



Elsewhere

Australia's ex-PM Bob Hawke dead

SYDNEY
Australia's longest-serving Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke died on Thursday aged 89. The son of a preacher, Mr. Hawke led his country during the 1980s, a period during which he seduced the nation with his everyman appeal while beginning deregulation of the economy, including by floating the dollar. **AFP**

Trump pardons former media baron Black

WASHINGTON
U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday signed a full pardon for former media mogul Conrad Black, who was convicted in 2007 of fraud and obstruction of justice and spent 3-1/2 years in prison. Mr. Black, who has called Mr. Trump a friend, published a book last year praising him, titled *Donald J. Trump: A President Like No Other*. **AFP**

Theresa May to set departure timeline after vote on Brexit Bill

Boris Johnson to enter the intra-party contest to replace her

VIDYA RAM
LONDON

British Prime Minister Theresa May will set a timetable for her departure after a crucial vote on Brexit legislation in June, as Conservative MPs temporarily backed away from demands that she set a date for her departure this week and Boris Johnson declared his intention to enter the intra-party contest to replace her.

Her plan will add to the significance of the vote on the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement Bill, whose crucial second reading is set to take place in the week beginning June 3, and through which the Prime Minister hopes to make a final attempt to get her Brexit plans through Parliament.

At the weekend, Graham Brady, the chair of the influential 1922 Committee of backbench Conservative MPs (MPs without a government post) had insisted that a departure date needed to

Images of Iran missiles set off U.S. alert

Photos of weapons on small boats in the Gulf caused White House to fear an attack from Tehran

JULIAN E. BARNES
ERIC SCHMITT
WASHINGTON

The intelligence that caused the White House to escalate its warnings about a threat from Iran came from photographs of missiles on small boats in the Gulf that were put on board by Iranian paramilitary forces, three U.S. officials said.

Overhead imagery showed fully assembled missiles, stoking fears that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps would fire them at U.S. naval ships. Additional pieces of intelligence indicated the possibility of potential attacks, on U.S. troops in Iraq, by militias having Iranian connections.

Threat perception
But just how alarmed the Trump administration should be over the new intelligence is a subject of fierce debate among the White House, the Pentagon, the CIA and America's allies. The



Loaded and deployed: The aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* conducting a replenishment-at-sea with support ship *USNS Arctic*. The carrier is currently in the Gulf. **AFP**

photographs presented a different kind of threat than previously seen from Iran, said the three officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Taken with the other intelligence, they could indicate that Iran is preparing to attack U.S. forces. That is the view of John Bolton, President Donald Trump's hard-

line National Security Adviser, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

But other officials – including Europeans, Iraqis, members of both parties in Congress and some senior officials within the Trump administration – said Iran's moves might mostly be defensive against what Tehran believes are provocative acts

by Washington. Either way, the questions about the underlying intelligence, and complaints by lawmakers that they had not been briefed on it, reflect the deep mistrust of Mr. Trump's national security team.

Evacuation of Embassy

The State Department on Wednesday ordered the partial evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and a consulate in Iraqi Kurdistan, a move that one senior U.S. official said was an overreaction to the intelligence and could possibly do more to endanger diplomats than to keep them safe.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, in a closed-door meeting of House Democrats, criticised the administration's lack of transparency on the intelligence, according to a Democratic aide. She also said that the administration must consult Congress before taking any action.

Intelligence officials were

set to meet on Thursday with senior congressional leaders for a briefing on the new intelligence about Iran.

As military officials struggled to show that the threat from Iran was growing, intelligence officials declassified a photograph of one of the small boats, called dhows, carrying what was described as a functional Iranian missile.

The Pentagon has not released the photograph. On its own, two U.S. officials said, the photograph was not compelling enough to convince the American public and lawmakers, nor foreign allies, of the new Iranian threat.

The other photographs, which remain classified, show the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps loading missiles onto the boats in several different Iranian ports, the two officials said. It is believed the boats are under the Revolutionary Guards's control. **NY TIMES**

Coalition planes hit Sana'a after Houthi drone strike

Military sites in Yemeni capital targeted

REUTERS
SANA'A

The Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen carried out several air strikes on the Houthi-held capital Sana'a on Thursday after the Iranian-aligned movement claimed responsibility for drone attacks on Saudi oil installations. The Sana'a strikes targeted nine military sites in and around the city, residents said.

The Houthi-run Masirah TV channel quoted the Houthi Health Ministry as saying that six civilians, including four children, had been killed and 52 wounded, including two Russian women working in the health sector.

A coalition statement carried by Saudi-owned Al Arabiya TV, said the Sunni Muslim alliance struck military bases and facilities and weapons storage sites with the aim of "neutralising the ability of the Houthi militia to



The site of an air strike by the Saudi-led coalition in Sana'a, Yemen. **REUTERS**

carry out acts of aggression".

Saudi Arabia's Deputy-Defence Minister on Thursday accused Iran of ordering Tuesday's armed drone attack on two oil pumping stations in the kingdom.

The Houthis said they were responsible for the attack, which did not disrupt oil output or exports.

The head of the Houthis' Supreme Revolutionary Committee, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, said Iran did not direct the strike and that the movement manufactures its drones "locally".

De Blasio joins crowded race for presidency

REUTERS
NEW YORK

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio entered the crowded 2020 presidential race on Thursday, arguing that his record of progressive accomplishments in the country's biggest city positioned him as the perfect foil to President Donald Trump.

