

Polls open in New York

Clinton, Trump tipped to win in race to clinch Democratic, Republican tickets to White House

AFP, New York

New York began voting yesterday in a high-stakes presidential primary tipped to hand Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump victories in the race to clinch the Democratic and Republican tickets to the White House.

The former secretary of state, first lady and New York senator leads the polls by double digits over her Brooklyn-born challenger, Bernie Sanders, even if nationwide surveys put them neck-and-neck.

Trump, the brash Manhattan billionaire whose controversial campaign has appalled the Republican establishment, is streets ahead of his evangelical rival Ted Cruz and Ohio Governor John Kasich.

The tycoon is banking on a big home state victory in his quest to sew up the nomination before Republican grandees can deny him the ticket and anoint another candidate at the party convention in July.

The polls opened at 6:00 am (1000 GMT) and are due to close at 9:00 pm (0100 GMT today) when Clinton and Trump have scheduled what they hope will be victory parties in Manhattan.

To the disadvantage of Vermont senator Sanders, only New York's 5.8 million registered Democrats and 2.7 million registered

Republicans are eligible to vote. Independents are barred from participating.

With both races for the White House nomination so competitive, it is the most consequential New York primary in decades in the country's fourth largest state that is home to an incredibly diverse electorate.

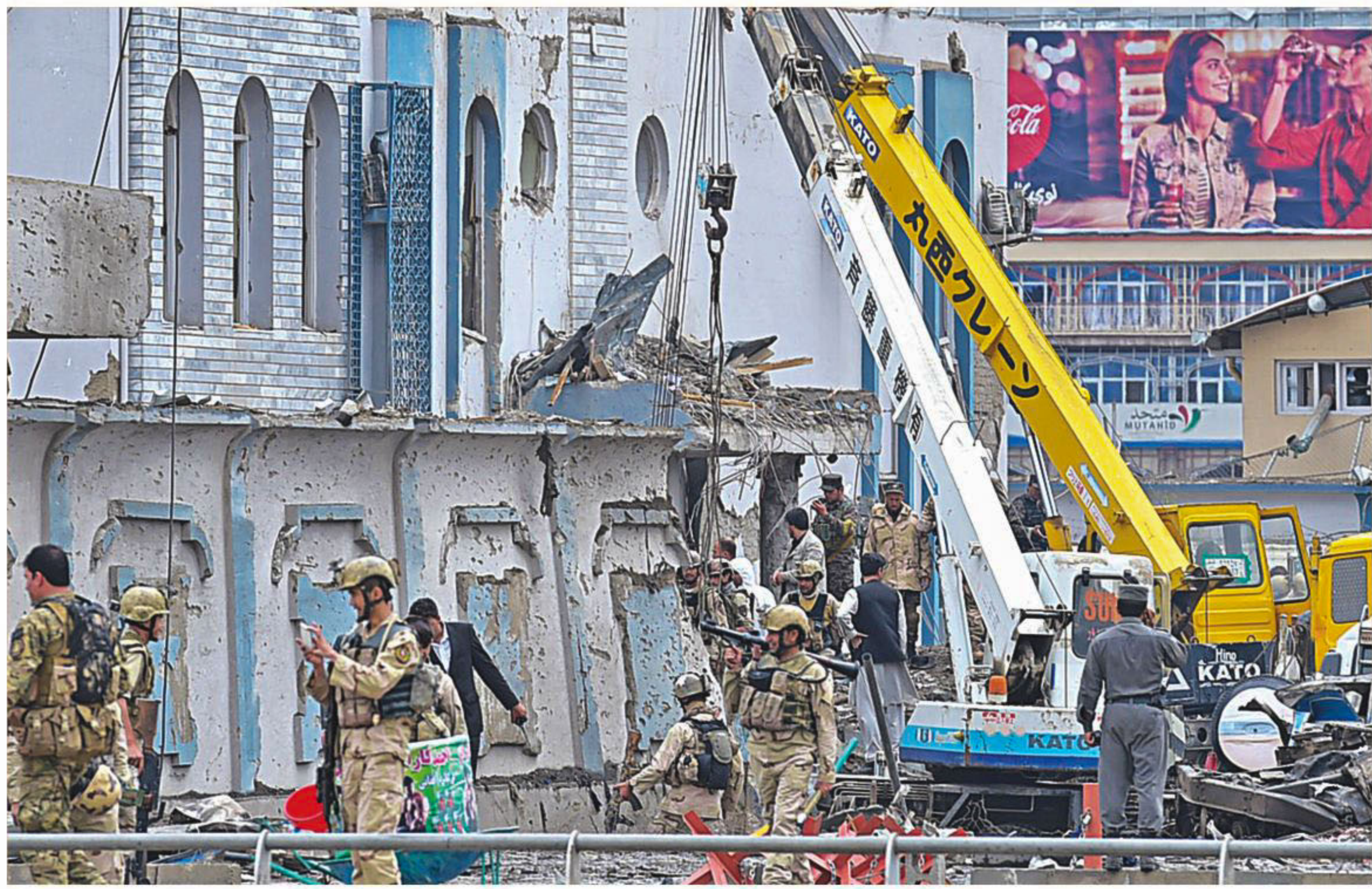
Uniquely, three of the candidates lay claim to calling New York home: Trump, who has never lived anywhere else, Clinton who was twice elected the state's US senator, and Sanders who was raised in Brooklyn.

