



THE AGE

INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

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POLITICAL HACKING

China key suspect in cyber raid

David Wroe
National security correspondent

Chinese spies are the prime suspects in an unprecedented hack of Australia's political parties that could have exposed information about voters and private data of MPs.

In what sources have branded an "A-team" attack, the Liberal, Labor and National parties have all been subjected to cyber operations by a skilled foreign government that was also responsible for a breach of Federal Parliament's computer systems.

While authorities said there was no evidence the hacking was political interference, they acknowledged they did not know what data was taken or the motives.

Sources said the sophistication of malicious software used was limited to a handful of countries worldwide,

COMMENT
The time for special treatment has passed
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most of whom are friendly towards Australia, leaving China and Russia as possible culprits.

A senior intelligence source said: "It's been a long time since we've been focused on an actor who has this level of sophistication."

Officials stress they don't yet have the evidence to name a country, but China was behind previous attacks on government systems, including a 2011 hacking of the federal parliamentary email network and the 2015 hacking of the weather bureau.

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Photo: Alex Ellinghausen

HELLOWORLD'S BOOKING ENTRY FOR SENATOR CORMANN'S FLIGHTS

Cormann 'no idea' of free flights

EXCLUSIVE
Nick McKenzie
Richard Baker

Finance Minister Mathias Cormann's flights for a family holiday to Singapore were paid for by a travel company controlled by Liberal Party Treasurer Andrew Burnes within weeks of that company winning a \$1billion contract from Senator Cormann's department.

Helloworld, a listed company of which Mr Burnes is the chief executive, booked tickets for Senator Cormann, his wife and two children on the company's "staff and family travel" account.

Records kept by Helloworld and obtained by *The Age* reveal that the

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SEARCH RESULTS									
Customer No.:	100008	Contact:		Credit Limit:	1.0				
Customer:	AAAStaff and Family Travel	Phone:		Balance:					
Sales Exec:	INTERAUS	Email:		Unallocated:	0.00				
Show Hidden	Show Selected	Ticket No.		Selection amount:	0.00				
Advice	Date	Booking	Tickets	Amount	Due	Name	Comment	All	
22250161	17/07/2017	15978383	ETK	2560.02	2560.02	CORMANN/MATHIAS/MR	CORMANN/MA		

GetUp! 'not linked' to left parties

Michael Koziol

The Australian Electoral Commission has declared activist group GetUp! is not associated with any political party, defying conservatives who argued it should be treated as an arm of Labor and the Greens.

The commission found GetUp!'s

campaigns were primarily issue-based rather than linked to a particular party, and that its conduct on polling booths urging a vote for Labor or the Greens did not constitute a significant part of its overall activities.

GetUp!'s national director Paul Oosting said the commission's deci-

sion had "strongly rejected the push by the hard-right faction of the Coalition to shut everyday people out of politics".

The AEC accepted that GetUp! how-to-vote cards distributed in some electorates at the 2016 election

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Blame game on recycling

A blame game has erupted over the state's recycling crisis as councils prepare to dump their next recyclables collection in landfill.

The City of Whittlesea has urged residents to hold off putting rubbish in yellow-top bins. The City of Hume is one of 20 councils taking its recycling collection to

landfill. The state government wants councils to find better services after recycling company SKM Services was forced to stop accepting material. Councils have accused the government of failing to stabilise the recycling industry.

REPORT Page 9

WEATHER

Today Mostly sunny
Tomorrow Partly cloudy
Thursday Partly cloudy
Details

14-20
12-22
15-20
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ODDSPOT

Firefighters have rescued a cat - a very large cat ... a mountain lion - from a tree outside a home in the Southern California desert. After wildlife personnel tranquilised the cougar, the firefighters carefully lowered it from its 15-metre-high perch to the ground. It was later released back into the wild.



BUSINESS

'Big boys' do better in tough world
CLANCY YEATES
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FAMILY FUN ♦ GROUP 1 RACING ♦ FANTASTIC FOOD

AUSTRALIAN GUINEAS DAY



Dr Thi Hoang Oanh Nguyen
with frozen flu samples.
Photo: Justin McManus

GetUp! ‘no links’ to Labor

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directed voters to preference Labor and the Greens, which could meet the criteria for being declared an “associated entity” of those parties.

However, the commission ruled that the how-to-vote cards comprised a small part of GetUp!’s activities and were insufficient to make the group wholly or significantly controlled by Labor or the Greens.

Furthermore, the AEC noted the cards did not consistently recommend voting for the same political party. Neither did GetUp! make financial donations to registered political parties.

The decision means GetUp! is not required to file a financial return to the Electoral Commission setting out its major sources of funding and political expenditure.

Mr Oosting said the investigation had backfired on the conservatives who had called for it, and that the AEC’s decision set an important precedent for grassroots campaigners.

Several Coalition members have argued GetUp! should be classified as an associated entity of Labor or the Greens. Liberal MP Ben Morton presented the how-to-vote cards to the AEC at an inquiry by the joint standing committee on electoral matters into the 2016 election.

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has labelled the activist group as an “extremist” arm of Labor and the Greens.

Liberal senator Eric Abetz yesterday said: “GetUp! is a highly partisan extreme left-wing front, established by Bill Shorten and trade union funds. Together with foreign support, it continues to attack the Liberal Party and Liberal parliamentarians.”

GetUp! has campaigned against the Adani coal mine and for a “fairer treatment” of asylum seekers.

Universal flu vaccine a big step closer

Liam Mannix

A huge taskforce of Australian research institutions believe they have taken major steps towards developing a universal flu vaccine that could last for up to 10 years.

