

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Albums
of the Year

Culture

Santa's
Extra Nice
List

Part two
(H to M)

Who owns
what on
O'Connell
Street

Business

Taoiseach sets
new focus on
national security

Martin highlights threat to energy and communications

John Mooney
Investigations Editor

The taoiseach has said protecting Ireland's energy supplies and critical undersea infrastructure from "third parties" is regarded as a core national priority, reflecting concern at the height of government that the state's economic lifelines are exposed to sabotage, surveillance and hybrid attack.

In an interview with The Sunday Times, Micheál Martin said Ireland's undersea infrastructure of fibre-optic cables, gas connections and electricity supply lines was being monitored and the authorities were liaising with partners in Britain and Europe to protect it.

He added that the government planned to enhance security at ports and other critical nodes to safeguard the connections.

"There is deep co-operation with EU member states and with the United Kingdom in respect of all of these issues, and that has been ongoing. We share knowledge. They share knowledge.

"One has to be very vigilant and one has to strengthen resilience in respect of critical undersea infrastructure because our society and modern economy depend on that," Martin said.

The taoiseach confirmed the government's decision to build a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal at Shannon was grounded in protecting Ireland's energy supplies, which he described as a "security imperative".

The Russian military was caught mapping out the specific location

of vulnerabilities in a gas pipeline that connects Ireland to Britain last year when it deployed a spy ship in the Irish Sea, which is evolving into a strategic battleground between Russian and Britain.

The Russian ship Yantar was tasked with identifying parts of the seafloor where the connector was vulnerable to sabotage, according to intelligence collected by Britain and Ireland's military services. The area was later checked to see if it had been mined with explosives.

"The LNG strategic gas reserve is absolutely a security imperative. We're very dependent on gas connectors. It has been very effective but it's part of a critical undersea infrastructure which is exposed and vulnerable. Therefore you need back-up. We're moving to see if we can accelerate that," Martin said. "We'll do everything legislatively to fast-track this facility because it is an important back-up.

"This decision was taken earlier in the year but this is very much in the context of security and economic security."

A Department of Defence-led project concluded Ireland would suffer rolling electricity blackouts for weeks should the gas interconnector be strategically damaged in the winter months. The economy could be damaged irreparably.

Martin stopped short of attributing blame for the drone incursion that took place over Dublin Bay to interrupt the state visit of President Zelensky from Ukraine, but said third-party actors were involved. The taoiseach said the incident would be discussed at

the ministerial council on national security due to convene this week, but he had been privately briefed on the incident. Martin followed the government's longstanding policy of being guarded about attributing blame for national security incidents but did say they had become the new norm.

"It's happened in Copenhagen, it's happened in Germany, it's happened in Belgium, it's happened in France. It's happened in quite a number of member states. So we're no different. We all co-operate with each other. We all take advice and harness expertise from each other," he said.

A further review may lead to the introduction of new policies for the garda and military should a drone incident occur again.

The taoiseach said the scale of cyber and hybrid attacks across Europe had risen exponentially since the invasion of Ukraine.

"Ireland has not been immune from that. Every member state, both private sector operations, public sector operations, are constantly repelling and fighting back to prevent cyberattacks. Likewise there's increased concerns around critical undersea infrastructure – the cables, gas connectors and the Russian shadow fleets," he added. "It's not just Ireland; I mean, many of these cables are intertwined. They're connected. It's a global issue. A pattern has emerged since the beginning of the war."

Martin pointed to sabotage attacks believed to have been orchestrated by Russia against

SOMETHING IRISH THIS WAY COMES



Hollywood stars Paul Mescal and Jessie Buckley were back on home soil last night, walking the red carpet at Light House Cinema in Dublin for the premiere of their film Hamnet. Full story, page 3

Fianna Fail
bosses blew
€400,000
on Aras bid

Jennifer Bray Political Editor
Claire Scott
Political Correspondent

A review of Fianna Fail's disastrous presidential election bid has found the final cost of the campaign will be about €400,000, and a fresh blame game has erupted within the party.

The substantial bill comes after the dramatic withdrawal of Jim Gavin from the race following a dispute with a former tenant.

