

Betting sites see record wagering

REUTERS, New York
The raucous, passionate and unpredictable 2016 US presidential election is on track to notch another distinction: the most wagered-upon political event ever.

With many opinion polls showing a tight race just one day before today's election, record numbers of bettors are pouring millions into online platforms from Ireland to Iowa in the hope of capturing a financial windfall from a victory by Democrat Hillary Clinton or Republican Donald Trump.

UK-based internet betting exchange Betfair said on Sunday its "Next President" market was set to become the most traded it had ever seen and expected to surpass even Brexit, the contentious UK referendum to leave the European Union.

By Sunday, roughly \$130 million had been traded on who will become the next US president, compared with \$159 million on the Brexit referendum, Betfair spokeswoman Naomi Totten said.

The amount bet so far on the 2016 contest dwarfs the roughly \$50 million laid on the 2012 race. "We think it is because (of) how raw the Brexit (vote) is in people's minds - they're not convinced yet that it's a done deal," Totten said.

Most polls leading into Britain's June 23 referendum predicted Britons would choose to remain in the EU. Instead, they voted to leave by a 52 percent to 48 percent margin. Betfair's "Next President" market was by far the largest of more than 70 markets on the site related to the US election. As of Friday, some \$140 million has been put into play on markets.



NBA basketball player LeBron James (R) introduces US Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton during a campaign rally in Cleveland, Ohio, US on Sunday night. Inset, US President Barack Obama holds up a baby after speaking in Kissimmee, Florida, as he campaigns for Clinton during a Hillary for America campaign event. PHOTO: REUTERS, AFP



SEVEN THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON ELECTION NIGHT

Donald Trump is attempting to crack Hillary Clinton's blue wall. And Clinton is hoping for a surge in Latino turnout fueled by opposition to Trump. Here are the key states and signs to study as the night unfolds:

TRUMP'S MUST-WINS
Most plausible paths to victory for Trump start with holding onto two battlegrounds that Mitt Romney won four years ago -- North Carolina and Arizona -- and flipping three states President Barack Obama carried: Florida, Ohio and Iowa. A loss in any of the states would severely complicate Trump's already precarious path to 270 electoral votes. A win in a state like Pennsylvania or Michigan would allow Trump to offset a loss in North Carolina and still have a shot at reaching 270.

CLINTON'S MUST-WINS
The key question for Clinton is whether her "blue wall" of Democratic-leaning states on the Great Lakes -- Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin -- will hold. Trump has targeted all three, but Clinton has consistently led polls in all three states. However, most voters in Michigan and Pennsylvania cast their ballots on Election Day -- which means her campaign hasn't built the early voting advantage already in place elsewhere.

DOES LATINO TURNOUT SURGE?
If Clinton wins, her coalition will consist of women, college-educated voters and a swell of new Latino voters. In early voting in states like Nevada, and Florida, there's already evidence of burgeoning Latino turnout. This is best witnessed by the over 57,000 people who voted in Nevada Friday, with pictures of long lines and extended hours at a Latino grocery store in Clark County.

DOES TRUMP HAVE A "MAJORITY"?
Trump's biggest strength is his overwhelming support from disaffected white voters -- particularly men, and especially those without college degrees. His campaign has long argued that those voters -- many of them independent or Democrats who buy into Trump's protectionist stance on trade -- will carry him on Election Day. For this to happen, Trump will also need core Democratic voters to stay at home, as well. Already, Trump appears poised to win Iowa, and has polled ahead of Clinton in Ohio.

DO AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTERS SHOW UP?
Among Democrats' biggest concerns has been whether African-American voters -- a reliably left-leaning constituency -- will turn out in numbers anywhere close to their support for Obama in 2008 and 2012. If the answer is no, it could hobble Clinton in key states -- particularly Florida and North Carolina. Obama is helping carry Clinton's load with black voters.

