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Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Taliban name new Afghan government, interior minister on U.S. sanctions list

Sept 7 (Reuters) - The Taliban drew from its inner high echelons to fill top posts in Afghanistan's new government on Tuesday, including an associate of the Islamist militant movement's founder as premier and a wanted man on a U.S. terrorism list as interior minister.

World powers have told the Taliban the key to peace and development is an inclusive government that would back up the movement's pledges of a more conciliatory approach, upholding human rights, after a previous 1996-2001 period in power marked by bloody vendettas and oppression of women.

Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, in his first public statement since the Aug. 15 seizure of the capital Kabul by the Islamist insurgents, said the Taliban were committed to all international laws, treaties and commitments not in conflict with Islamic law.

"In the future, all matters of governance and life in Afghanistan will be regulated by the laws of the Holy Sharia," he said in a statement, in which he also congratulated Afghans on what he called the country's liberation from foreign rule.

The names announced for the new government, three weeks after the Taliban swept to military victory as U.S.-led foreign forces withdrew and the weak Western-backed government collapsed, gave no sign of an olive branch to its opponents.

Afghans who enjoyed major progress in education and civil liberties over the 20 years of U.S.-backed government remain fearful of Taliban intentions and daily protests have continued since the Taliban takeover, challenging the new rulers.

On Tuesday, as the new government was being announced, a group of Afghan women in a Kabul street took cover after Taliban gunmen fired into the air to disperse hundreds of protesters.

The last time the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, girls could not attend school and women were banned from work and education. Religious police would flog anyone breaking the rules and public executions were carried out.



Students across Afghanistan have started returning to university for the first time since the Taliban stormed to power, and in some cases females have been separated from their male peers by curtains or boards down the middle of the classroom

The Taliban has urged Afghans to be patient and vowed to be more tolerant this time - a commitment many Afghans and foreign powers will be scrutinising as a condition for aid and investment desperately needed in Afghanistan.

LATE FOUNDER'S LEGACY IN NEW GOVERNMENT

Mullah Hasan Akhund, named as prime minister, like many in the Taliban leadership derives much of his prestige from his close link to the movement's reclusive late founder Mullah Omar, who presided over its rule two decades ago.

Akhund is longtime chief of the Taliban's powerful decision-making body Rehbari Shura, or leadership council. He was foreign minister and then deputy prime minister when the Taliban were last in power and, like many of the incoming cabinet, is under U.N. sanctions for his role in that government.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, the new interior minister, is the son of the founder of the Haqqani network, classified as a terrorist group by Washington. He is one of the FBI's most wanted men due to his involvement in suicide attacks and ties with Al Qaeda.

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, head of the movement's political office who was given his nom de guerre "brother", or Baradar, by Mullah Omar, was appointed as Akhund's deputy, main Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told a news conference in Kabul.

The passing over of Baradar for the top government job came as a surprise to some as he had been responsible for negotiating the U.S. withdrawal at talks in Qatar and presenting the face of the Taliban to the outside world.

Baradar was previously a senior Taliban commander in the long insurgency against U.S. forces. He was arrested and imprisoned in Pakistan in 2010, becoming head of the Taliban's political office in Doha after his release in 2018.

Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, a son of Mullah Omar, was named as defence minister. All the appointments were in an acting capacity, Mujahid said.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters on Air Force One, as President Joe Biden flew

to New York, that there would be no recognition of the Taliban government soon.

ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

Taliban spokesman Mujahid, speaking against a backdrop of collapsing public services and economic meltdown amidst the chaos of the tumultuous foreign pullout, said an acting cabinet had been formed to respond to the Afghan people's primary needs.

He said some ministries remained to be filled pending a hunt for qualified people.

The United Nations said earlier on Tuesday that basic services were unravelling in Afghanistan and food and other aid were about to run out. More than half a million people have been displaced internally in Afghanistan this year. An international donor conference is scheduled in Geneva on Sept. 13. Western powers say they are prepared to send humanitarian aid, but that broader economic engagement depends on the shape and actions of the Taliban government.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

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IDA Was One Of The Worst Flooding Catastrophes In The Northeast



Up until last week, IDA's March through the northeast as a tropical storm claimed at least 51 lives in states including New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Connecticut.

