

SMART CHOICES COLLEGE GUIDE

16-page pullout
Inside today



It is tempting to actually want Fianna Fáil to nominate Bertie Ahern for the presidency because we do perhaps need a sharp reminder of what collective shame feels like

Fintan O'Toole
Opinion



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FF leaders remain opposed to Ahern Áras bid

Ex-Dublin manager Jim Gavin viewed as serious prospect, say party sources

Martin likely to set out his thinking about options at meeting next week

PAT LEAHY, ELLEN COYNE and JACK HORGAN-JONES

The Fianna Fáil leadership remains strongly opposed to the possibility of former taoiseach Bertie Ahern becoming the party's candidate for president, according to three senior sources familiar with Micheál Martin's thinking.

Meanwhile, they said, the former Dublin football manager Jim Gavin is being viewed as a serious prospect.

A Fianna Fáil parliamentary party meeting is expected to be scheduled for the middle of next week, at which point Mr Martin will set out his thinking about the party's options.

However, it is unlikely that a candidate will be selected until later in September, insiders said.

Senior sources familiar with discussions on the issue said the view of the party leadership – understood to be shared by Mr Martin, key aides, several Ministers and TDs – is that former taoiseach Mr Ahern should not be the party's candidate in the election, which is likely to be scheduled for late October.

Mr Ahern, who is currently in Croatia for meetings with senior figures in the region, was unavailable for comment.

There is now a general acceptance in Fianna Fáil that the party will run a candidate. This marks a change since the start of the summer when senior party figures insisted Fianna Fáil was undecided about contesting the election.

A series of elected representatives have voiced their belief in recent weeks that the party should run a candidate, which is a view now accepted by most senior party figures. One backbencher said there is a "yearning" among their colleagues for a Fianna Fáil contestant in the field.

Mr Martin is understood to be continuing to take soundings and talk to potential candidates, though Mr Gavin is favoured by some as someone with wide appeal. Mr Gavin could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Sources said the party is

some way off a decision, though they played down the prospects of law professor Siofra O'Leary, former judge of the European Court of Human Rights, being tapped for the role.

None of the names previously touted as potential Fianna Fáil candidates, including former ministers Mary Hanafin and Éamon Ó Cuív, ex-SDLP leader Colum Eastwood and the Northern Ireland academic Deirdre Heenan, are likely to be favoured by the leadership, sources said.

But there was some enthusiasm for Mr Gavin among TDs yesterday, with one Minister speculating that his position in Dublin would give him a geographic advantage. Mr Gavin, who headed a GAA committee on new Gaelic football rules, is credited with reviving the sport this year.

Sinn Féin, meanwhile, continues to keep its intentions to itself. The party said there is no meeting of the ruling ard chomhairle scheduled yet and there is no expectation of a decision on a candidate this week.

The view in Sinn Féin is that it is "eminently sensible" to hold off until September and leave less time for a prospective candidate to be exposed to media scrutiny. Party leader Mary Lou McDonald again declined to confirm or deny her possible candidacy at the weekend, telling the BBC that "all options are on the table".

The coming weeks are also likely to see the focus shift to local authorities, where Independent candidates may seek nominations.

Businessman Gareth Sheridan's campaign has claimed it has active interest from 12 local authorities that are open to hearing from Independent candidates.

A spokesman for Mr Sheridan's campaign said councils had indicated they would be open to hearing pitches from prospective candidates, most likely between September 8th and 20th.

FF at least clear on who it won't back for Áras: page 2



Five journalists killed in Israeli attack on hospital

MARK WEISS
in Jerusalem

At least 20 Palestinians, including five journalists, were killed yesterday when an Israeli tank fired two shells at the Nasser hospital in the southern Gazan city of Khan Younis.

About 50 other people, including medical staff, were also injured in the attack on southern Gaza's last functioning hospital.

A video clip showed civil defence workers wearing bright

orange vests and journalists being hit by the second shell while they were attempting to rescue bodies from the initial strike.

The fatalities included one reporter, Al-Quds News' Ahmed Abu Aziz, and four photojournalists. They were Reuters' Husam al-Masri, Al Jazeera's Mohamed Salameh, and freelance photographers Mariam Dagga and Moaz Abu Taha.