POST-TRUMP GOP STARTS NOW
Since Trump clinched the GOP nomination in May, Republican Senate and House candidates have been forced to answer for everything he has said -- from his attacks on a Gold Star family and an Indiana-born judge's heritage to his rejection of conservative orthodoxy. As soon as the election ends, Capitol Hill Republicans -- especially if they retain control of both the House and Senate -- will regain power.

HOW THE LOSER HANDLES LOSING
For a nation divided by a long, bitter contest, this could be the most important question of all: Will the loser concede -- and how will he or she do it? Trump and Clinton are both historically unpopular presidential nominees. Half the country thinks Clinton is a crook, and the other half thinks Trump is a racist and misogynist. The loser will play a crucial role in legitimizing the victor -- or delegitimizing the winner from the outset. SOURCE: CNN ONLINE

Clinton gets boost from FBI

No charges for Democratic candidate after new emails reviewed

AGENCIES

Democrat Hillary Clinton headed into the final day of a tight White House race against Republican Donald Trump yesterday with new momentum after the FBI said no criminal charges were forthcoming in an investigation of her email practices.

Both Clinton and Trump will spend the day racing across a handful of battleground states that could swing today's election, which polls show is close but tilting toward Clinton.

FBI Director James Comey again sent shockwaves through the race by telling Congress on Sunday that investigators had worked around the clock to complete a review of newly discovered emails and found no reason to change their July finding that Clinton was not guilty of criminal wrongdoing in her use of a private email server while secretary of state.

It was uncertain whether the announcement came in time to change voters' minds or undo any damage from days of Republican attacks on Clinton as corrupt. Tens of millions of Americans had cast early votes in the 10 days since

Comey first told Congress of the newly discovered emails.

"Nothing's going to change between today and tomorrow to help win back" undecided voters," Trump campaign manager Kellyanne Conway said on ABC's "Good Morning America."

Trump, who has not said whether he will respect the results of today's election, questioned the thoroughness of the FBI review and said the

Rapids, Michigan.

Clinton will make two stops in Pennsylvania and visit Michigan before wrapping up with a mid-night rally in Raleigh, North Carolina. She will appear at an evening rally at Philadelphia's Independence Hall with President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama, as well as rock star Bruce Springsteen.

Clinton's Democratic allies

decided "on the merits of the candidates" rather than innuendo.

Republicans kept up their criticism of Clinton.

"She simply believes she's above the law and always plays by her own rules," House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan said in a statement, arguing that Clinton's use of a private email server "compromised our national security."

Meanwhile, a BBC poll of polls put Clinton four points ahead of Trump. The BBC poll of polls looks at the five most recent national polls and takes the median value, ie, the value between the two figures that are higher and two figures that are lower.

US stock index futures rose more than 1 percent after the FBI announcement and the US dollar also strengthened in Asian trading against major currencies.

Markets have tended to see Clinton as the status quo candidate, and news favoring her bid often boosts investors' risk appetite. Global financial markets slipped last week as opinion polls showed the presidential race tightening.



issue would not go away.

Clinton did not mention the FBI finding during her last two campaign events on Sunday.

"That's behind us now," campaign manager Robby Mook told CNN yesterday.

Yesterday, Trump was set to hit five battleground states - Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Michigan - and close with a late-night rally in Grand

hoped the FBI finding would be enough to push her over the finish line and end the uncertainty and Republican attacks on her character that have dogged her campaign since Comey made the new emails public on Oct 28.

"The FBI's swift and thorough review should finally close the door on this Republican sideshow," House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi said, adding the election would now be

NEWS IN brief

Assange to get legal grilling: Sweden
AFP, Stockholm

Julian Assange will be questioned in person next week over longstanding rape accusations, Sweden's public prosecutor's office announced yesterday, saying an Ecuadorian prosecutor would visit the WikiLeaks founder in the embassy where he has been holed up since 2012. Swedish deputy public prosecutor and a Swedish police inspector will also be present at the questioning on November 14.

Duterte cancels police rifle deal with US
AFP, Manila

Firebrand Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said yesterday he would cancel an order for about 27,000 American-made assault rifles, in his latest display of defiance against the United States. The rifles were due to be provided to the Philippine police but Duterte said he would look for cheaper alternatives. The US and the Philippines are bound by a mutual defence pact, but Duterte has said he wants to kick out American forces.