Since IDA made landfall as a Category 4 hurricane, the storm was responsible for a

total of 60 deaths.

The governor of New Jersey said, "We are not out of the woods yet. We are going to clean up and we are going to stay together, maybe for a long time."

In Texas, Governor Abbott signed into law last Wednesday a measure that would

prohibit abortions in Texas as early as six weeks --before some women even know they are pregnant. This bill also opens a new frontier in the battle over abortion restriction. Abortion rights groups have promised to challenge the new law.

Abbott also signed a new law that bans

homeless encampment on public property in Texas. The law makes it illegal to set up a shelter or store belongings for an extended period of time. The offense is a Class C misdemeanor and punishable by a fine of up to \$500 dollars.

With the hurricane and the abortion law and the homeless encampment law being passed in Texas, it makes for a more difficult life for a lot

poor citizens.

We all agree on clearing the mess on the city streets, but in the meantime, the government has a responsibility to help the homeless find jobs and give them shelters in which to live.

Today we are facing so many challenges in our nation. We need to help each other to overcome so many difficulties, especially in this time of disaster.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Cpl Preston Dyce, a soldier with the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 10th Mountain Division, is greeted by his wife Michaela Dyce upon his return home from deployment in Afghanistan, at Fort Drum, New York. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid



Students attend class under new classroom conditions at Avicenna University in Kabul, Afghanistan. Social media/via REUTERS



Workers clean up the site of the Historic Karnofsky Shop, a historic, building that collapsed during Hurricane Ida in New Orleans, Louisiana. REUTERS/Kathleen Flynn



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson visits Westport Care Home in Stepney Green, east London. Paul Edwards/Pool via REUTERS



Demonstrators participate in a symbolic performance during a protest over the Thai government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and to demand Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's resignation, in Bangkok, Thailand. REUTERS/Soe Zeya Tun



Men and children from Afghanistan sit atop a van with their belongings after crossing into Pakistan at the Friendship Gate crossing point at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border town of Chaman, Pakistan September 3, 2021. REUTERS/Saeed Ali Achakzai

The U.S. Needs A COVID Goal



Illustration: Eniola Odetunde/

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

A huge reason why the pandemic response — or the lack of one — feels so chaotic right now is that the U.S. doesn't have a well-defined goal, experts recently argued in a pair of op-eds.

Why it matters: Policy decisions and individual behavioral choices should ideally be aligned in pursuit of an agreed-upon outcome, but as of now, we don't have one.

What they're saying: "We think much of the confusion and disagreement among scientists and nonexperts alike comes down to undefined and sometimes conflicting goals in responding to the pandemic," Harvard's Joseph Allen and Boston University's Helen Jenkins wrote yesterday in the New York Times.

State of play: The federal government is pushing ahead with a vaccine booster effort that some experts say is unnecessary, state and local governments are taking a patchwork approach to masking and vaccine policies and individual Americans are all trying to figure out how much risk they're willing to tolerate in everyday life.

•School districts and businesses are trying to figure out how to handle — and are taking very different approaches to — the return to school and work.



•But the U.S. as a country hasn't agreed on a set of outcomes we're trying to achieve, particularly whether we're trying to eliminate the spread of the virus or to greatly reduce the level of hospitalizations and death it causes.

•"If the goal is getting to zero infections and staying at that level before dropping restrictions, one set of policies apply. If the goal is to make this virus like the seasonal flu, a different set of policies follow," Allen and Jenkins write.

Zoom in: The vaccination effort is similarly struggling from an undefined set of goals, NYU's Céline Gounder wrote recently in The Atlantic.

•This ambiguity has become more problematic as more evidence emerges that the vaccines' effectiveness against infection has decreased.

