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PAGE 35



'THE PUBLIC NO LONGER FEEL SAFE IN OUR CITIES'

Micheál Martin sideswipe at FG's Justice Minister

TÁNAISTE Micheál Martin has revealed that he wants Fianna Fáil to take over the Department of Justice and to set up a new dedicated transport police force if successfully returned after a general election.

In a hard-hitting interview with the Irish Mail on Sunday, the Fianna

EXCLUSIVE

By John Lee

GROUP POLITICAL EDITOR IN CORK

Fáil leader signalled that 'making Ireland safe again' would be a key election pitch

to voters. And in a thinly veiled criticism of his Fine Gael Coalition partners and Justice Minister Helen McEntee, Mr Martin said: 'We're [Fianna Fáil] interested in justice and crime. We believe, and this will feature heavily in our manifesto, there's a real sense of people not feeling

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**STANLEY WOMAN
SPEAKS TO MOS:
My €60,000
'extortion' text
was idiotic**

PAGES 8-9

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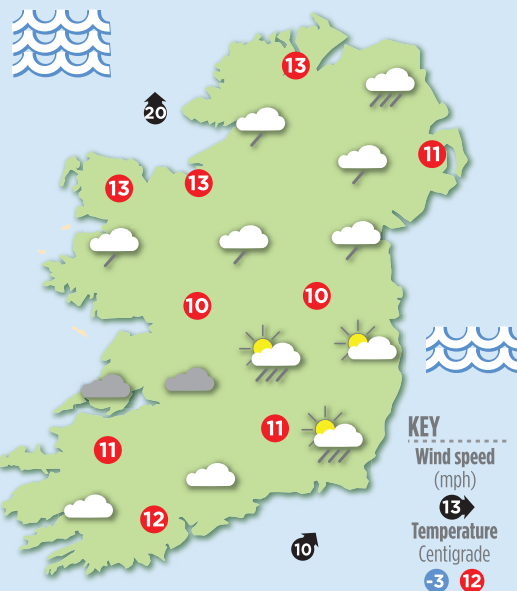
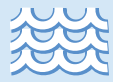
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Weather



► FORECAST

GENERAL FORECAST

A bright start in the east, but clouds and rain will push across the country, starting in the west early on, and rain will become widespread later. Fresh south-westerly winds.

REGIONAL FORECASTS

Leinster: Bright early on, but with clouds developing, bringing rain later on. Fresh south-westerly winds. Tonight, rain early on. Max temp 14C (57F). Min temp 6C (43F).

Dublin: Bright early on, though clouds will move in, bringing rain later on. Fresh south-westerly winds. Tonight, rain early on. Max temp 14C (57F). Min temp 6C (43F).

Ulster: Bright in the far east early on, then mostly cloudy with rain pushing in. Fresh south-westerly winds. Tonight, spells of rain. Max temp 14C (57F). Min temp 6C (43F).

Connacht: A cloudy day with rain throughout the day, especially in the afternoon. Fresh south-westerly winds. Tonight, spells of rain. Max temp 14C (57F). Min temp 7C (45F).

Munster: Cloudy in the morning with rain pushing in later in the afternoon. Fresh south-westerly winds. Tonight, spells of rain. Max temp 15C (59F). Min temp 7C (45F).

Waterford: A bright early morning, with clouds later, bringing rain in the evening. Fresh south-westerly winds. Tonight, rain will ease later. Max temp 14C (57F). Min temp 6C (43F).

WEEK AHEAD

Tomorrow will be mostly cloudy with a few spells of rain at times, mainly in the morning, but many areas should stay dry. Sunny periods on Tuesday, but clouds will push into the north and west by the evening with a chance of some rain on the coast. Mainly dry and bright on Wednesday, especially later. Bright at times with some patchy rain in the north on Thursday, pushing south on Friday.

► SIX-DAY FORECAST

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
DUBLIN	15	14	15	15	12	11
CORK	15	14	15	15	13	11
BELFAST	15	15	15	15	11	11
GALWAY	14	14	15	14	11	11
LIMERICK	15	14	15	15	13	12
DERRY	15	14	15	15	12	11
KILKENNY	15	14	15	15	13	11
WATERFORD	15	14	15	15	13	11

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► From Page One

safe in cities, in Dublin and Cork, in urban environments. They feel the cities are no longer safe.'

The Foreign Affairs and Defence Minister said his party will push for a significant recruitment campaign to boost garda numbers and reform the force's training college in Templemore.

While acknowledging that 'pay is an issue' when it comes to recruiting gardaí, he said 'you can do certain things on allowances... you can do certain things in specific areas'.