Yemen war death toll surpasses 7,000: WHO
AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's 20-month war has killed more than 7,000 people and wounded nearly 37,000, the World Health Organization said, as the UN envoy voiced alarm over the worsening humanitarian situation. "More than 7,070 people have been killed and over 36,818 injured" as of October 25, the WHO said in a statement.

Trump's big bet on less educated whites

A potential victory for Donald J Trump may hinge on one important (and large) group of Americans: whites who did not attend college.

Polls have shown a deep division between whites of different education levels and economic circumstances. A lot rides on how large these groups will be on Election Day: All pollsters have their own assessment of who will show up, and their predictions rely on these evaluations.

The largest bloc is whites who have no college degree, and the voting-age population of this group is as large as that of voting-age blacks, Hispanics and Asian-Americans combined. Mitt Romney won this group over Barack Obama by 26 percentage points, and Ronald Reagan by 31 points over Michael Dukakis. But Bill Clinton won this bloc of voters both times he ran. In this year's political polls, this group favours Trump by large margins over Hillary Clinton.

However, the voting electorate -- the people who actually go to the polls -- could look substantially different from the voting-age population. In the last presidential election, only about half of whites with no college degree voted, leaving about 29 million votes on the table in an election decided by five million votes.

This population is the heart of red-state America. It dominates the rural landscape of swing states like Ohio, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Wisconsin. NY TIMES ONLINE

Voter turnout explodes among blacks, Hispanics

Turnout among African American and Hispanic voters in the United States is surging, and this swell of minority participation could spell trouble for Donald Trump's White House hopes.

On Sunday -- the last day of early voting before Election Day today -- hundreds of people attended "Souls to the Polls" events, aimed at encouraging churchgoers to vote across the key swing state of Florida.

Some came straight from morning worship, wearing three-piece suits and dresses as they made their way past dozens of campaigners hoisting signs for local candidates and urging support for solar energy and education issues.

At one event in central Miami, people held hands and prayed outside an early voting site, while at another in southern Miami-Dade County, about 20 African American men rolled in together on motorcycles.

For some, the vote they cast was as much for Democrat Hillary Clinton as it was against her Republican billionaire challenger.

As of Sunday, 565,000 Hispanics have voted in person in Florida, a 100 percent increase over the close of early voting in 2012, according to Daniel Smith, a University of Florida professor who tracks voter turnout.

Hispanics make up a powerful voting bloc in the battleground state of Florida, and are widely expected to lean toward Clinton. SOURCE: AFP

'Clinton will bring us together': Obama

Hillary Clinton is the only candidate who will bring all Americans together and uplift them, outgoing US President Barack Obama has said as he assailed Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump of lying with "impunity".

Addressing an election rally in Kissimmee in Florida on Sunday, Obama praised his former secretary of state for embracing America's diversity as a strength, recognising that progress requires compromise, and promoting dignity, courtesy, and respect for all Americans.

Obama went on to criticise Trump as "uniquely unqualified to be president" and "temperamentally unfit to be commander-in-chief", citing his disrespectful and hateful rhetoric towards minorities, women, and people with disabilities as an "irreconcilable lack of character".

"Two days to decide the future of this country. And I need you to go vote. I need your help to help finish what we started eight years ago," he said.

All the progress that the US has made goes out the window if Clinton does not win this election. "We win this election if we win Florida. If we win Florida, it's a wrap. We win Florida, it's over," he said.

Obama added that Trump lies with "impunity" and went on to cite an incident that occurred in Fayetteville last week. SOURCE: PTI

US-backed forces push closer to Syria's Raqa

AFP, Ain Issa

A US-backed Kurdish-Arab alliance pushed closer to Raqa and Iraqi forces seized a key town near Mosul as offensives advanced yesterday against the two Islamic State group strongholds.

After announcing the start of the long-awaited offensive on Raqa on Sunday, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance said it had moved south towards the city despite fierce jihadist resistance.

