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IRISH LANGUAGE
SUPPLEMENT

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Taoiseach to avoid Fianna Fáil heave in short term

There is little appetite in parliamentary party for an immediate move to oust him

Martin will continue to meet TDs in a bid to heal relations after presidential fiasco

ELLEN COYNE
and PAT LEAHY

There is little apparent appetite among Fianna Fáil TDs for an immediate heave against party leader Micheál Martin, a survey of the party's Dáil deputies suggests.

But Fianna Fáil's disastrous presidential election campaign may still threaten Mr Martin, with many TDs declining to say if they back the Taoiseach as he prepares to enter his 15th year as party leader.

Mr Martin will continue to meet backbench TDs this week, as he attempts to heal relations with his party in the wake of the embarrassing exit of Jim Gavin from the presidential race.

Loyal Ministers yesterday appealed for calm from their colleagues, after Mr Martin was publicly criticised over the weekend for his stewardship of the party's failed presidential campaign.

Wicklow-Wexford TD Malcolm Byrne, who will be meeting Mr Martin today, said that the Taoiseach had "led Fianna Fáil through some very difficult periods ... The presidential election campaign, though, was a disaster and has left many members and supporters angered and disappointed".

On Saturday, Dublin South-West TD John Lahart said that while Mr Martin enjoyed "significant respect" and "great affection" within the party, the Taoiseach had made "significant errors in judgment in the run-up to and during the presidential election campaign".

In response to Mr Lahart's remarks, Minister of State Thomas Byrne appealed for unity. "The one thing I would say is ... we really need to come together as a party," he said.

The Irish Times contacted each of Fianna Fáil's 48 TDs yesterday, and asked them if they would support a motion of no-confidence in Mr Martin's leadership, if they wanted him to step down before the Republic takes on the presidency of the Council of the European Union in July, and if they believed Mr Martin

should step down after the EU presidency term ends?

The majority declined to respond. All TDs and Ministers happy to be quoted on the record were supportive of Mr Martin's leadership. They included Minister of State Timmy Dooley, who answered each question "no, no and no". Chief Whip Mary Butler said that she "absolutely supports" the Taoiseach to lead the country and the Government through the EU presidency and after. Minister for Transport Darragh O'Brien said he had "full confidence in Micheál Martin. He should lead us into the next election and he will". Minister of State Christopher O'Sullivan said that he "wouldn't support a motion of no confidence".

One TD did not believe that Mr Martin should step down before the State takes on the presidency, but "what happens after the presidency will depend on how that period goes". Other TDs said they were still consulting with local members.

Meanwhile, Fine Gael MEP Seán Kelly has claimed he was "shafted" by his party when colleagues in Leinster House declined to back his run for the Áras. Mr Kelly told RTE's News at One yesterday that Heather Humphreys had been "anointed" by TDs. "I think from the point of view of not getting a nomination, you'd have to ask yourself, why was there such a determined effort to stop me from getting a nomination? Maybe because I would win it, and that's the way I would have been approaching it."

His comments went down badly with Fine Gael, with well-placed sources noting that the MEP had not contested against Mairead McGuinness for the nomination and had said publicly in July that the presidency was a "largely ceremonial role" where "you don't have that much power or influence".

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House of
horrors
All in a
good cause

Sawyer Enright and Sofia Woodfull brave the Ken Carraher house of horrors at Bayview Court on Killiney Hill Road in Dublin. The annual Halloween attraction raises funds for Debra, the charity supporting those living with an incurable skin condition, EB.

It is open from 4pm to 8pm from today until Thursday, and from 4pm to 9pm on Friday.

Photograph:
Alan Betson

State steps up efforts to deport convicted criminals

CONOR LALLY
Crime and Security Editor

Efforts to deport convicted criminals from the Republic have been stepped up in recent months, with a record number of those in Irish prisons now also having exclusion orders imposed.

The orders mean criminals can be deported to their European Union country of origin and are then banned from returning to the Republic for up to 10 years.

The number of EU citizens

selected for removal and long-term exclusion from the Republic in 2025 looks set to be about six times higher than last year, The Irish Times has learned.

This is the latest strand in the Government's efforts to take a tougher approach to failed international protection applicants and also to EU citizens who are considered to have effectively abused their automatic right to live and work in Ireland by committing crimes here.

"The removal from the State

of convicted criminals and those who are a danger to public safety is a priority for the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration Jim O'Callaghan," the Department of Justice said in reply to queries.

"The removal of such individuals is actively managed by the department in close consultation with An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service. This work involves regular and ongoing reviews of cases to ensure they progressed swiftly where possible."

EU exclusion orders can be

imposed on any citizen of a member state and can also apply to those from Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

The orders can be imposed on individuals, and their family members, who "represent a danger to public policy or public security". Anyone whose "personal conduct represents a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat affecting one of the fundamental interests of society" can be deported and also banned from re-entering the Republic for up to 10 years.

Although an EU-wide system of exclusion orders has long been available to the Irish authorities, their use in the Republic has accelerated significantly this year.

In the 9½ months to mid-October, some 99 exclusion orders were imposed on EU citizens who had been convicted of crimes and jailed in the Republic. By the end of this year, that is expected to reach at least 120. That compares with 24 exclusion orders imposed on EU citizens last year and 19 in 2023.

Of the people covered by

those 99 exclusion orders imposed to mid-October, some 45 have already been removed, including 22 on commercial flights and 23 on a charter flight to Romania.

The news comes after it emerged efforts to deport many failed international protection applicants have been undermined by legal challenges in the Republic. The issue came into focus when it emerged a foreign man charged with the sexual assault of a 10-year-old girl last week at Citywest, Dublin, should have been deported.

Children's hospital legal costs soar in €880m battle

ELLEN COYNE
Political Correspondent

Expenditure by the board of the new National Children's Hospital on legal fees, litigation and defending claims rose from €2 million in 2023 to more than €6 million in 2024.

The rise in costs was driven by proceedings taken by construction company BAM against the hospital board under its contract. The board is now defending claims in excess of €880 million from BAM, it said last night.

The hospital is set to be the most expensive health infrastructure project in the State, with a final cost of at least €2.4 billion.

It has run over multiple budgets and deadlines, and there are fears it will not meet its July 2026 opening date – the 16th time since 2020 that its

completion has been pushed back.

Relations between the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board (NPHDB) and BAM have publicly deteriorated in recent years.

The hospital's builders have claimed that design changes have affected their ability to finish the project, while the board has said that many parts of the hospital that BAM presented as completed still had snags.

High Court

The NPHDB financial statements for 2024, which were laid before the Oireachtas last week, said by the end of April this year, the amount the board spent on professional fees for "litigation and claims defence" rose from €1.8 million in 2023 to €4.4 million in 2024.

Fees for "legal expenses" also rose from €224,000 in 2023 to

more than €1.6 million in 2024.

BAM has initiated several legal proceedings against the board, and the 2024 accounts show four cases in which court proceedings initiated by the construction company resulted in the NPHDB being required, under its contract, to pay more than €160 million in a bond to BAM. This was funded directly from the HSE and paid to the company by the board.

A spokeswoman for the board said it is "actively defending claims in excess of €880 million from BAM, including the duplication and triplication of claims".

She said there were claims "at all levels of the dispute mechanism process" up to and including the High Court, with costs also incurred for adjudication and conciliation.

BAM did not respond to requests for comment.

Weather

Breezy with sunny spells and scattered showers. Highest temperatures of 11-14 degrees.

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