

Biden still leads in 2020 Iowa poll, three others fight for second

REUTERS, Des Moines

Former Vice President Joe Biden still leads the Democratic pack of presidential contenders in a poll of Iowa voters released on Saturday, with Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Pete Buttigieg in a tight battle for second place.

Biden is the first choice of 24% of likely Democratic caucus-goers in Iowa, the state that kicks off the presidential nominating race next February, in the Des Moines Register/CNN/Mediacom Iowa Poll.

Sanders, a US senator, is the first choice for 16% of respondents, while Warren, also a US senator, and Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, are at 15% and 14%, respectively. No other candidate managed double-digits.

US Senator Kamala Harris registered 7%, and US Senator Amy Klobuchar and former Texas Congressman Beto O'Rourke are both at 2%. Seven candidates registered 1%.

"We're starting to see the people who are planning to caucus start to solidify," said J. Ann Selzer, president of Des Moines-based Selzer & Co, which conducted the poll. "There's a lot more commitment than we normally see this early. And some of these candidates who've been under the radar start to surface and compete with Joe Biden."

She said many candidates in the large field had failed to make a breakthrough. Nine did not register support in the poll.

"There's always been a question mark as to how many can get any real traction," Selzer said.

The Register's Iowa poll has a long track record of relative accuracy in the state.

More than 20 Democrats are vying for the right to challenge Republican President Donald Trump, who will formally launch his re-election bid on June 18. Biden has been the consistent leader in most national and state polls since he first entered the race in late April. Sanders runs second to Biden in most polls.

The Register said the poll methodology changed from its last few surveys. As a result of new caucus rules, the poll this time included a blend of those who plan to attend a caucus in person and those who will participate in a virtual caucus online or by phone.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaks to the press at the Ganabhaban yesterday after returning from a tri-nation visit to Japan, Saudi Arabia and Finland.

PHOTO: PID

Myanmar, aid groups to blame

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Myanmar also doesn't want to take them back, which is another major barrier to their repatriation, she said. "The problem lies with Myanmar [as well]."

Bangladesh continues its efforts to resolve the crisis, she added.

After the repatriation agreement with Myanmar was signed, Rohingyas suddenly started protesting against going back to their homes, said Sheikh Hasina, asking who may have instigated such protests.

Another problem is that the displaced people fear that they will be subjected to repression if they return to Myanmar, she said.

About the relocation of Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar to Bhashan Char Island in Noakhali, she said the donor agencies have a serious objection to this as well.

"Those who provide assistance to them [Rohingyas] have a serious objection though the government constructed very beautiful houses and structures at Bhashan Char for their relocation."

The PM said Bangladesh had talks with China, India and Japan separately and all of them agreed that the displaced people are Myanmar nationals and they should go back.

BRINGING TARIQUE BACK
The PM said the sentences that courts have handed down to acting BNP chairman Tarique Rahman in different cases will surely be executed.

"We've been in talks with the

British government [to bring Tarique back to the country] ... I can say the punishment will be executed today or tomorrow."

Replying to a question by a journalist about the government efforts to bring Tarique back home, the PM said, "I hate to utter his name."

Tarique has been leading a luxury life in London as he amassed huge ill-gotten money, she said. "He tries to create some problems whenever I go there."

Hasina came down hard on people who shed crocodile tears for Tarique, forgetting the misdeeds he had committed when the BNP was in power.

"How do you forget the August-21 grenade attack? I was not supposed to remain alive the way the attack was launched. Ivy Rahman and many others died in the attack when they [BNP] were in power."

She also said repeated attempts and attacks were made by the BNP on her life. "They also killed our thousands of leaders and activists. You're out there crying for the killers who embezzled the money of orphans and involved with smuggling 10-truck arms."

She then asked how the government would try criminals if people showed sympathy to a convict like Tarique.

Tarique, declared a fugitive by Bangladesh courts, has been sentenced up to life in jail in several cases, including that of money laundering, corruption and August-21 grenade

attack on an Awami League rally.

On September 11, 2008, Tarique Rahman went to London for treatment, and he has been living there with his family since then.

He was arrested on March 7, 2007 during the army-backed caretaker government and released on parole on September 3, 2008.

PM TO TRAVEL BY BIMAN
In an apparent reference to a pilot's travel to Doha without his passport to fly her back, the PM on Sunday said an incident takes place whenever she boards a flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

"There was a ticket problem at Biman. There would be no ticket although there would be vacant seats. But now no seat remains vacant after I ordered action. Those who used to do ticket trade have resentment. This is why whenever I fly [Biman] either an incident takes place or it hits headlines," she said.