South of Mosul, Iraqi forces had retaken the town of Hamam al-Alil from IS, a key objective in their three-week advance on the city.

Raqa and Mosul are the last major cities in Syria and Iraq under the jihadists' control and their capture would deal a knockout blow to the self-styled "caliphate" IS declared in mid-2014. The US-led coalition that launched opera-

tions against IS two years ago is providing crucial backing to the offensives, with both air strikes and special forces advisers on the ground.

SDF spokeswoman Jihan Sheikh Ahmed told AFP that forces had advanced on two fronts towards Raqa amid heavy fighting.

Alliance forces had pushed at least 10 kilometres (six miles) south towards the city from the towns of Ain Issa and Suluk, she said.

Near Mosul, federal police, army and elite interior ministry forces established full control over Hamam al-Alil, the last town of note on the way to Mosul from the south, AFP reporters said.

It lies on the west bank of the Tigris river, about 15 kilometres (nine miles) southeast of the edge of Mosul.

Fighting also continued east of Mosul, with Kurdish forces launching an offensive to take the town of Bashiqa and the elite Counter Terrorism Service battling IS in the city's suburbs.



TENSIONS WITH RUSSIA 300,000 Nato troops put on 'high alert'

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Up to 300,000 Nato troops have been put on alert amid rising tensions between Russia and the Baltic states.

Jens Stoltenberg, the secretary-general of Nato, said the alliance hoped to speed up the response time of thousands of its troops to allow it to react to a combat situation more effectively.

In October, it was reported Nato was preparing to station 4,000 troops on the Russian border with the Baltic states in its biggest military build-up since the Cold War. The troops will be summoned from nations across the alliance, including the UK.

"We have seen Russia being much more active in many different ways," Stoltenberg told The Times.

Modi govt obsessed with power: Rahul

TNN, New Delhi

India's Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi yesterday slammed the Narendra Modi government saying that it is obsessed with power and tries to silence all those who disagree with it, ANI reported.

The Gandhi scion is chairing a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) in the place of his mother and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, who's reportedly unwell and unable to attend.

This is the first time Rahul has presided over a CWC meeting. Top Congress leaders, including Manmohan Singh, P Chidambaram, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Janardan Dwivedi, Ahmed Patel, Ambika Soni and AK Antony are among those attending the meeting.

Rahul said that asking questions "discomforts this government." He was referring to comments by Union ministers who have more than once said, in the recent past, that people shouldn't question the government.

"Hiding behind the cloak of national security, civil society is being intimidated for asking questions ... Asking questions is what discomforts this government, for they have no answers, we must expose the government's failures in the upcoming Parliament session," Rahul told the CWC gathering.

The Congress vice president also referred to the one-day government ban imposed on the Hindi news channel NDTV India.



Myanmar press under pressure

Leading English daily bans Rakhine reports
AFP, Yangon

A leading English-language newspaper in Myanmar has suspended its reporting on restive Rakhine state, according to an internal memo, as pressure mounts on media to curtail critical coverage of army operations in the area.

The northern part of the state, close to the Bangladesh border and home to the repressed Muslim Rohingya minority has been under military lockdown for almost a month after deadly raids on three police border posts.

The violence has posed the biggest challenge so far to Aung San Suu Kyi's young government and raised questions over the balance of power between the army and the civilian administration.

The Myanmar Times, the country's oldest independent English-language daily, stopped covering the crisis after one of its senior staff, Fiona McGregor, was fired over an article alleging troops gang-raped Rohingya women.

In an internal memo seen by AFP, management ordered editors "not to analyse, comment, report or have opinion pieces on the following subjects until further notice: Rakhine State; Rohingya; and military actions in Rakhine state".

That prompted staff to post a notice in yesterday's print edition saying the paper's "editorial policies are in the process of being clarified by management."

"Until then you may notice some gaps in our coverage." The paper's management could not immediately be reached for comment.

Foreign journalists have been banned from the area, but allegations have emerged of troops killing Rohingya civilians, raping women and torching villages.