A review commissioned after the controversy has examined the spending on the campaign and found the final bill will be in the region of €400,000, but not more than this. It has also examined the timeline of events leading up to the selection of Gavin as a candidate, from the initial contact in July, to a due diligence process in mid-August and then his selection by the party in September.

There are fresh recriminations inside Fianna Fail over a specific timeline of who knew what, and when, about the rent issue.

It is understood the review details when different members of the party were alerted to a possible tenancy issue, and on what date.

A number of Fianna Fail TDs told The Sunday Times there were heated conversations happening behind the scenes about who should shoulder the final responsibility for the way in which the campaign imploded.

One TD said a key question that would be asked this week was whether senior members of the party knew about the rent issue before the parliamentary party

Continued on page 2 →



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Thousands of vulnerable children at risk after Camhs rejection

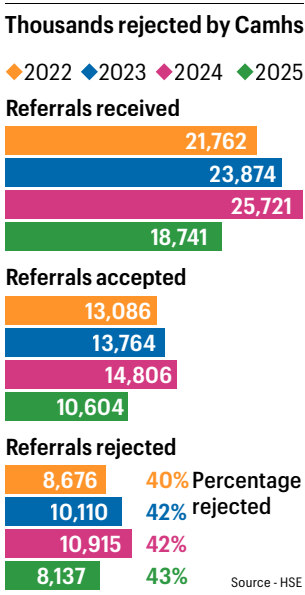


Julianne Corr

Almost half of all children sent to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Camhs) this year have been turned away, with some young people at risk of suicide instead seeking help in overwhelmed hospital emergency departments. New HSE figures show a total of 8,137 children had referrals rejected by Camhs up to the end of September this year, which is 43 per cent of all referrals received by the service. In Dublin and the

northeast, the rejection rate rose to 55 per cent. Camhs provides assessment and treatment for young people under 18 with moderate to severe mental health difficulties, usually accessed via GP referral. Primary care psychology treats children with mild to moderate difficulties. Last year 10,915 Camhs referrals were rejected, representing 42 per cent of all cases. In 2023, 10,110 children were also denied access, again representing 42 per cent. Rory O'Brien, clinical lead for paediatric emergency medicine at Cork University Hospital, said children were presenting to emergency departments "every day" in

acute mental health crises after long waits for Camhs or primary care – or having been refused access entirely. "We're seeing several every day, but we're only seeing the pointy end of the stick here as there's a huge amount of children out there who aren't coming in because everyone knows what it's like when you come into an ED," he told The Sunday Times Young Minds Matter campaign. One 49-year-old mother from the Midlands said she was forced to take her 12-year-old daughter to an emergency department in the middle of the night in January 2023 because she feared the girl would harm herself.



The child, then in first year at secondary school, had been on a Camhs waiting list for five months with escalating anxiety and depression. At the time of referral, she told her GP she "couldn't see herself reaching her 16th birthday". "It was a complete last resort," her mother said. "She kept saying, 'My brain won't stop.' She was really distressed and agitated and I just didn't know what to do. "When we got there they said they would put through an urgent referral for Camhs and we ended up getting an appointment a day or two later. It felt like because she had gone through A&E that they were treating it

seriously now." But despite finally accessing the service, the family's experience was "poor", leading to more emergency department presentations, including after a paracetamol overdose, and a four-week admission to St Patrick's hospital in Dublin, where the girl spent her 13th birthday. The mother had to give up work to care for her. During this time she also arranged a private autism assessment, which confirmed a diagnosis while the girl was in St Pat's. Eventually they were seen by a locum consultant in Camhs. "I ended up walking out of one of the appointments crying because he was so dismissive. He was basically

saying, 'We think it's autism and Camhs can't help you,'" the mother said. By summer 2023, the relationship between the teenager – who had missed a year and a half of school – and her Camhs clinical nurse had broken down. Her anxiety was repeatedly dismissed as "teenage angst" and the service attempted to discharge her. The mother turned to private care, paying €160 a week for a psychologist and €120 for occupational therapy. After eight sessions, the psychologist concluded the girl needed more intensive, continuous support than private practice could offer and was better

suited to the public system. Now aged 15 and in third year at secondary school, the teenager is taking Prozac, an antidepressant, but is still being refused psychological support by Camhs. "I was told my child was not complex enough for the CDNT [children's disability network teams], had needs that were too severe for primary care, and then Camhs didn't know how to manage autism. There's a massive gaping hole there," the mother said. O'Brien said: "The ED is not the right place for a child in crisis. We need rapid access clinics, community hubs – something drastic needs to happen."