Since the November 23 Dublin riots, when gardaí temporarily lost control of parts of Dublin city centre to a mob, concerns have repeatedly been raised about the force's lack of equipment and training that gardaí undergo to police violent protests.

As part of measures to improve the State's policing response, Mr Martin said: 'I do think we have to look at Templemore itself, the timelines by which people are trained. We do need to look at

'They feel the cities are no longer safe'

that in terms of, can we accelerate the progress of the programmes to get people on the beat and on to the streets more quickly?'

Aside from reform and increased boots on the ground, the Tánaiste also said he wants to establish a dedicated transport police force, something Garda Commissioner Drew Harris – who is due to retire next May – has repeatedly ruled out. Although many European countries operate with different crime fighting agencies, this would be the first new police force in Ireland since the foundation of the State.

And Mr Martin said he would set up a transport police force with or without the support of the Garda Commissioner.

'I also think we need a transport police [force]. If the gardaí don't want to do transport police – and the Commissioner said he doesn't, operationally, he doesn't feel it's necessary or maybe his resources are such that he can't deploy – then we could do a separate transport police operated by the NTA [National Transport Authority] or by transport companies.'

The Tánaiste's comments echo calls by the country's largest union, Siptu, this week for the establishment of a dedicated public transport

Martin: 'I'll push for more gardaí and to accelerate their graduation'



CHANGING HATS: Micheál Martin wants FF to have Justice

'Fianna Fáil has to fight this election as if our lives depend upon it'

FULL INTERVIEW 10-11

wake of last November's riots.

Mr Martin said the move damaged Sinn Féin, whose support levels have plummeted over the past year.

'It was anti-State what they did, in my view, and it did damage Sinn Féin, because a lot of people said: "Whose side are they on?"

'I mean, the gardaí were attacked, buses were burned, and here you have a party trying to politically exploit it, bringing to the Dáil a motion of no-confidence in the minister for justice,' he said.

'At moments like that, in a country, you stand together against the forces of disorder. Sinn Féin didn't stand in solidarity against those forces of disorder. I think it was a fundamental mistake by them.

'But the problem for Sinn Féin is they've always thought

to exploit problems, more than come up with solutions.'

The Tánaiste also noted Sinn Féin's leadership has never apologised for IRA kneecapping people for 'anti-social behaviour' in the North, or tarring and feathering women believed to have a relationship with a British soldier.

'They've never really acknowledged any of that or apologised for any of that, or even said, "we got this wrong" or "that was wrong". I find it extraordinary,' he said.

'We have various inquiries into the past and rightly so, but take the phenomenon of

'How many young lives were destroyed?'

kneecapping young people. How many young peoples' lives were traumatised and destroyed?' he asked.

'They may have engaged in some anti-social behaviour, but... the Provisional IRA took it upon themselves to kneecap those kids.

'What were the scars on their lives, the trauma on their lives, having gone through that experience? I mean, to be shot in the leg, in the knee, at 16 years old, or 17 or 18 years old, it was brutal stuff, but we're told [by Sinn Féin]: "It was the conflict."

'There was never anyone [in Sinn Féin] who said: "We got that all wrong, and we apologise to those young people. Or the young women in the seventies who were tarred and feathered because they went out with a British soldier.'

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DID YOU REMEMBER?

Clocks went back an hour at 2am this morning to mark the end of Summer Time. We will now be on Greenwich Mean Time until next March 30.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

THE Irish Mail on Sunday strives for complete accuracy in every article but it is inevitable when working against deadlines that mistakes are sometimes made and misunderstandings arise. We have always been ready to publish corrections and we do our utmost to ensure this happens quickly and prominently. If you feel that any of our coverage is incorrect or incomplete, please email: corrections@mailonsunday.ie Letters for publication should still be sent to: letters@mailonsunday.ie



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Tánaiste Micheál Martin dismisses talk of quitting the leadership of

EXCLUSIVE



By **JOHN LEE**

GROUP POLITICAL EDITOR IN CORK

IT will come as a body blow to some of his internal party rivals, but Tánaiste and Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin clearly has no intention of departing the main political stage anytime soon.

In a remarkably candid interview with the Irish Mail on Sunday, Mr Martin revealed he wants to be a three-time Taoiseach, firmly ruling out a mooted presidential run.

The Tánaiste cut a relaxed figure, frequently breaking into laughter, as he took time out from canvassing in Mitchelstown in his native Co. Cork on Friday to debunk any suggestion of succession plans within his party.

It is clear during our hour-long conversation that he wants to continue the work of the current Coalition if Fianna Fáil forms part of the next administration, and he is confident the party will.