They have found a part of the flu virus that does not change year-to-year. Mice given the vaccine become immune to the flu.

But their solution, published in a study today, would produce a strange type of vaccine: one that lets people still get sick, and that does not work for about half the population.

Most vaccines stop a virus infecting you. This vaccine kills viruses once you are infected.

“It’s not like antibodies – you can still get a mild form of the disease. But it could be a bit of a sniffle, rather than being bedbound for two weeks,” says Peter Doherty Institute Professor Katherine Kedzierska, the study’s senior author.

And a quirk in our DNA means it would only work for roughly half the world’s population.

A one-shot vaccine that does not require annual updates is the Holy Grail for influenza researchers. It would prevent disastrous flu seasons like 2017, when an ineffective vaccine led to a record number of infections and almost 4000 confirmed deaths.

More importantly, a universal

vaccine would help prevent the spread of lethal pandemic strains such as the Spanish flu, which killed up to 100 million people in 1918.

Flu viruses pose a big problem because of their ability to mutate every year, becoming just different enough for our immune system to let them through. But a virus cannot change all its genes. Some are ancient and integral to its function.

Find them, and you could theoretically build a vaccine that protects against every type of flu.

In work published today in *Nature Immunology*, a team of 37 researchers from more than 20 institutions reveal that they’ve found some of those ancient, common genes.

They used those genes to build a vaccine that would allow the immune system to spot and kill all types of flu.

In mice, the vaccine seems to ward off new infections.

“We think this is a big step forward in designing a universal influenza vaccine,” says Marios Koutsakos, the study’s lead author.

The next task: find more ancient genes that are common across all types of flu. With a broader range of target genes, the team could build a vaccine that worked for all humans.

“This work is still in the early stages. But having identified those cross-reactive T cells, we think we’re on a good path to start making a universal T cell vaccine.”

Cormann had ‘no idea’ he’d got free trip

From Page 1

Melbourne-based company paid \$2780.82 for the Singapore flights, which were booked in July 2017.

Helloworld announced the following month that its subsidiary, AOT, was the winner of the three-year-plus, \$300million a year finance department tender. Departmental sources claim Helloworld had achieved preferred tenderer status before Senator Cormann’s flights were booked in July. Senator Cormann and his family took the trip in early January, 2018.

The minister only paid for the return flights to Singapore from Perth yesterday afternoon, after Mr Burnes and Senator Cormann were contacted by *The Age*.

Senator Cormann said yesterday he had “no idea” that the travel had been booked on the family and staff travel account, nor that his credit card had not been charged. He was “completely unaware of internal administrative arrangements at Helloworld in terms of

how they managed private and personal travel”.

Yesterday evening, Mr Burnes said it was “absolutely an internal administrative oversight” that Senator Cormann’s credit card had not been charged for the trip when it was booked, which allowed the politician and his family to fly for free to Singapore.

Senator Cormann, who is a close personal and political associate of Mr Burnes, a Liberal donor, has never declared the Singapore family holiday on his parliamentary register of interests.

Senator Cormann said yesterday that he had no influence over the Finance Department tender process that led to Mr Burnes’s company being re-contracted to supply travel and accommodation booking services to the Australian government.

Helloworld is a \$713 million company whose main rivals in the corporate and government market include Flight Centre. Mr Burnes and his wife own a 35 per cent

*‘So many people use
our company to
book their travel.’*

Andrew Burnes, Helloworld chief executive

stake while Qantas Airways is its second-biggest shareholder with 17 per cent.

Former Treasurer Joe Hockey is also a top 20 shareholder.

When *The Age* sought comment from Mr Burnes yesterday about why his travel group had booked the Cormann family’s travel, he said: “We sell \$6.5 billion worth of travel. So many people use our company to book their travel.”

Mr Burnes declined to answer further questions on the record, although it is understood that his personal office arranged the Perth to Singapore booking after a request from Mr Cormann sometime before 17 July 2017.

A Helloworld source said it was

“probably inappropriate” that Mr Cormann’s travel was booked via a “family and staff” account.

The Age is not accusing Senator Cormann or Mr Burnes of any wrongdoing.

A source familiar with the tender negotiations between AOT and the Finance Department said an in-principle deal was reached in relation to a new contract on June 28, 2017, just over a fortnight before Mr Cormann’s trip to Singapore was booked by Helloworld and six weeks before Helloworld announced to the market it had won the travel contract.

Between 2000 and 2014, Mr Burnes’s AOT Group donated at least \$170,000 to state and federal branches of the Liberal Party.

The 2017 contract tender process was overseen by Mr Sheridan, a veteran finance department official. According to departmental documents and a source involved in the tender process, Mr Sheridan had annoyed some of the bidders, including Helloworld, when he

sought to cut margins and save the government money.

Asked if Mr Burnes had ever expressed concern about Mr Sheridan to him, Senator Cormann replied: “I’m not going into specifics. From time to time people engaged in procurement processes ... raise issues. My standard process is to send anyone to the department”.

Yesterday, Mr Burnes said he had not expressed any displeasure about Mr Sheridan to Senator Cormann, but acknowledged that “I did provide some feedback about aspects of the [tender] process to [Senator Cormann] who referred me to the department.”

In August 2017, Mr Sheridan was shifted to a new role in the finance department. He declined to discuss why he was moved, referring reporters to the finance department’s media team.

There is no suggestion Senator Cormann was involved in or influenced the departmental tender process or was involved in Mr Sheridan’s job transfer.