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Inside today



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Social upheaval has shifted from being against the Government to being against the State

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Opinion & Analysis



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Politicians to get more protection in wake of fuel protests

Gardaí concerned some of those involved in protests have become radicalised

Harris still intends to cut income tax in budget despite €750m extra spending

CONOR LALLY and PAT LEAHY

Garda protection is being stepped up for senior politicians, including Taoiseach Micheál Martin, due to fears they could be targeted amid public anger following the fuel protests over the past week.

There are concerns some of those involved have effectively become radicalised and will seek to publicly confront senior politicians, creating confrontations that could spiral.

Along with Martin, Tánaiste and Minister for Finance Simon Harris, Minister for Justice Jim O'Callaghan and Minister for Defence Helen McEntee were also outspoken against those involved in blockades. The Garda's efforts to ensure their safe passage around the country will now involve added security and deeper planning.

Garda Commissioner Justin Kelly has already said he was aware of "attempts in person and online to threaten and intimidate gardaí" who had been policing the protests and blockades.

O'Callaghan announced last Thursday morning that the Defence Forces had been placed on standby, following a Garda request, to aid the operation to clear protests and blockades. McEntee has refused to confirm or deny reports she was not consulted before O'Callaghan's statement.

O'Callaghan also warned protesters they "should not complain later about any damage caused" to their vehicles during removal. He added "outside actors" were "manipulating" the protesters so they could "damage Ireland as a country".

O'Callaghan's warning that the far right was trying to exploit the fuel protests was regarded as well-founded. Garda sources said there were clear efforts to infiltrate the fuel protests by the Irish far right, who appear to be seeking momentum as anti-immigration sentiment dissipated over the past 12-18 months.

However, it is feared the role O'Callaghan played in the past week, especially being

seen as the figure who first mentioned the Defence Forces could be used to help gardaí break blockades, may now make him a target for protesters.

Senior Garda officers believe the strength of feeling towards politicians, among some sectors of the protest movement, will not be restricted to those in Government. As a result, public representatives from all parties will be offered security advice.

A significant security operation will also be undertaken as the Dáil today sits for the first time since the protests began early last week.

Harris still intends to bring forward a package of income tax reductions in the next budget, despite the three quarters of a billion in extra spending and tax cuts announced in the last three weeks.

"The Tánaiste has said repeatedly that he expects there to be an income tax package in the next budget and that position has not changed," his spokesman said.

The Department of Finance has said it will publish revised estimates for spending projections and a smaller surplus in the wake of the €505 million package announced on Sunday evening, and the €250 million announced last month, in the coming weeks.

The department said the cuts to excise would cost €260 million until July, while the deferral of the carbon tax increases would cost €22 million.

Behind the scenes, though, there are also fears in the department that the current package of measures will be extended beyond July 31st, adding further costs into the hundreds of millions.

There is understood to be considerable unease within the Department of Finance and across Government about the rush to extra spending at a time when a global economic slowdown is expected to lead to slower growth here and higher inflation.

➔ **Opposition parties back protests: page 2; Opinion: page 12**



Hands up for Handel

Messiah fills the air on Fishamble Street

Maureen Porteus, Redempta Ní Sheoige, Lucy Bruton, Mairín Mullary and Jennifer Cullen among 120 singers from Our Lady's Choral Society who, alongside the Dublin Handelian Orchestra and mezzo-soprano Sharon Carty, performed choruses and arias from Handel's Messiah on Fishamble Street in Dublin yesterday on the anniversary of George Frideric Handel conducting the world premiere of his oratorio on the same street on April 13th, 1742.

Photograph: Bryan O'Brien

Iran threatens new attacks as US blockade begins

MARK WEISS
in Jerusalem

Iran has threatened to resume rocket and drone attacks on the ports of its Gulf neighbours after the US implemented a blockade of Iranian ports and coastal areas yesterday.

Oil prices climbed, with no sign of a swift reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to ease the biggest ever disruption in supplies and broader concerns over the durability of a two-week ceasefire agreement reached last week.