Far right not republicans, warns Saoradh

Extremists who pose with guns while standing in front of tricolour disowned by group that backs the New IRA

John Mooney
Investigations Editor

Dissident republicans have delivered a blunt warning to emerging far-right groups trying to cloak themselves in the imagery and language of the IRA. Saoradh, the political organisation that supports the New IRA, and the Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Association (IRPWA) have disowned far-right extremists who have begun styling themselves as republican paramilitaries in videos circulating online. They insist these groups are "not republicans" and have warned that anyone jailed for offences linked to far-right activism will not be recognised as republican prisoners or housed alongside dissidents in either the Republic or Northern Ireland. Republican prisoners serve their sentences in segregated prison landings and receive extra privileges. Brian Kenna, a member of Saoradh's national executive, told a meeting of dissidents in south Dublin last week that far-right groups represented a distortion of republicanism. "They are populist. They are a nuisance and don't have massive support," he said. "They are now trying to steal the identity of republicanism and taking advantage of the issues caused by the housing crisis. They are not a long-term threat." Kenna's remarks were backed by Sean Hanna of the welfare association whose organisation raises funds for families of republican prisoners. Hanna told the meeting that far-right prisoners would not be supported by the IRPWA, which raises money for dissident prisoners aligned to various factions. The intervention comes as far-right activists increasingly try to tap into discontent around immigration by styling

“**These populists are trying to steal our identity**”



Brian Kenna: "Far right is distorting republicanism"

themselves as republican paramilitaries. Some groups have released videos of masked men wearing balaclavas, holding military-style weapons and standing in front of tricolours issuing threats and anti-immigrant statements. Among them is the New Republican Movement, which recently posted a video featuring three masked men holding handguns and military weapons in front of a tricolour, threatening politicians and those who support immigrants or the opening of accommodation centres. In the video, the men described themselves as "patriots" who were "frustrated with mass immigration and the sexual indoctrination of children in school". The group also threatened to take action against local politicians, whom it described as legitimate targets. The Police Service of Northern Ireland has commenced an investigation. Other self-styled paramilitary groups include the Irish Defence Army, which is alleged to have discussed arson attacks on mosques. In Belfast, dissidents have already begun to target people accused of involvement with far-right groups. They have adopted the cover name Socialist Republican Front (SRF) and have been known to use pipe bombs. SRF has threatened a group called Clann Eireann, which is accused of vandalising republican graves in the city's Milltown Cemetery and attacking murals expressing a welcome to migrants. Security sources say that a small number of fringe dissidents, who are involved in organised crime and extortion, have gravitated towards anti-immigrant activism, providing an opportunity to build a support base and extort money.

SANTA CLAUSES ARE COMING TO TOWN



Crowds of people dressed as Santa Claus throng the streets of New York for the city's annual SantaCon, in which participants are urged to wear a costume, spread joy and "not drink more than Santa can handle"

No to high tax for a united Ireland

Jason Johnson

Voters have put a price tag on the question that has fired political passions in Northern Ireland for a century – and it seems constitutional preferences come with a hard spending cap. The University of Liverpool's Institute of Irish Studies asked people not just how they would vote in a border poll, but how much extra tax they would be prepared to pay each year to get their preferred outcome. Among those who would vote for Irish unity tomorrow or within 15-20 years, fewer than one in five (17.5 per cent) were willing to pay £5,000 more if unity were delivered. Six in ten said they would not. Some 20.9 per cent would accept a £3,000 rise, with 53.7 per cent opposed. More than a third, 35.1 per cent, would not pay £1,000 extra in taxes, and 48.3 per cent would not accept higher rents and living costs to achieve a united Ireland. Supporters of the Union were no more willing to dig deep. Among those who said they would vote to remain in the UK, only 11.7 per cent were willing to pay £5,000 a year more in tax, and 16.6 per cent would pay £3,000. In each case, close to two thirds said they would not. Forty per cent said they would not pay £1,000 extra tax and 52 per cent would not accept higher rents and living costs to stay in the UK. Professor Peter Shirlow, who led the survey, said it was a clear message. "Aspirations can be conditional," he said. "What people might want and what they are prepared to pay for are not the same." The November survey involved 1,534 voters, with results weighted to be representative of the Northern Ireland electorate.