At least four medical personnel were also killed.

Nasser hospital director Atef al-Hout accused Israel of target-

ing its surgical centre. "We were in the middle of surgeries and it happened," he said. "Some of them were halted."

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed regret. "Israel deeply regrets the tragic accident. Israel appreciates the work of journalists, medical teams and all civilians. The army is conducting a thorough investigation."

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson Brig Gen Effie Defrin said the military did not intentionally target civilians.

" Hamas began this war, and created impossible conditions."

Military sources said the target was a surveillance camera situated on a balcony on the fourth floor of the hospital which soldiers operating in the area suspected was being used by Hamas to observe troop movements.

The second shell was fired as the rescue crews were busy attending to the wounded.

All fire at hospital buildings requires special authorisation from a senior officer. The IDF

investigation is examining who gave permission and why less lethal munition, such as a sniper or a small drone, was not used to take out the camera.

The Committee to Protect Journalists put the number killed in the war at 193, accusing Israel of killing journalists in Gaza as "a deliberate and systematic attempt to cover up Israel's actions".

World Health Organisation director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "While people in Gaza are being

A blood-covered camera belonging to Palestinian photojournalist Husam al-Masri who was killed at Nasser hospital. PHOTOGRAPH: AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

starved, their already limited access to healthcare is being further crippled by repeated attacks."

Ceasefire bid unlikely to stop Israeli escalation: page 6

Patched-up IT system froze in hours leading up to budget

JACK HORGAN-JONES
Political Correspondent

The Department of Finance was severely hit by IT bugs in the hours leading up to last year's budget, with officials locked out of documents and facing frozen systems on overheating laptops.

The issues were such that there was a "significant risk" to the department's ability to ensure timely delivery of budget documentation to the Oireachtas on budget day, according to its top civil servant, piling on "severe pressure" to meet deadlines.

The issues related to the Department's eDocs system. Its secretary general, John Hogan, wrote to the Government's Chief Information Officer, Barry Lowry, saying that across the night and early morning before the budget, a "significant vol-

ume of issues" arose that "considerably impacted staff".

He told Mr Lowry that any risk to the delivery of core tasks like the budget was "wholly unacceptable". The letter outlines that some officials were locked out of documents, while others were "closing/vanishing" when a user had more than one open.

For some, "the system froze and became non-responsive" with staff facing a "white screen", while "some staff devices [became] very hot and seemed to slow down/freeze".

The letter indicates some issues had presented in the weeks leading up to the budget. While there were extra resources and support provided, no resolutions were found and the offered solution was to abandon shared versions being worked on and to start new documents.

From late on September 30th to 5.48am on October 1st,

the day of the budget, a document with the economic and fiscal outlook had to be saved and re-uploaded five times as staff had been locked out of it. Officials from the economics division could not simultaneously edit spreadsheet files.

Others could not work on the Minister's budget speech at the same time, adding "hours" to their work. Slides designed to be shared online during the speech were unavailable, as the folder they were in crashed as the Minister spoke.

Mr Lowry apologised and said the issue was a Microsoft update, known as a patch, that had been extensively tested but had been deployed without incident across departments. "But we did not anticipate that the patch could have such a negative effect." A spokesman for the office said the issues have now been addressed.

Weather

Blustery showers extending across the country from the west. Highs of 16-20 degrees

THE IRISH TIMES
24-28 Tara Street, Dublin 2.
D02CX89
Telephone: (01) 9203900
Online: irishtimes.com
The recommended retail price of THE IRISH TIMES in the Republic of Ireland is €2.60
Subscriptions: Tel: (01) 9203901
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9 771393 351925 35
Vol. No. 52372. Tuesday, August 26, 2025

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CSO: The number of international protection applicants working in Ireland has 'increased dramatically'. Page 5

World News



Ukraine: More talks are planned with the US on security guarantees and the possibility of peace negotiations involving the Kremlin. Page 7

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Social media: Donal Skehan is the latest celebrity to fall foul of the rules on paid promotions on social media platforms. Page 15

Sports Tuesday

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Gaelic football: The Kerry county board is expected to ratify manager Jack O'Connor's appointment for a further two years this evening. Page 19

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