

SANDERS QUESTIONS CLINTON'S PRESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATION

PHILADELPHIA: Bernie Sanders is questioning whether Democratic rival Hillary Clinton is "qualified" to be president after she spent much of the day after the Wisconsin primary criticizing his record and his preparedness for the job.

"She has been saying lately that she thinks that I am quote unquote not qualified to be president," Sanders told a crowd of more than 10,000 people at Temple University's Liacouras Center in Philadelphia on Wednesday. "I don't believe that she is qualified if she is, through her super PAC, taking tens of millions of dollars in special-interest funds."

Sanders also said Clinton is not qualified because of her vote for the war in Iraq and her support for trade agreements that he says are harmful to American workers. It's the latest salvo in a war of words that has gotten increasingly heated as underdog Sanders has gained ground on front-runner Clinton, capped by the Vermont senator's victory in Tuesday's Wisconsin primary.

Clinton spokesman Brian Fallon responded quickly to Sanders' comment, writing on Twitter: "Hillary Clinton did not say Bernie Sanders was 'not qualified.' But he has now - absurdly - said it about her. This is a new low."

In a fund-raising appeal early yesterday, Hillary for America's deputy communications director, Christina Reynolds, said of Sanders: "This is a ridiculous and irresponsible attack for someone to make - not just against the person who is almost certainly going to be the nominee of their party this November, but against someone who is one of the most qualified people to run for the presidency in the history of the United States." Indeed, Clinton did not say Sanders was "unqualified" or "not qualified" during a much-quoted interview Wednesday morning on MSNBC's "Morning Joe." In a discussion of an interview with Sanders that appeared in the New York Daily News, Clinton was asked if "Bernie Sanders is qualified and ready to be president of the United States." She responded, "Well, I think he hadn't done his homework and he'd been talking for more than a year about doing things that he obviously hadn't really studied or understood, and that does raise a lot of questions." Sanders spokesman Michael Briggs said Wednesday evening that Sanders was responding to reports on the CNN and Washington Post websites. A Post story was headlined, "Clinton questions whether Sanders is qualified to be president."—AP

ROUHANI: RADICAL TALK WON'T DELIVER RESULTS

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that radical talk from critics of the country's nuclear deal with world powers was dangerous and he urged more, not less, diplomacy and dialogue. His comments came just days after a speech by the commander of the elite Revolutionary Guards, who said the accord, which lifted international sanctions on Iran, amounted to a humiliation. Rouhani, a moderate cleric under Iran's theocratic system, was boosted in February elections when his allies made gains in parliament and their conservative rivals lost dozens of seats. However, the polls have been followed by gestures from hardliners within the regime that appear aimed at preventing the nuclear agreement leading to any wider rapprochement.

A flurry of ballistic missile tests conducted by the Guards since October last year triggered fresh US sanctions after a UN panel said they breached previous resolutions. The tests, however, do not amount to an infringement of the July nuclear accord as it did not cover ballistic missiles.

Rouhani, in a speech broadcast live from Tehran, said the nuclear deal, finally implemented in January after more than two years of talks, showed "logic and argument can triumph over hard power and threats." "Under radical thinking, there should never be cooperation with the IAEA or the United Nations," Rouhani said, referring to the International Atomic Energy Agency responsible for monitoring the deal. "Radical thinking tells us not to trust anyone, not to trust neighbors or friends, but moderate thinking tells us... we should talk to the world and seek self-reliance at the same time. "Being radical is disadvantageous to us everywhere. It creates the biggest danger for any society."

Once-only opportunity

The Guards report not to Rouhani but to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's ultimate authority. The force's commander, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, said on Tuesday that the nuclear deal should not be seen as a model for rapprochement.—AFP



BETHPAGE: Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally. — AFP

BRUISED IN WISCONSIN, TRUMP AND CLINTON EYE FRIENDLIER NEW YORK

BOTH CANDIDATES LOOK TO BOUNCE BACK

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton looked to bounce back Wednesday from unsettling presidential primary losses in Wisconsin, training their sights in the next White House contests on friendlier ground—their home state of New York.