"We all have a stake in America, that is what this election is about. Please, come out! Vote tomorrow,"

Clinton said Monday in an impassioned plea to become the country's first woman president. She spent the day pressing the flesh in a whirlwind of campaign stops that included greeting nurses, stopping by a car wash, chatting to kitchen workers and eating ice cream.

In the evening, she made a joint appearance with her husband, former president Bill Clinton, at a Manhattan rally for Irish Americans.

A big victory in the state, which elected her over Barack Obama in 2008, would stall the momentum generated by her self-styled Democratic socialist rival who has won seven out of the last eight state votes.



Afghan security personnel inspect the site of a car bomb attack at the gate of a government office in the Puli Mahmood Khan neighbourhood of Kabul yesterday. A powerful Taliban car bomb followed by a fierce firefight left 30 people killed and hundreds wounded, a week after the insurgents launched their annual spring offensive. Story on page 16.

PHOTO: AFP



IMPEACHMENT ROW Rousseff vows to fight back

AFP, Brasilia

Embattled Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff vowed Monday to wage a "long" fight against impeachment as Congress moved closer to putting her on trial in a deepening political crisis.

The 68-year-old leftist leader was in a combative mood in her first public response since the lower house of Congress over-whelmingly voted late Sunday to send her case to the Senate.

"I am outraged by the decision," Rousseff told a news conference carried live on television.

Rousseff invoked her survival story under Brazil's military dictatorship in the 1970s, when she was tortured as a young member of a violent guerrilla group.

"I have strength, spirit and courage. I will not be beaten, I will not be paralyzed. I will continue to fight and I will fight as I did all my life," she said.

"This is not the beginning of the end. The battle has begun. This fight will be very long and memorable," she said.

Rousseff faces charges of illegally manipulating government accounts during her 2014 reelection to mask the scale of budget holes.

But Rousseff said that deputies in the house had failed to provide any evidence that she'd committed an impeachable crime, calling the process instead a "coup d'etat." She branded her Vice President, Michel Temer, a traitor who had conspired against her.

He would take over if she's impeached.

Japan quake survivors struggle with shortages

Hope dims for the missing ones; death toll climbs to 44

REUTERS, Tokyo

Survivors of a series of Japanese quakes measuring up to 7.3 struggled yesterday with shortages of food and water as the death toll rose to 44 and rescuers dug through mud and rubble for the missing, but hopes dimmed of finding them alive.

Japanese stocks bounced back from Monday's slide, with electronics manufacturer Sony Corp climbing 6.7 percent after saying its image sensor plant in Kumamoto, shut after the quake, makes components mainly for digital cameras.