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Taoiseach to foster more resilience to hybrid attack

→ **Continued from page 1**

subsea cables in the Baltic Sea and physical attacks that had taken place in Poland and other EU states. "There is an increase in hybrid attacks of different types, some involving arson and others hiring low-level criminals to do damage. Europe is on increased alert and it's obviously related to the war." The taoiseach said he believed Ireland should foster national resilience across all sectors of society. He said he also wished to harness and integrate Irish expertise towards protecting the country and developing a stronger sense of national resilience, especially in respect of critical undersea infrastructure, cybersecurity and other areas including ports. "I've asked the relevant minister to factor in security considerations in terms of making our ports more robust and resilient to potential hybrid attacks because trade is of essence to the island and our economic security." Martin is credited with doing more than his predecessors to protect

Ireland's political institutions and the economy by strengthening the state's defence posture through planning, investment and diplomacy. He rejected any suggestions that Ireland was engaging in warmongering or was moving away from its stated position of neutrality. "Europe doesn't want conflict. Russia caused this war and has created all this tension, but Europe is realising that it has to simply create a great resilience itself and that's what's motivating the rearmament and the greater investment in defence capability. It's not warmongering, it's just dealing with reality." He said Ireland would support Ukraine joining the EU as soon as 2027, as proposed by the most recent peace plan that would overturn the established accession procedure. He also said the government supported unfreezing billions of Russian assets held in the EU to fund Ukraine's defence and reconstruction. "We're not members of Nato. We're not part of a military alliance. However, this is European Union policy. The invasion of Ukraine is a violation of the UN charter. We've never been politically neutral. Here is a state that has been violated, in its sovereignty, in its territory, and integrity. "We also believe that the future cannot be where a big

power believes it can simply go in and destroy a country, kill people, and then destroy the infrastructure, and then Europe has to pick up the tab afterwards. There has to be some financial economic deterrence to deter this behaviour into the future." The taoiseach's comments come as Ireland moves carefully to realign its security and defence posture while maintaining its stated policy of neutrality. This strategic realignment is taking place on all fronts. Last week Ireland agreed to support the use of the EU's €175 billion Horizon project to fund research into dual-use technology that might have defence applications. James Lawless, the higher education and innovation minister, said the decision took into account how the international security environment had rapidly evolved. He said it was important for Ireland to be seen to do everything to protect itself but also Europe. "The mood among the majority of member states is very much that some of them feel under attack; some of them are under attack, certainly from hybrid forms, if not full-frontal assaults," he said. "We have a common interest in European defence."

Alison O'Connor and Leo Varadkar, page 19

Blame game erupts on Fianna Fail's Aras fiasco

→ **Continued from page 1**

voted for him, and if so, what was done to get to the bottom of it. Furthermore, John McGuinness, the Carlow-Kilkenny TD, said that many members would be looking for accountability following the publication of the report, which is expected this week. "Those responsible need to accept responsibility and it falls to the leadership and to Micheál Martin," McGuinness said. "I would caution all of those involved

Micheál Martin led his party behind GAA star Jim Gavin

to be honest and to be direct and to place the blame wherever it should be placed. The days of ducking and diving are over – it has cost us in terms of our public profile hugely, and financially." He said if it were the private sector and a significant sum of money had been lost, "the culprits would be sacked and the company would move on". When asked whether he thought the Fianna Fail leadership should step down from their roles, McGuinness said: "We need to see the report and to see exactly what happened. It needs to be given to the parliamentary party and then people can make up within their own minds what they believe should happen next." TDs are anxious to see the report before the end of term and have said pushing it further into 2026 would not be a good look for the party in its centenary year. "This has dragged on long enough. There are a lot of people who just want to move on at this stage," one TD said. "We need to be seen to be doing the work we were elected to do, and fulfilling our promises in the programme for government."

Coalition on the skids, pages 6-7