The Republican and Democratic frontrunners were trounced Tuesday night in the Badger State, giving their respective rivals—Ted Cruz and Bernie Sanders — a boost in morale and delegates. Trump's defeat makes his ascent to the Republican nomination steeper, increasing the likelihood of a contested convention in July that could throw the party's nod to someone more to the liking of the establishment.

Usually at no loss for words, the real estate mogul left it to his campaign to blame his poor Wisconsin showing Tuesday on an anti-Trump movement that it said spent "countless millions on false advertising" to stop him. "Ted Cruz is worse than a puppet—he is a Trojan horse, being used by the party bosses attempting to steal the nomination from Mr Trump," his campaign said in a statement. Cruz, an ultra-conservative senator from Texas, won with 48.3 percent of the vote, to 35 percent for Trump. Ohio Governor John Kasich took 14 percent.

'Turning point'

"It was a turning point, I believe, in this entire election," Cruz told reporters Wednesday in New York, where he flew to challenge the brash billionaire on his home turf. Cruz painted Trump as more willing to engage in insults than substantive debate. "He gets very angry when the voters reject him," Cruz said.

Trump's loss followed a brutal campaign week, in which he alienated

women by saying those who have abortions should be punished—and then retracting the comment. He also drew fire for calling NATO obsolete and a plan to make Mexico pay for a border wall by holding hostage the money its citizens send home from the US.

But Trump remains the undisputed Republican frontrunner with 746 delegates to 510 for Cruz and 145 for Kasich after Tuesday, according to a CNN estimate. The first to get to 1,237 wins the nomination. Trump needs to secure those delegates before the Republican convention in Cleveland in July, or face a fight in the second round of balloting when pledged delegates are free to choose a candidate for themselves.

By winning Tuesday, "Cruz increased his chances of preventing a first-ballot nomination for Trump," American politics professor John Pitney of Claremont McKenna College said. "It gives the anti-Trump forces a fighting chance." Clinton also emerged from Wisconsin with her formidable delegate lead intact — 1,780 compared with 1,099 for Sanders. To win the Democratic nomination, 2,383 delegates are needed.

The race now turns to friendlier territory for both Trump and Clinton. Polls give New Yorker Trump a 31-point lead over Kasich and Cruz in the Empire State, which votes April 19. In Pennsylvania, which votes a week later, he leads by 13 percentage points, according to a RealClearPolitics poll average. Clinton, who represented New York in the Senate from 2001 to 2009, has an 11-point lead over Sanders in her adopted home state and a 17-point advantage in Pennsylvania, where she also has roots. The candidates were losing no time, with Trump holding a rally in Bethpage on Long Island later in the

day. Cruz sought to make his own mark in New York, addressing voters in a Bronx restaurant.

Trump shook off his defeat at a fiery speech in Bethpage filled with his usual applause lines about building a wall on America's southern border and "making America great again." "We're bringing companies back to the United States. We are going to have a strong border. We are going to build the wall. It will be a real wall," he said in one of his most popular campaign refrains.

Cruz, who faces an uphill battle—especially after slamming Trump in January as having liberal "New York values"—was heckled briefly at his stop in the minority-heavy Bronx by a man who accused him of running on an "anti-immigrant platform."

Clinton rebukes Sanders

Clinton, meanwhile, pounced on an interview Sanders gave to the New York Daily News editorial board in which he vowed to break up big banks like JPMorgan Chase but failed to explain specifically how he would do it or what the consequences might be.

"I think he hadn't done his homework and he had been talking for more than a year about doing things that he obviously hadn't studied or understood and that does raise a lot of questions," Clinton said. Clinton argued that her pragmatism was a smarter approach than the grass-roots idealism of Sanders, who has touted free public college for all and a universal health care system.

"Like a lot of people, I am concerned that some of his ideas just won't work because the numbers don't add up," Clinton said in Philadelphia. "Others won't even pass Congress."—AFP