Flights resumed to the damaged airport in the southwestern area of Kumamoto, which suffered the worst of the damage, but aftershocks continued to rattle the region and survivors spent another night huddled in cars and evacuation centres, afraid to return to their damaged homes.

"It's really tough," one woman told TV Asahi, her two-month-old baby sleeping in blankets on the floor, at her side.

"There's no milk and only the diapers we brought with us. Once they run out, there's nothing."

About 30,000 rescuers dug through mud and splintered houses, and Japanese media reported that one of those missing was pulled out without signs of life on Tuesday, four days after the worst quake struck in the early hours of Saturday.

Eight remain missing and more than 1,000 were injured.

More than 94,000 people remained in evacuation centres, cut off from the world by destroyed roads, but television footage showed relief goods being unloaded from planes at the main airport and water services gradually being

restored.

A 5.8-magnitude quake hit the area late on Monday. Of more than 600 quakes hitting Kyushu since Thursday, more than 87 have registered at least a four on Japan's intensity scale, strong enough to shake buildings.

The Kumamoto region is an important manufacturing hub and home to Japan's only operating nuclear station, which has been declared safe.



Police officers pile empty coffins in one of Ecuador's worst-hit towns, Pedernales, two days after a 7.8-magnitude quake hit the country, on Monday. Rescuers and desperate families clawed through the rubble to pull out survivors of an earthquake that killed 424 people and destroyed towns in a tourist area of Ecuador. Story on page 16.

9/11 bill under scrutiny

US-Saudi alliance faces new pressures as Obama heads to Riyadh

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama heads to Saudi Arabia yesterday amid tensions over congressional legislation which would potentially allow the royal government to be sued in American courts over the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The bipartisan bill has yet to make it to the Senate floor, but already it has triggered outrage in Riyadh and threatens to further poison the already strained ties between Washington and its longstanding Gulf ally.

The White House is desperate to scuttle the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, which would allow the families of loved ones killed in the 9/11 attacks to sue the Saudi government.

When asked Monday about the bill during an interview with CBS News, Obama said, "exactly, I'm opposed."

The bill would essentially waive the doctrine of sovereign immunity to say that "if you basically fund and sponsor terrorist attacks on American soil you can be liable for damages," said main co-sponsor Senator John Cornyn, the chamber's number two Republican.

Fifteen of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 were Saudi citizens. But no official Saudi complicity in the Al-Qaeda attacks has been proven, and the kingdom has never been formally implicated.

Saudi Arabia has reportedly warned it could sell off several hundred billion dollars in American assets if Congress passes the measure.

The New York Times reported Saturday that Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told lawmakers in Washington last month the kingdom would be forced to set up to \$750 billion in treasury securities and other assets in the United States to avoid having them frozen by US courts.

The White House said Monday Obama would veto the measure. "Our concerns about this law are not related to its impact on our relationship with a particular country," said White House press secretary Josh Earnest.

NEWS IN brief

Yemen fighting kills 13 after talks delayed

AFP, Marib

Clashes between Yemeni loyalist forces and rebels have killed 13 fighters, military sources said yesterday, after UN-brokered peace talks were delayed with warring parties trading blame for truce violations. The fighting erupted late Monday in Marib province, east of the rebel-held Yemeni capital Sanaa, despite pledges by all warring parties to commit to a ceasefire that came into effect on April 11.

Greece starts letting migrants leave camps

AFP, Athens

Authorities on the Greek islands began allowing migrants out of the detention camps where they are being held while their asylum requests are processed, a migration official said yesterday. Since an EU-Turkey deal for stemming the huge influx of people to Europe went into force on March 20, around 7,500 people have landed on the Greek islands where they have been kept in holding centres.

Russian vote monitor hit with big fine

AFP, Moscow

Russia's independent election watchdog Golos said yesterday it had been fined a whopping 1.2 million rubles for violating controversial legislation forcing non-governmental organisations to carry a "foreign agent" tag. Supporters and fellow rights activists said the fine -- equivalent to \$18,300 or 16,150 euros -- is believed to be the largest ever imposed on a Russian organisation for violating the notorious law.

