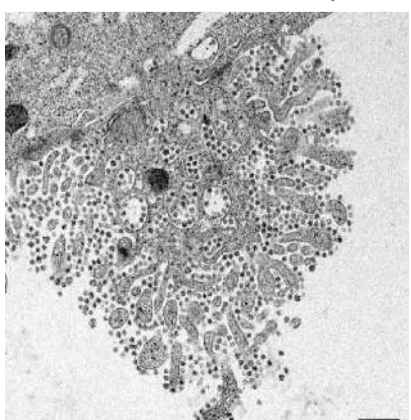
DISPARITIES IN DISTRIBUTION



But studies show one or two injections don't ward off the pathogen. The best bet at this point is a booster shot, which triggers the production of neutralizing antibodies and a deeper immune response.

How We'll Know When the Covid-19 Crisis Is Over

While the virus won't be overwhelming hospitals and triggering restrictions forever, it's still unclear when — or how — it will become safe to leave on the back burner.



Transmission electron micrograph of a green monkey kidney cells 24 hours

after infection by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. (Source/The University of Hong Kong)

Robert Wachter, chair of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, puts the odds at 10-to-one that by the end of February, most parts of the U.S. and the developed world will no longer be struggling with severe outbreaks.

"That is a world that feels fundamentally different from the world of the last two years," he said. "We get to come back to something resembling normal."

When Will the Pandemic End?

Elsewhere in the world, the pandemic will be far from over.

The threat of new variants is highest in less wealthy countries, particularly those where immune conditions are more common. The delta mutation was first identified in India while omicron emerged in southern Africa, apparently during a chronic Covid infection in an immunocompromised HIV patient.

"As long as we refuse to vaccinate the world, we will continue to see new waves," Hotez said. "We are going to continue to have pretty dangerous variants coming out of low- and middle-income countries. That's where the battleground is."



A "door-to-door" vaccination team inoculates residents at a village in the Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir, India, in August 2021. (Photo/Sumit Dayal/Bloomberg)

Amesh Adalja, senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security in Baltimore, sees the pandemic continuing into 2023 for parts of the developing world.

to endemic is when you're not worried about hospitals getting crushed," he said. "That will happen in most Western countries in 2022, and it will take a little bit longer for the rest of the world."

In parts of Asia, public health officials aren't even willing to consider calling the end of the pandemic.

While most of the world now seeks to live alongside Covid, China and Hong Kong are still trying to eliminate it. After spending much of 2021 virtually virus-free, both places are currently dealing with outbreaks.

"We do not possess the prerequisites for living with the virus because the vaccination rate is not good, especially amongst the elderly," said Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam.

Harsh virus restrictions including border closures and quarantines may well be in place until the end of 2022, though the higher contagiousness of the new variants is making that harder to maintain, as Hong Kong's current challenges show.

With so much of the world still mired in the pandemic, virus-related dislocations will continue everywhere.



Covid-19 testing outside a building placed under lockdown at the City Garden housing estate in Hong Kong, in Jan. 2022. (Photo/Louise Delmotte/Bloomberg)

The immense strain on global supply chains is only worsened by workers sickened or forced to quarantine as a result of omicron. The problem is especially acute in Asia, where much of the world's manufacturing takes place, and means global concerns about soaring consumer prices are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

systems around the world face a long, slow recovery after two years of monumental pressure.

And for some individuals, the virus may be a life sentence. Long Covid sufferers have now been experiencing severe fatigue, muscle aches and even brain, heart and organ damage for months.

How long will we be dealing with the long-term ramifications of the virus? "That's the million-dollar question," South Africa's Gray said. "Hopefully we can control this in the next two years, but the issues of long Covid will persist. We will see a huge burden of people suffering from it."



A temporary Covid treatment facility at the Commonwealth Games Village Sports Complex in New Delhi on Jan. 5. (Photo/T. Narayan/Bloomberg)

Life After the Pandemic Over the coming months, a sense of what living permanently with Covid really looks like should take shape. Some places may forget about the virus almost entirely, until a flareup means classes are cancelled for a day or companies struggle with workers calling in sick.

Other countries may rely on masking up indoors each winter, and an annual Covid vaccine is likely to be offered in conjunction with the flu shot.

"I just hope we don't have to keep making new boosters every so often," she added. "We can't just vaccinate everyone around the world four times a year." "It's really hard to predict."

(Courtesy Bloomberg.com)