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Lazard says CEO Wasserstein hospitalized

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By [Paritosh Bansal](#)

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Investment bank Lazard Ltd said on Sunday that Chairman and Chief Executive Bruce Wasserstein, a legendary dealmaker, had been hospitalized for an irregular heartbeat.

Wasserstein's condition is serious, but he is stable and recovering, Lazard said, adding that it will not be providing updates at this time.

"This is not a talking head. This is a person that's deeply involved in the relationships that are so fundamental to this company," said Campbell Harvey, a professor at Duke University's business school. "It just screams uncertainty."

A Lazard spokeswoman declined to comment beyond the company statement.

Wasserstein, 61, a rainmaker since the 1970s, has most recently been involved in the looming takeover battle between Kraft Foods Inc and Cadbury PLC, representing the U.S. food group in its bid for the British chocolate maker.

The Wall Street veteran achieved fame as an adviser to buyout house KKR on its unprecedented acquisition of RJR Nabisco in 1989, which was recorded for posterity in the book, "Barbarians at the Gate," by Bryan Burrough and John Helyar.

Until a few years ago, the RJR takeover was the largest leveraged buyout in history.

BANKER AND MEDIA BARON

Wasserstein has helped broker more than 1,000 transactions worth more than \$250 billion, including Time's merger with Warner Brothers and the Dean Witter, Discover & Co. combination with Morgan Stanley.

Over the years, he has earned a reputation as a brilliant but hard-nosed banker who always found a way to get deals done. Among other schemes, Wasserstein invented the "Pac-Man defense" where a takeover target turns and buys its would-be acquirer.

In 2000, Wasserstein sold his mergers boutique Wasserstein Perella & Co to Germany's Dresdner Bank for \$1.5 billion. When plans for an investment banking unit spin-off failed a year later, Wasserstein quit and left the firm bearing his name. In time, some of the people he recruited to Dresdner also left.

Brooklyn-born Wasserstein has always excelled, earning a degree from the University of Michigan and then enrolling in Harvard Law at age 19; in 1970, he graduated from Harvard Law and a year later, received his Harvard MBA. He also attended the London School of Economics and went to Cambridge University as a Knox Traveling Fellow.

He worked briefly as a volunteer for consumer advocate Ralph Nader while he was in law school. After graduation, Wasserstein joined elite law firm Cravath, Swaine & Moore. But he soon traded life at the white-shoe law firm for the faster pace of Wall Street.

He then joined investment bank First Boston Corp, where he and Joseph Perella, another top Wall Street banker, built an M&A practice before forming Wasserstein Perella & Co in 1988.

Outside Wall Street, Wasserstein's favorite pursuit has been journalism. The

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one-time college newspaper editor and summer staffer at Forbes magazine acquired New York magazine through his \$2 billion private investment firm, Wasserstein & Co. He has also written business-related books.

Wasserstein's private equity fund also owns The Deal LLC, a media company focused on the mergers & acquisitions market.

(Reporting by Paritosh Bansal; Editing by [Jan Paschal](#))

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