The US blockade covers vessels of any flag engaging with Iranian ports, oil terminals or coastal facilities, extending across the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea east of the Strait of Hormuz.

US president Donald Trump warned that if any Iranian ships came close to the blockade they would be "immediately eliminated". The US deployment consists of more than 15 warships, including an aircraft carrier, guided-missile destroyers and an amphibious assault

ship, according to reports in the Wall Street Journal.

Trump declared plans for a naval blockade after weekend talks in Islamabad between vice-president JD Vance and an Iranian delegation collapsed, even though the temporary ceasefire technically lasts for another nine days.

An Iranian military spokesman called the US measures "piracy", warning that if Iranian ports were threatened, no port in the Gulf or Gulf of Oman would be secure. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

said any military vessels approaching the strait would be considered in violation of the ceasefire.

During the 40-day war, Iran blocked the passage to and from the Gulf for most non-Iranian ships and demanded during the talks that it be allowed to charge transit fees.

Now, the US is seeking to block the movement of Iranian oil through the Gulf, thereby depriving the cash-strapped regime of an economic lifeline.

Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who was un-

comfortable with the announcement of a two-week truce, said Israel supported the US naval blockade and was fully co-ordinated with Washington.

Nato allies said yesterday they would not participate in the blockade, proposing instead to intervene only once fighting ends.

British prime minister Keir Starmer said the United Kingdom would not be dragged into the Iran war.

The ambassadors of Israel and Lebanon to the US are due to begin formal peace talks to-

day in Washington, while fighting continues between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia in Lebanon.

Israel has refused Beirut's demand for a ceasefire in advance of the negotiations but, under pressure from Washington, has stopped attacks in Beirut and the Beqaa valley while continuing to engage Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon.

➔ **War in the Middle East: page 6; Iran grapples with economic devastation: page 18**

National Museum collection at 'risk' in storage building

ÓRLA RYAN

The building housing the National Museum of Ireland's collection "presents a significant long-term risk" as it is "at full capacity" and not at the standard required to safely preserve the items, the museum board's chair has said.

The collection, which consists of about four million objects, has been stored at the Collections Resource Centre in Swords, north Dublin, since 2010. The Office of Public Works (OPW) rents the 18,116sqm (195,000sqft) building from a private landlord at an annual cost of €2.6 million and sublets it to the museum. The lease was due to expire in 2030 but was extended in 2024 until 2044.

The museum has long raised concerns about the building, saying an alternative location

was needed. Prof Cathal O'Donoghue, chair of the board, said the building was a "non-purpose-built facility" and "presents a significant long-term risk given the scale of the collection".

Efforts were needed to find a more suitable location as it would take a long time to move the vast and delicate collection, he said. "The specific risk relates to the length of time required to move the collection... Early pre-planning is essential," he said.

O'Donoghue made the remarks in letters to Minister for Culture Patrick O'Donovan last August and September.

O'Donoghue said the lease extension gave some stability but did "not resolve the underlying strategic challenge". The facility "is at full capacity and lacks the environmental and structural standards required

for long-term collections".

The board had "consistently highlighted the need for early planning and cross-departmental engagement to progress a permanent, purpose-built solution". He said this "would not only safeguard the national collection but also ensure more efficient and strategic use of public resources".

The letters were released following a freedom of information request.

Speaking to the Irish Times Early Edition podcast, O'Donoghue said it would take seven years to rehome the collection if 2,500 objects were moved from the current location to a new facility every day.

Representatives from the department and the OPW are working with the museum to help find a permanent storage facility, a museum statement noted.

Weather

Dull and damp with scattered outbreaks of rain. Mild but breezy. Highs of 10-14 degrees.

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EU: Irish man Anthony Whelan has been appointed head of the European Commission's competition department. **Page 5**

World News



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Business + Your Money

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Sports Tuesday

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Soccer: Noah Okafor scored twice as Leeds celebrated a first Premier League win against Manchester United in over 23 years. **Page 20**

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