Housing is a priority, and he good-humouredly said he took issue with his partner in government, Taoiseach Simon Harris, for announcing in the MoS last week he wanted to increase the new home targets to 60,000, as Mr Martin said he had suggested it first.

While he insists he takes 'nothing for granted', he is quite sure that recent polls – putting his party substantially behind Fine Gael – underestimate Fianna Fáil's support levels.

And after an underwhelming 2020 campaign, he signalled he will be taking a more aggressive approach this time around.

'I've learned from the 2020 campaign and previous campaigns that the dynamic of the campaign will be crucial here,' he said.

'So we've got to fight this as if our lives depend upon it. It's going to be very, very competitive. You've got a number of key parties, you've got independents, you've got smaller parties. So we have a very fragmented political system.'

That said, he is determined his party will form part of the next government, and that he will return to the highest political office in the land.

'I want to go back as Taoiseach, that's my objective.'

'And I'll just make the point; Fianna Fáil won the last three national elections, but we get written off every time.'

'Commentators don't seem to be more guarded in their commentary [about us]. They seem to be totally taken by the polls. We saw that in the recent local election, where we were well behind the other two parties in the polling, and yet we came first in terms of the seats.'

When I suggest that, if he is re-elected, it would be an opportune moment to announce a run for

the Áras – with the next presidential election scheduled for October next year – Mr Martin emphatically replied: 'No. If I'm elected Taoiseach... you fulfil your duty.'

'I want to be Taoiseach. I'm committed to Dáil Éireann, I want to be elected Taoiseach. So you can't leave midstream if you're Taoiseach. That's my personal view of life, that it's an extraordinary honour to be Taoiseach of a country, and I'd serve out my time and would be committed, because you have to have an agenda you want to complete.'

It has been widely speculated that Mr Martin would step away from frontline politics and allow a successor – most likely deputy leader and Finance Minister Jack Chambers – to fill his shoes.

Asked if he regards Chambers as an obvious successor, the Tánaiste insisted: 'You can never ordain anybody, no leader can and no leader should, because life is so full of change now.'

But he then goes on to make a very strong case for his youthful 33-year-old deputy.

'When we were coming out of Covid and the change in rotation happened with [former Taoiseach and Fine Gael leader] Leo [Varadkar], I said the ministers have done well to get us through Covid, and I didn't make changes then. And

Jack had been a very effective chief whip, he was a very good negotiator on climate in the formation of Government,' he said.

'He's tough. But then in the local elections, he was exceptional as a director of elections, as a motivator of candidates across the length and breadth of the country. He was a good director of elections, to be blunt about it.'

'In terms of Finance, I felt he has the intellectual capacity, he has the brain power. He is dedicated to politics, so I think his time had come,' he added of the man he insists is not the anointed one.

Asked when Mr Chambers will get the opportunity to stake a claim for the leadership, Mr Martin warned any challenger will have quite a wait before he decides to step down.

'The future in terms of leadership of the party? There will be many other candidates, I've no doubt, but that would be after the next general election.'

And he pointedly clarified, laughing: 'The one after the next election... just in case [there is any doubt].'

If he is returned as Taoiseach after the election, Mr Martin said he expects this to be as part of the three-party coalition, again involving Fine Gael.

He said: 'My sense is, it will be a

I don't want to run for the Áras – I want to be a three-time Taoiseach

MARTIN'S FF IN HIS OWN WORDS

ON BUILDING ROADS

'I think there's been a lack of clarity around the roads issue. This outgoing Government has been made up of three parties with different priorities. I'm gonna be honest and say we believe in public transport, but we also believe we have to build more roads, and we have, we have to have substantive active transport... the greenways that have been developed.'

My own city of Cork has been transformed and I will be a keen supporter of active travel. But we can't have an absence of clarity on road building.

Like, we built motorways in the 2000s, we built them, Cork-Dublin, Galway-Dublin. That was a fundamental decision made. And I understand some environmental concerns, but, I mean, we're meant to be going electric. In a new government, we're going to be building the Metro. We're going to be doing light rail in Cork and light rail in Limerick over the next 10 years. But we'll also be building roads that are necessary.

WHAT WENT WRONG IN 2020

'The early positioning of us versus the rest. I think Leo made an intervention in the first debate between me and Leo that, "I've no difficulty going in with

Fianna Fáil" and that made it Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael against the rest... And then other factors as well, to be clear. I think our manifesto, our messaging, could have been stronger, and campaigns take off, and go on the wrong direction.'