Sheikh Hasina said she asked for prompt action against those who were on duty at the immigration for allowing the Biman pilot to go to Doha without his passport.

Mentioning that anyone might forget to carry their passport, she asked why it was not checked at the immigration.

Many people have been requesting her not to travel by Biman, but she has expressed her firm determination to travel by the national flag carrier even if she faces death, she said.

She asked the authorities concerned to ensure tight security at airports so

that no one can pass the immigration without any check.

A Biman flight carrying the PM had to make an emergency landing at Ashgabat International Airport in Turkmenistan on her way to Budapest on November 27, 2016 due to low oil pressure in its engine.

ON TEESTA WATER
Bangladesh won't have to seek water from others if water could be reserved properly, she said when asked about Teesta water sharing.

"Bangladesh is a delta. All rivers originated from the Himalayas flow through Bangladesh. If we take steps to preserve water, we won't have to seek water from others."

"We've taken the Delta Plan, and we're dredging rivers," she said adding, "What will they do with the extra water? So, don't be worried. They didn't give water but is giving us electricity which is also good."

"We've resolved difficult problems like the one over maritime boundary. We've resolved the enclave problem in a friendly manner [too]."

SECURITY DURING EID
"I was really very worried during Eid Jamaats as [terror] incidents are happening. We paid special attention so that no untoward incident occurs..."

"But I don't want to frighten people saying these."

"Whenever any information [over militant threats] is received, we take necessary action immediately following investigations by intelligence agencies."

Iran leader pardons 691 on Eid, but Lebanese excluded

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader pardoned hundreds of prisoners on the occasion of the end of Ramadan, but a Lebanese national who Beirut expected to be released was not among them, authorities said yesterday.

In total, the sentences of 691 prisoners were either commuted or deferred as decided by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as a gesture for the Eid al-Fitr holidays, said the judiciary's Mizan Online news website.

Last week, Lebanon said one of its nationals condemned in 2016 to 10 years' jail in Iran after being found guilty of spying for the United States would be on the pardon list.

The Lebanese foreign ministry, quoted by the country's official NNA news agency, said Nizar Zakka would be pardoned at the request of Beirut as a gesture for Eid.

But Zakka's name was not on the list, said Iran's judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili.

"The individual was sentenced and the president of Lebanon had -- in letters to judicial officials -- requested a conditional pardon," he said, quoted by Mizan.

"This request has been in the judicial process and, in case any decision is taken by the judicial apparatus, information will be provided."

A resident of the United States in his 50s, Zakka was arrested in September 2015 during a visit to Iran, where he was convicted the following July.

At the time of his arrest, state television in Iran charged Zakka had "deep ties to military and intelligence services of the United States", Iran's arch-foe.

It broadcast photographs of a man in military uniform it said was Zakka at an American base.

At the end of 2017, Iranian courts confirmed his 10-year sentence on appeal, as well as that of an American and two Iranian-Americans accused of "collaboration" with the United States.

Iran and the United States broke diplomatic ties in 1980, and their relations have deteriorated significantly since US President Donald Trump took office in January 2017.

No pressure on media

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there was pressure on him.

"Nobody has put any pressure. They don't feel good about the continuation of the democratic process. They feel good if there is any undemocratic process, for example, under the emergency government or military government. Under such governments, they can write as prescribed," she added.

She said the editor had admitted in a television talk show that he "published reports with information supplied by the DGFI (Directorate General of Forces Intelligence)".

"We are not supplying any information through the DGFI. So now he cannot write anymore. That means he cannot write anything if it is not prescribed. This has been established."

The PM then said she had not received any cooperation from "these newspapers".

"And, how many newspapers were in our favour after I returned home? Almost all [of them] have written against me. I am used to it."

She said the most important thing to her is speaking and working as per her conscience.

"I don't care who writes what. I love my country and countrymen. I work for the welfare of my country. If I have this belief, I have no headache about others' comments -- good or bad," Hasina said.

She said they cannot see what she can do from her position.

"Isn't Bangladesh going forward? Isn't everybody getting the results? Isn't Bangladesh's dignity improving globally? It is. Today the whole world looks at Bangladesh and lauds us. Don't [you] all feel good about it?"

She further said those who didn't

want the country's independence wouldn't feel good about it.

"We haven't obstructed anyone from writing. Let him write as much as he wants. He continued to write. But suddenly he said he can't write."

