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US puts Hezbollah lawmakers on sanctions blacklist for first time

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Trump slams May's 'foolish policies,' 'pompous' envoy

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump assailed Britain's US ambassador as a "pompous fool" and slammed outgoing premier Theresa May's "foolish" policies in a second straight day of virulent attacks triggered by the leak of unflattering diplomatic cables. The missives threaten to plunge Washington and London into an unprecedented diplomatic crisis with uncertain outcome, and have landed their author, British Ambassador



Kim Darroch

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WASHINGTON/BEIRUT: The US Treasury placed two Hezbollah members of Lebanon's parliament on its sanctions blacklist yesterday - the first time Washington has taken aim at the Iran-allied group's elected politicians. The Treasury named MPs Amin Sherri and Muhammad Hasan Raad to a terror-related blacklist, saying that Hezbollah uses its parliamentary power to advance its alleged violent activities. Also placed on the blacklist was Wafiq Safa, a top Hezbollah official close to Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah.

"Hezbollah uses its operatives in Lebanon's parliament to manipulate institutions in support of the terrorist group's financial and security interests, and to bolster Iran's malign activities," said Sigal Mandelker, Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. The move came as the US steps up pressure on Iran and its alleged "proxies" in the Middle East, including Hezbollah, which Washington accuses of

encouraging "terror" attacks.

However, officials stopped short of a threatened sanctions action against Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. On June 24, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said Zarif would be added to the sanctions list "later this week", amid rising tensions in the Gulf. A senior administration official who insisted on anonymity would not confirm that plan. "We are obviously exploring ... various avenues for additional sanctions on Tehran. Obviously Foreign Minister Zarif is a figure of key interest," she said.

It was the first time the US Treasury had placed Hezbollah lawmakers on its blacklist, which forbid US individuals and businesses with a US branch - including leading international banks - from doing business with those sanctioned. "It is time we believe for other nations around the world to recognize that there is no distinction between Hezbollah's political and military wing," a senior administration official who insisted on anonymity

told journalists. "To any member of Hezbollah considering running for office, know that you will not be able to hide beneath the cover of political office," the official said.

Raad, 64, is the head of the parliamentary bloc of the party and an MP since 1992. Sherri, 62, is a 17-year Hezbollah veteran of parliament representing Beirut. Safa, the Treasury said, maintains the group's ties to financiers and allegedly helps arrange the smuggling of weapons and drugs. The newest sanctions brought to 50 the number of Hezbollah individuals and entities blacklisted by the Treasury since 2017.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's tourism minister urged politicians yesterday not to wreck the country's best tourist season in years, after a deadly shooting in a popular mountain region stirred fears of strife. Avedis Guidanian said more tourists came to Lebanon in the first half of this year than in the same period any year since 2010. But he warned the pres-

ident in a meeting that the summer forecast would take a hit if political tensions persisted. "I told him, in case this incident cannot be contained, there are fears. There are many questions from people planning to come," the minister told a press conference at the presidential palace.

He added that there were no big cancellations so far. "His excellency (President Michel Aoun) assured me that things are on the right track. God willing, soon, we will have really overcome this."

The government has vowed to restore security after the shootout on July 1 killed two aides of a minister in the Chouf mountains, one of the bloodiest theatres of Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war. The tourism industry, once a mainstay of Lebanon's now-battered economy, has been in the doldrums since 2011 - the year conflict erupted in neighboring Syria.

Political paralysis in Lebanon and travel warnings from Gulf Arab states also

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Trump hails Qatar ties, to sign 'very large transaction'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump yesterday praised friendship with the Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, saying he is "a highly respected man, a real leader in a large part of the world and a very important part of the world." In remarks to reporters alongside Sheikh Tamim at the Oval office, Trump said "we have known each other a long time and have been friends for a long time and we are doing a lot of work now." He added that Qatar is investing "very heavily" in the US and they are "creating a lot of jobs and buying tremendous amounts of military equipment, including planes and buying large numbers of commercial planes from Boeing."

Trump said that they will be signing "a very large transaction ...that will be purchasing a lot of Boeing

jets and a lot of money spent in our country and that means a lot of jobs, so we just appreciate everything." He also shed light on Al Udeid military base in Qatar, saying they built "one of the great military bases, I would say anywhere in the world."

For his part, Sheikh Tamim said that the US and Qatar "enjoy a very great relationship and we are doing a lot together." He indicated that the economic partnership has been more than \$185 billion and Qatar is "planning to double this number". He added that Qatar has "a lot of investments" in the US, saying "we trust the economy here, we do a lot in the infrastructure and we are planning to do more investments." Sheikh Tamim invited Trump "to see Qatar and visit Al Udeid base", to which Trump remarked that the base "is incredible, it is a great place to have it, in the middle of the Middle East, so obviously it is a very important location."