SEAT TARGET

'We've a stronger team going out into this election than we had in 2020. On the ground there are better teams across the country. It's very difficult to put figures on it, but certainly we want to be in the 40s, and I'm experienced enough to know that making gains in elections, it's not easy, but I think there are opportunities of gain for us.'

TRANSFERS TO FIANNA FÁIL

'What I would say to you is that there's a real sense of fluidity in transfers amongst the centre ground parties. So you take the broad spectrum of the centre ground from centre-left right to the centre-right. There's fluidity in transfers that wasn't there before. So you look at Cynthia Ní Murchú, she picked up 16,000 votes from the Green candidate, Grace O'Sullivan. Before that, she picked up a big transfer from John Mullins (Fine Gael) and so did Billy Kelleher.'

three-party coalition government of some sort,' he said, indicating his preference for a smaller party rather than a group of Independ-

ents. 'There's different Independents, and there's different sets of Independents but we will be pushing for the strongest vote possible,

because we think parties matter. Parties give cohesion to government. Parties give strength to government. Parties give certainty to

Fianna Fáil, saying that he is keen for the top job in the country again

NOT GOING ANYWHERE: Tánaiste and the leader of Fianna Fáil, Micheál Martin



Micheál Martin canvassed in Mitchelstown in the company of the Irish Mail on Sunday on Friday before moving onto Midleton and other towns around his native Cork. Mr Martin's grandfather is from Mitchelstown and he bumped into his first cousin Ned Walsh while on the canvass. Mr Martin entered shops along the main street. At one hardware shop he agreed to have his election shoes resoled. He sent his driver back to his state car to get his other pair of shoes.

MICHEÁL MARTIN is nursing 'a big loss' following the death of his beloved pet dog. 'My dog's passed away. Setanta, he was a big loss... 14 years of age.' Asked if he plans to get another dog, the Tánaiste replied: 'Not yet. There's a big debate [in the family]. He was a Bichon Frise. My daughter, Ava, looked after him so well in the last few weeks. They're hard to replace, yeah, but the Bichon... like, they'd watch telly with you. You know, they're a beautiful dog.'

That's another two years wasted. 'You're going to disrupt and delay. We need houses fast, and we need to build them fast. Then they want to create some new public construction company... that'll take an age.'

'They want to get rid of the Help to Buy [scheme]. And I'm saying, a lot of couples are saving money now saying: "Okay, there's a Help to Buy scheme."'

On the subject of housing, it is clear that comments made by the Taoiseach in the MoS last week – when he announced plans to increase new home targets to 60,000 a year – may have rubbed the Tánaiste up the wrong way.

He was keen to set the record straight; that it was he that had, in fact, suggested the upwardly revised target first.

But he acknowledges 60,000 – double the current level of new builds – will be very difficult to achieve.

'I think it will be 2029 or 2030 before we get to the 60,000 target per annum.'

'But mind, that's a target, right? I've had this argument... yes, we should increase our targets. But the real issue is we have to increase output.'

'What we've brought in, in the last four years, is a consistency on local authority house building and improved housing values.'

'So we're now [saying] we should make it 8,500 new builds in social housing. Last year it was about 8,133 but we added to that.'

Mr Martin said Fianna Fáil wants to maintain the Housing portfolio in the next coalition, and also Education 'because I've always had a passion for it'.

'I was delighted in this Government that we're able to give free access to schoolbooks from primary right up to leaving certificate. So, I'd like the Education portfolio to continue that mission of ensuring access.'

'My parents left school aged 12 because of economic necessity'

Explaining his passion for education, Mr Martin said he 'is a product of the Donogh O'Malley [former Minister for Education who brought in free education for all] revolution. My parents never

went to secondary school. They left school at 12 because of economic necessity.'

And with his stated ambition of becoming a three-time Taoiseach, he could eclipse Fianna Fáil founder Éamon de Valera.

But when I put it to Mr Martin that he is now second only to Dev in terms of longevity as party leader, he insists this is something he hasn't given any thought to.

'Someone said that recently, I never bothered even checking that. Time goes very fast.'

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government. The public won't want too much fragmentation because they don't want elections every two years, and if governments are dependent too much on solid Independents or smaller parties, that can have its own problems.

'Now, we benefited from strong support from a group of Independ-

ents, the regional group who put forward their issues from their constituency point of view and their policies, but were solid enough and their support was fundamental to keeping the Government together for four and a half years, which I think was good for the country.'

He categorically rules out any

sort of deal with Sinn Féin, particularly 'because of their housing strategy'.

'I think there's a real choice facing housing at the moment.'

'We got the LDA [Land Development Agency] legislation done in two years, and Sinn Féin are going to come along and say, "Oh, we're going to change that legislation."