Mr. de Blasio, 57, launched his candidacy with the central campaign message, "Working People First," becoming the 24th Democrat seeking to take on Mr. Trump in the election next year.

In a video released on Thursday, Mr. de Blasio returned to the theme of income inequality that had animated his first mayoral campaign in 2013, when he emerged as a leading voice for the burgeoning left wing. "People in every part of this country feel stuck or even like they're going backwards," he said in the video. "But the rich got richer."

Technology ban escalates U.S.-China tensions

Order prohibits purchase of equipment from companies that pose security risk

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China warned the U.S. on Thursday against further harming trade ties after President Donald Trump effectively barred Chinese telecom giant Huawei from the U.S. market, escalating tensions between the world's top economic powerhouses.

At the same time, Beijing's diplomatic relations with Ottawa further soured as China formally arrested two Canadians on suspicion of snatching state secrets in a case seen as retaliation over Canada's arrest of a Huawei executive on a U.S. extradition request.



The U.S. has added Huawei to a blacklist that will make it much harder for the firm to use crucial components. **AP**

The spat over Huawei adds to the uncertainty over efforts to revive a deal that would end a bruising U.S.-China trade war after the two sides hiked tariffs recently. "The U.S.'s bullying and maximum pressure tactics have caused the China-U.S. economic and trade talks to suffer a serious set-

back," Commerce Ministry spokesman Gao Feng told a weekly press briefing.

Mr. Trump stepped up the U.S. battle against Huawei on Wednesday when he signed an executive order prohibiting the purchase or use of equipment from companies that pose "an unacceptable risk to the national

security of the United States" or the safety of the American people. While the White House insisted that no particular country or company was targeted, Huawei is likely to be hit by the move amid concerns that its equipment could be used by Chinese intelligence services.

The U.S. Commerce Department followed up with a more direct hit on the tech giant, adding it to a blacklist that will make it much harder for the firm to use crucial U.S. components in its array of phones, telecom gear, databases and other electronics.

INTERVIEW | ABDULLA SHAHID

'We have rock solid ties with India'

Minister says Maldives will work with all countries in region for better security

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN
CHENNAI

Maldivian Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Abdulla Shahid**, is a veteran of democratic politics in the island nation and has been at the forefront of recent shifts in the balance of power in Male. On a brief visit to Chennai, he spoke about why the Maldives is strategically positioned to play a critical role on issues such as counterterrorism and climate change, even as it strives to address economic challenges inherited from the previous administration in Male. Edited excerpts:

We've seen a change in the political trajectory of the Maldives since last year, including a perceptible shift in the bilateral space. How do you see that evolving?

■ The relationship that we have with India now is rock solid. There is mutual respect from both countries. Both understand that it is to the benefit of both countries that we cooperate on development, security, and every facet of relations. It is mutual respect and understanding that has taken us to this new level of relationship and cooperation.

Uppermost on everyone's mind on the region now is the security question, especially after the Easter Sunday attack in Sri Lanka. What do you see as the Maldives being able to



We will aim for the moon as far as environmental protection is concerned

contribute in terms of security?

■ The Maldives is the guardian of the Indian Ocean, because it straddles the middle of that region. Therefore, the responsibility that is on us to make sure that we work with all countries in addressing such issues is fundamental. The threats that are faced by countries, including the Maldives, India, Sri Lanka and the U.S., have no boundaries, no religion. It is pure evil. We can confront this evil only by making sure that we put aside our differences and work together. The Maldives will play its role in making sure that our intelligence agencies and security forces and our border control officers work with all our partners. Together, I am sure that

we will defeat terrorism.

In terms of specifics, we've heard in India that there were people from Kerala, for example, who went across to Syria. How much radicalisation has been seen within the Maldives?

■ We have some Maldivians who have gone to Syria as foreign fighters, and some of them have been killed. We are very seriously monitoring the people who had left the country to join as foreign fighters in other parts of the world. Again, our intelligence agencies will be able to keep track of them, with cooperation within an international framework.

The big concern for the Maldives is mitigating climate change, and there have been numerous conversations on this with India. Do you think that there's more for a country the size of India could be doing, either for the Maldives or by itself, to help mitigate climate change effects?

■ The Maldives' carbon footprint is almost nil. But as a country there is a responsibility, a role that we have to play. We have continued to raise the voice of small island states in international fora, because we are at the forefront of the victim list. India is helping us in renewable energy sources. Recently, during Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's visit, the Indian government donated

many environment-friendly street lights and home lighting. These are little things, but it does go a long way. The Maldives is in need of renewable energy projects, because we could become the first country that is entirely run on renewable energy, based on today's technology. We will aim for the moon, so far as environmental protection is concerned.

Looking at your domestic politics, the new government has settled in. Given the history of the Maldives' politics, and even its geography, do you feel that there are any challenges for the ruling coalition to hold together?

■ I would not hide the fact that we would have our differences. But I believe we have had enough experience to be more mature and avoid the mistakes of the past. I am confident that in these five years [ahead], we will be able to maintain the coalition as far as the government is concerned. In the parliamentary election, the people have come out and given a resounding, overwhelming majority for the Maldivian Democratic Party. But it is not the intention of President Ibu Solih to run the country by one party. It is his intention to maintain the mandate given by the people in the presidential elections. The people gave their mandate not to one party but to a coalition.