•"The public discussion of the pandemic has become distorted by a presumption that vaccination can and should eliminate COVID-19 entirely," Gounder argues.

•"The goal isn't to eliminate SARS-CoV-2 infections. We can't, no matter how many booster shots the United States gives," she adds.

(Courtesy axios.com)

Related

New 'MU' COVID Variant Now Found In 49 U.S. States

Since being discovered in Colombia in January, the mu variant of COVID-19 has spread to nearly four dozen countries and has made its presence known in Hawaii and Alaska. It has so far been found in 49 states with Nebraska being the only state to not have a mu variant case detected.

Health officials believe mu is even more transmissible than the delta variant and has the potential to resist vaccines.

In the U.S., the mu variant has been detected in 49 states and the District of Columbia, according to Newsweek.

California has reported the highest number of the latest variant with 384. A total of 167 of those cases were found in Los

Angeles County.

"The identification of variants like mu, and the spreading of variants across the globe, highlights the need for L.A. County residents to continue to take measures to protect themselves and others," said Dr. Barbara Ferrer, director of LA County Public Health, in a statement.



Coronavirus Dashboard

Vaccines: Fauci: Pfizer booster likely ready by Sept. 20, Moderna may need longer — AstraZeneca agrees to give EU 200M more vaccine doses, ending legal dispute.

1.Politics: Biden's high-stakes booster tension with Moderna — Wall Street boosts lab companies amid Delta testing surge — Restaurant recovery's screeching halt.

2.States: Kentucky governor says state is in "dire" situation from coronavirus surge — Ousted Tennessee vaccine chief sues state officials for defamation over firing.

3.Cities: New Zealand to lift lockdown outside of Auckland — Florida DOE investigating Hillsborough and Sarasota schools over mask policy.



Blood specimen collection tubes are seen in the laboratory of Bellville Medical Center, in Bellville, Texas, September 1, 2021. (FRANCOIS PICARD/AFP via Getty Images)

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that health officials were maintaining a "close eye" on the mu variant despite it being "not at all even close" to becoming the dominant COVID-19 strain in the U.S.

"Even though it has not in essence taken hold to any extent here we always pay attention to at all times variants," Fauci said.



4.Variant tracker: Where different strains are spreading.

Cases:

1.Global: Total confirmed cases as of 12 p.m. ET on Monday: 220,875,406 — Total deaths: 4,571,188— Total vaccine doses administered: 5,479,375,909

2.U.S.: Total confirmed cases as of 12 p.m. ET on Monday: 39,962,023 — Total deaths: 648,656 (Courtesy axios.com)

Why Are China's Bitcoin Miners Moving To Texas?



Quick Look

China's ban on cryptocurrency mining has forced bitcoin entrepreneurs to flee overseas. Many are heading to Texas, which is quickly becoming the next global cryptocurrency capital.

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

When China announced a crackdown on bitcoin mining and trading in May, Kevin Pan, CEO of Chinese cryptocurrency mining company Poolin, got on a flight the next day to leave the country.

"We decided to move out, once [and] for all. [We'll] never come back again," Mr Pan told the BBC.

Headquartered in Hong Kong, Poolin is the second largest bitcoin mining network in the world, with most of its operations in mainland China. The country was home to around 70% of global bitcoin mining power, until the clampdown sent the price of bitcoin into a tailspin and caught miners off guard.

Now China's "bitcoin refugees" are urgently scrambling to find a new home, whether in neighbouring Kazakhstan, Russia or North America, because for bitcoin miners, time is literally money.



"We had to find a new location for the [bitcoin mining] machines," Poolin's vice-president Alejandro De La Torre

said. "Because every minute that the machine is not on, it's not making money."

In what some call the "Great Mining Migration," the Poolin executives are among the many bitcoin miners who have recently landed in a place reputed as part of America's wild west: Austin, Texas

Bitcoins are a digital currency with no physical form - they exist and are exchanged only online.

They are created when a computer 'mines' the money by solving a complex set of maths problems and that is how bitcoin 'miners' who run the computers earn the currency.