Israeli guilty of killing Palestinian

BBC ONLINE

The Israeli ringleader in the killing of a Palestinian youth, abducted and buried to death in Jerusalem in 2014, has been convicted of his murder. A Jerusalem court found 31-year-old Yosef Haim Ben David guilty, rejecting a plea of insanity. He will be sentenced next month. Two youths have already been jailed for murdering Mohammad Abu Khdaif, 16.

German far-right leader in race trial

BBC ONLINE

The founder of Germany's anti-Islamist Pegida movement has gone on trial in Dresden on hate speech charges. Lutz Bachmann, 43, is accused of inciting racial hatred in Facebook posts, in which he called refugees "cattle", "scumbags" and "filth". Pegida's rallies have attracted thousands of supporters in Germany.

Mahathir seeks court order to freeze PM's assets

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamad, calling for Prime Minister Najib Razak to resign over the 1MDB state fund scandal, has applied for a court order to freeze Najib's assets, Mahathir's lawyers said yesterday.

The lawyers said in a statement Mahathir was also seeking a court order for Najib to disclose all assets held under his name as well as under the names of his nominees.

Mahathir, along with two others, filed a suit in March against Najib alleging corruption and abuse of power. The lawsuit also accused Najib of interfering in several probes into debt-laden 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

allegations of graft and mismanagement linked to 1MDB and deposits of about \$681 million into his personal bank account.

He has denied any wrongdoing and maintains that he did not use the funds for personal gain. In January, Malaysia's attorney-general cleared Najib of any criminal offence.

Mahathir was joined in the lawsuit by Khairuddin bin Abu Hassan and Anina binti Saadudin, former members of the ruling United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) party which Najib heads.

The three, citing misfeasance and breach of duty, are seeking exemplary damages from Najib to the government of 2.6 billion ringgit (\$669.93 million) and aggravated damages of 42 million ringgit - equal to the amounts that were deposited into Najib's account.

MALAYSIA 1MDB SCANDAL



Terrorist fighters threaten new Europe attacks

AFP, Brussels

Belgium said yesterday that more "terrorist fighters" want to return to Europe from Syria to carry out further attacks, a month after suicide bombings in Brussels killed 32 people.

"There is a lot of intelligence, for example signs that foreign terrorist fighters, combatants in Syria, want to return not just to Belgium, but to Europe to carry out an attack," Paul Van Tighelt, the head of the government crisis centre, told RTBF television.

Tighelt said Belgium would maintain its terror alert at level 3, the second highest, for a "terrorist threat to the whole country", adding that it meant that the threat was "still considered serious, grave and likely".

The inquiry into the March 22 Brussels bombings -- which were claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group -- was "being carried out in an intense way... but the danger has not yet gone," Tighelt added.

'EU needs Turkey more than Turkey needs EU'

AFP, Istanbul

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the European Union yesterday it needs Turkey more than Ankara needs the bloc, as tensions grew over promises for visa liberalisation in a crucial deal on stemming the flow of migrants to Europe.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu had earlier bluntly told the EU that Ankara would no longer abide by the March migrant accord if Brussels fails to implement the pledge to grant Turks visa-free travel by June.

Tensions have also been fuelled by a European Parliament report published last week that accused Turkey of backsliding on democracy

and pressure from Ankara on Berlin to prosecute a German comic over a poem satirising Erdogan.

The issues are coming to a head as Chancellor Angela Merkel and top EU officials prepare to travel Saturday to the Turkish city of Gaziantep close to the Syrian border to discuss implementation of the migrant deal.

"The European Union needs Turkey more than Turkey needs the European Union," Erdogan said to cheers in a televised speech to municipal leaders in Ankara, denouncing as "provocative" the European Parliament report.

He lashed out at the report for not praising Turkey's hosting of some 2.7 million refugees from the war in neighbouring Syria.

