



Pakistani women light candles as they pay respects to boxing legend Muhammad Ali in Multan yesterday. — AFP

# TALE OF TRUMP AND AZERBAIJAN PARTNER

WASHINGTON: Six months before he entered the presidential race, Donald Trump announced a new real estate project in Baku, Azerbaijan. His partner was the son of a government minister suspected by US diplomats of laundering money for Iran's military and described as "notoriously corrupt". Eighteen months later, and only weeks after daughter Ivanka Trump released a publicity video of the nearly finished project, references to the Baku project have disappeared from Trump's website. Trump's general counsel, Alan Garten, told AP that it was on hold for economic reasons.

Trump often talks of hiring the best people and surrounding himself with people he can trust. In practice, however, he and his executives have at times appeared to overlook details about the background of people he has chosen as business partners, such as whether they had dubious associations, had been convicted of crimes, faced extradition or inflated their resumes.

The Trump camp's screening skills are important as the presumptive Republican presidential nominee turns to selecting a running mate. They would only become more crucial if he won the White House. Then, Trump would have to name more than 3,600 political appointees to senior government positions, including critical jobs overseeing national security and the economy.

In the Azerbaijani case, Garten said the Trump Organization had performed meticulous due diligence on

the company's partners, but hadn't researched the allegations against the Baku partner's father because he wasn't a party to the deal. "I've never heard that before," Garten said, when first asked about allegations of Iranian money laundering by the partner's father, which appeared in US diplomatic cables widely available since they were leaked in 2010.

Garten subsequently said he was confident the minister alleged to be laundering Iranian funds, Ziya Mammadov, had no involvement in his son's holding company, even though some of the son's major businesses regularly partnered with the transportation ministry and were founded while the son was in college overseas. Ziya Mammadov did not respond to a telephone message the AP left with his ministry in Baku or to emails to the Azerbaijan Embassy in Washington.

Garten told the AP that Trump's company uses a third-party investigative firm, which he did not identify, that specializes in background intelligence gathering and searches global watch lists, warrant lists and sanctions lists maintained by the United Nations, Interpol and others. Trump has described his background research as presidential in quality. Asked in a 2013 deposition why he had not performed formal records of due diligence on a business partner - a man Trump later deemed "a dud" - Trump said he considered word-of-mouth inquiries to be adequate.

"We heard good things about him from a couple of different people," he said of his partner in the deposition. "That's

true with the president of the United States. You get references and sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not so good." Trump's lawyer, Garten, who was in the room at the time of Trump's statement, told the AP that it was unreasonable to expect Trump to know the full range of the company's diligence efforts.

Any American contemplating a business venture in Azerbaijan faces a risk: "endemic public corruption," as the State Department puts it. Much of that money flows from the oil and gas industries, but the State Department also considers the country to be a waypoint for terrorist financiers, Iranian sanctions-busters and Afghan drug lords. The environment is a risky one for any business venture seeking to avoid violating US penalties imposed against Iran or anti-bribery laws under the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

### Background Screening

Trump's choice of partners in Baku was Anar Mammadov, the son of the country's transportation minister. Anar Mammadov did not respond to AP's emails or messages sent to his social media accounts or messages left with his company. Garten said the Trump Organization had performed background screening on all those involved in the deal and was confident Mammadov's father played no role in the project.

Experts on Azerbaijan were mystified that Trump or anyone else could reach that conclusion. Anar Mammadov is widely viewed by diplomats and nongovernmental organizations as a transparent stand-in for the business interests of his father. Anar's business has boomed with regular help from his father's ministry, receiving exclusive government contracts, a near monopoly on Baku's taxi business and even a free fleet of autobuses.

"These are not business people acting on their own - you're dealing with daddy," said Richard Kauzlarich, a US ambassador to Azerbaijan under President Bill Clinton in the 1990s who went on to work under the Director of National Intelligence during the George W Bush administration. "Whatever the Trump people thought they were doing, that

wasn't reality," Kauzlarich said.

Anar Mammadov, who is believed to be 35, has said in a series of interviews that he founded Garant Holdings' predecessor - which has arms in transportation, construction, banking, telecommunications and manufacturing - in 2000, when he would have been 19. Anar received his bachelor's degree in 2003 and a master's in business administration in 2005 - both from a university in London.

Mammadov's statement that he founded the business in 2000 appeared in a magazine produced by a research firm in partnership with the Azerbaijani government. In other forums, he has said he started the business in 2005, though several of its key subsidiaries predate that period. Garten declined to discuss specific background research on Anar but said such checks were "comprehensive." The file for the Baku project would not have included anything on Ziya Mammadov, Garten said, because the Trump Organization concluded that he would play no role in the project.

"The younger Mammadov did not build his business empire simply by delivering newspapers," said Matt Bryza, a former US ambassador to Azerbaijan. He served on the National Security Council in George W Bush's administration and was appointed ambassador from 2010 to 2012 under President Barack Obama. Ziya Mammadov was described in March 2009 in leaked US diplomatic cables as "notoriously corrupt, even for Azerbaijan" and accused of working closely on government highway construction contracts awarded to a former senior Iranian military official in the Republican Guard, Kamal Darvishi. "We assume Mammadov is a silent partner in these contracts," the State Department cable said.

Though the Baku hotel project has not been completed, it has earned Trump a significant payday. He earned between \$2.5 million and \$2.8 million in hotel management fees from a hotel that has never opened, according to the financial disclosures filed by his campaign. Trump licensing details generally involve the receipt of a significant minority stake in the property, too. The Azerbaijani case is not the only one involving partners with unusual pasts. — AP

## MOI WARNS AGAINST RAMADAN BEGGING...

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It added that the Ministry of Interior is launching a public awareness campaign through the media and social networks to encourage people to turn in any beggar they may accost by calling the emergency hotline 112 or contacting

the nearest police station or police officer. Moreover, the statement cautioned those who may be tempted to eat food in public during the hours of fasting in Ramadan. Such an act would be in violation of the law, necessitating the offender to be jailed for a month or pay a fine of KD 100, or serve the jail term and pay the fine. — KUNA

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