This takes a lot of energy. As a new form of money that transcends national boundaries, there is also much confusion and potential to run afoul of government rules - so two things bitcoin entrepreneurs value are cheap electricity and a relaxed regulatory environment.

The Lone Star State fits the bill to a tee.



New frontier for bitcoin mining

For Mr Pan, Texas felt like home almost instantly. Days after his arrival, he was gifted an AR-15 rifle, which he says he may use to "hunt hogs from a helicopter" one day.

While the shooting ranges and Texas barbecue provide for welcome entertainment, legal protection for business is the major attraction for the bitcoin miners. "What happened to us in China won't happen in the US," Mr De La Torre says.



Kevin Pan (left) and Alejandro De La Torre.

Governor of Texas Greg Abbott has been a vocal supporter for cryptocurrency. "It's happening! Texas will be the crypto leader," he tweeted in June. In the same month, the Lone Star State became the second US state after Wyoming to recognise blockchain and cryptocurrency in its commercial law, paving the way for crypto businesses to operate in the state.

Many Chinese bitcoin companies have looked to Texas for stability and opportunity. Shenzhen-based firm BIT Mining has planned to invest \$26 million to build a data centre in the state, while Beijing-based Bitmain is expanding its facility in Rockdale, Texas. This small town with around 5,600 residents once housed one of the world's largest aluminium plants, and now it's emerging as the next global hub for bitcoin mining.

There might be another underlying connection between the industry and the state, as De La Torre says that bitcoiners and Texans share the same values. "Texans take their freedom and rights very seriously, and so do we bitcoiners."

Experts believe China's bitcoin crackdown was motivated by having greater

control over the financial markets, and it may become a boon for America. "The migration benefits the US in terms of talent acquisition and furthering the innovation ecosystem," says Kevin Desouza, a business professor at the Queensland University of Technology who has done research on China's digital currency policy. In return, the bitcoin miners get access to a thriving and innovative community, as well as more diverse sources of capital, according to Prof Desouza.



China was once the world's centre of bitcoin mining.

Energy and political risks

Other than a stable regulatory environment, the energy-hungry industry is hunting for cheap electricity in Texas. Texas has some of the cheapest energy prices in the world, due to its deregulated power grid. Consumers enjoy more choices of electricity providers, which encourage providers to lower prices to stay competitive. During peaks of electricity demand, bitcoin farms can even sell unused power back to the grid.

Although El Salvador is set to become the first country to adopt bitcoin as a national currency, bitcoin miners prefer the US because of its well-developed electrical infrastructure, says Mr

De La Torre.

But some analysts warn that the "Great Mining Migration" may lead to serious repercussions, as cities and towns struggle to meet the huge energy appetite.

In February, blackouts following a deadly snowstorm left millions of homes and businesses in Texas without power for days. More than 200 people died. During the power outage, bitcoin farms were compensated to stay offline.



The increased scrutiny of Chinese companies in America may also lead to more attention on these mining newcomers. Texas recently passed a law that prevents "hostile foreign actors" from accessing critical infrastructure, including its power grid. The new law was reportedly prompted by a Chinese billionaire's plan to build a wind farm in southwest Texas. Critics allege that the project could be used to hack into the Texas energy grid and to gather intelligence from a nearby US military base.

Prof Desouza says that while access to electricity grids is unlikely to be an issue for bitcoin miners in the short term, political risk will continue to evolve.

The bitcoin miners do miss something in China - cheap labour cost and speedy construction.

According to Mr Pan, while a new bitcoin farm takes up to five months to build in China, it could take as long as 18 months in Texas. Global shipping prices have also skyrocketed during the pandemic, making it significantly more expensive to ship mining machines from China to the US.

Despite the costly and time-consuming efforts, Mr Pan says his company is committed to settle in Texas, "It's a free land, and a lot of bitcoiners are here," he says, "so we feel: 'whoa, family reunion.'" (https://www.bbc.com/)