Earlier yesterday, US Acting Secretary of Defense Mark Esper met Sheikh Tamim at the Pentagon to "reaffirm the strategic security partnership" between the two countries, the Pentagon said in a statement yesterday. — KUNA



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump meets Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani in the Oval Office at the White House yesterday. — AFP

Instagram rolls out new AI features to counter bullying

WASHINGTON: Instagram will introduce new features aimed at curbing online bullying, the Facebook-owned platform announced Monday, as social media giants face increased scrutiny over the harassment faced by many users. There have been growing calls around the world for greater oversight of platforms like Facebook and Twitter, amid widespread criticism over bullying, as well as the spread of hate speech and fake news.

Instagram, which has more than a billion users worldwide, is a platform focused on images, allowing users to post photos and videos, which can then be commented on by other users. The company said it has used artificial intelligence to monitor bullying and harmful content for years, and will now use the technology to detect when a user is about to post something offensive and issue a warning.

"This intervention gives people a chance to reflect and undo their comment," Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, said in a statement. "From early tests of the feature, we have found that it encourages some people to undo their comment and share something less hurtful once they have had a chance to reflect."

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NANTES, France: In this photo taken on May 2, 2019, logos of US social network Instagram are displayed on the screen of a computer and a smartphone. — AFP

Perot, billionaire who sought US presidency, dies

WASHINGTON: Ross Perot, the eccentric and iconic self-made billionaire and computer industry giant whose two runs for president as an independent candidate shook up American politics, died yesterday at 89, his family said. "A true American patriot and a man of rare vision, principle and deep compassion, he touched the lives of countless people through his unwavering support of the military and veterans and through his charitable endeavors," they added.

The trailblazing Texas tycoon, technology pioneer and philanthropist died at his Dallas home, after what the Dallas Morning News described as a five-month battle with leukemia. Perot delivered a shockingly strong performance as an independent in the 1992 presidential race, capturing 19 percent of the vote and syphoning off conservative support, helping seal Democrat Bill Clinton's victory over incumbent George HW Bush.

No other independent or third-party candidate has won such a large slice of the vote since the Democratic and Republican parties began dominating presidential politics in the mid-19th century, and he foretold the impact that strong, focused third-party campaigns could have on a White House race. His appearance alongside Clinton and Bush on the debate stage sharply boosted his credibility among viewers.

When Bush asked what experience Perot had to run the country, the retort from Perot - who spent \$63 million of his own money on the race - was a corker. "I don't have any experience in running up a \$4 trillion debt," Perot fired back. "I don't have any experience in gridlock government where nobody takes responsibility for anything and everybody blames everybody else... but I do have a lot of experience in getting things done."

Four years later Perot ran again, as leader of the Reform Party. But he did not fare as well, and Clinton was re-elected. Perot's first campaign caused a rift between him and the Bush family, but yesterday, George W Bush, the 43rd president, hailed him as an American icon. "Texas and America have lost a strong patriot," Bush said in a statement. "Ross Perot epitomized the entrepreneurial spirit and the American creed."

Henry Ross Perot was born on June 27, 1930, in



TAMPA: In this file photo taken on Oct 31, 1992, independent presidential candidate Ross Perot speaks at the University of South Florida. — AFP

Texarkana, Texas, and raised in the height of the Depression. He graduated in 1953 from the US Naval Academy, where he first learned about computers. After his naval service, Perot joined IBM as a computer salesman in 1957 and quickly made a reputation for himself. In 1962 he met his yearly sales quota by Jan 19.

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Ransomware hits hard; cyber attacks cost \$45bn in 2018

WASHINGTON: An estimated two million cyber attacks in 2018 resulted in more than \$45 billion in losses worldwide as local governments struggled to cope with ransomware and other malicious incidents, a study showed yesterday. The Internet Society's Online Trust Alliance, compiling data from the United States and some international sources, said other important losses came from fraudulently taking over business email credentials as well as "cytojacking" or hijacking a computer or network to generate bitcoin or other virtual currency.

The report suggested cyber criminals are getting more sophisticated in targeting their victims, but also noted many attacks could have been prevented with improved computer security. Various security researchers found as many as 6,515 computer breaches and five billion records exposed in 2018. Jeff Wilbur, technical director of the alliance, said the report's estimates are conservative because many attacks are not reported. "The financial impact of cybercrime is up significantly and cyber criminals are becoming more skilled at profiting from their attacks," Wilbur said.

Some \$8 billion in losses came as the result of ransomware attacks including high-profile incidents targeting the cities of Atlanta, Georgia, and Baltimore, Maryland that forced the municipalities to rebuild their networks. While the number of ransomware infects fell by an estimated 20 percent, the financial losses surged by 60 percent, the report said. Attackers also continued to profit from a variety of email scams that impersonate employees or vendors, a technique also known as "phishing".

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