"I think he's not getting the prescribed writings. If he wants, the DGFI will supply him with [reports], let him contact them. He will be supplied. What can I say beyond this?" she asked.

(The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam recently spoke to DW Bangla in Germany on media freedom in Bangladesh.)



Indian supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) shout slogans as they block a road in Siliguri yesterday during a protest against the recent killings at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal. Three supporters of BJP and another from Trinamool Congress have been killed in a gun battle in West Bengal state on Saturday evening, police said. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: AFP

Dhawan ton helps India down Australia

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to surpass Ireland's 329 for seven against England in 2011, the highest score by any team batting second to win a World Cup match

They put up a spirited fight but the ever-increasing run-rate kept pulling

them back.

Skipper Aaron Finch was run out for 36 while opening partner Warner survived an early scare when he edged a Bumrah delivery on to his stumps only for the bails to stay put.

Warner got going with Smith to put

on 72 runs for the second wicket but the left-hander fell to the guile of leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal.

Smith kept Australia in the hunt along with Usman Khawaja, who made 42.

But Kumar saw off Smith as part

of a double strike in the 40th over that also accounted for Marcus Stoinis.

Chahal got the dangerous Glenn Maxwell for 28 and the chase was all but over, although Carey's unbeaten 55 did get Australia past 300.

UK's Johnson baulks at Brexit cost as leadership race heats up

REUTERS, London

Boris Johnson, the leading candidate to succeed Theresa May as Britain's prime minister, said yesterday he would withhold an already agreed 39-billion-pound (\$49.6 billion) Brexit payment until the European Union gives Britain better withdrawal terms.

Johnson is one of 11 lawmakers vying to run the world's fifth largest economy after May resigned as leader of the governing Conservatives on Friday, having failed to unite parliament or the country behind her Brexit plan.

Britain is mired in its deepest political crisis in decades over how, when and whether it should leave the EU - a decision that will fall to May's successor and affect both its future role on the world stage and prosperity for generations to come.

As the contest to replace May gathered pace yesterday, Johnson made his first major intervention, targeting the large pro-Brexit wing of his Conservative Party with a promise to take a hard line with Brussels over the terms of Britain's exit.

"I think our friends and partners need to understand that the money is going to be retained until such time as we have greater clarity about the way forward," Johnson told the Sunday Times. "In getting a good deal, money is a great solvent and a great lubricant."

Main rivals foreign minister Jeremy Hunt, agriculture minister Michael Gove and interior minister Sajid Javid, also want to renegotiate or modify the deal, but none have threatened not to pay the exit bill May agreed with the EU in 2018.

The 39 billion pounds represent outstanding British liabilities to the EU to be paid over a number of years.

The EU has repeatedly said it will not reopen discussion of the Brexit transition deal it reached with May last year, which British lawmakers have rejected three times, or to negotiate a future trade deal with Britain without the divorce payment.

Those three defeats forced May to announce her resignation.

"We will have a different attitude in the negotiating team and a different negotiating team," Johnson said, adding that he would give personal orders to negotiators from his ministerial team rather than politically impartial public servants.

Nepal faces challenge identifying Everest bodies

AFP, Kathmandu

The bodies of four climbers who failed their Everest challenge and left little clue as to their identity have thrown up a new challenge for Nepalese authorities who control the world's tallest peak.

Worn by the wind and cold to near skeletons, the remains have been in a Kathmandu morgue since they were brought back from the slopes two weeks ago with nearly 11 tonnes of trash.

Police and government officials admit they face a huge challenge putting names to the dead climbers and sending them back to their home countries.

They cannot even be sure how long the corpses had been among scores waiting to be found on the slopes.

A government-organised clean-up team retrieved the bodies between the Everest base camp and the South Col at 7,906 metres (25,938 feet) this climbing season.

"The bodies are not in a recognisable state, almost down to their bones. There is no face to identify them," senior police official Phanindra Prasai told AFP.

"We have directed the hospital to collect DNA samples so they can be matched with any families who come forward."

Nepalese police are going through administrative processes so they can make an appeal for help and inform foreign diplomatic missions about the bodies. But some fear the mystery could take years to solve.

"It is a difficult task," said Ang Tsering Sherpa, former president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association.

"They need to share more information about the bodies, especially the locations of where the bodies were found, and reach out to expedition operators."

Scope likely

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The government is also considering conducting a survey on owners of apartments and houses in big cities to bring them under the tax net.

Earlier, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal had said the government planned to bring one crore people under the tax net through a survey. Some 10,000 people will be involved in carrying out the survey.