

International

Buttigieg exits race, Biden back in contention; 'Super Tuesday' looms

Openly gay US presidential candidate ends his campaign

WASHINGTON: Pete Buttigieg, the openly gay US presidential candidate, on Sunday ended his campaign to be the Democratic nominee - giving a major boost to fellow centrist Joe Biden. The 38-year-old Buttigieg's surprise decision was set to shake up the race this week when 14 states vote on "Super Tuesday."

It is expected to further boost the fortunes of Biden after the former vice president scored a resounding victory in South Carolina's primary on Saturday in the contest to see who faces President Donald Trump in November. Biden has emerged as the chief moderate challenger to frontrunner Bernie Sanders, the firebrand leftist who has taken the race by storm and is looking to score big wins today in states such as crown jewel California.

Buttigieg, a military veteran and former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, addressed supporters in his home town. "The truth is that the path has narrowed to a close - for our candidacy, if not for our cause," he said. Buttigieg did not mention Sanders by name in his speech, but he has publicly stated he believes the 78-year-old senator's "inflexible" political approach would fail in a match-up against Trump. "We need a broad-based agenda that can truly deliver for the American people, not one that gets lost in ideology," he said.

Buttigieg however stopped short of endorsing Biden or any other candidate. Buttigieg emerged as a major player by narrowly winning the Iowa caucuses, earning widespread attention for his unflustered and professional approach in an often bitter Democratic nomination battle. But his third place finish in Nevada and a worse showing in South Carolina confirmed he had struggled to build a broad coalition, including support from black voters - a key Democratic demographic.

Biden's resounding victory Saturday in the first southern state to vote has thrust him back into contention, after miserable showings in the first three states. With 48 percent of the vote in South Carolina, Biden more than doubled the 20 percent won by Sanders - positioning him as the leftist senator's main rival. "Just days ago the press and the pundits declared my candidacy dead," Biden told a crowd in Norfolk,

Virginia, one of the states voting on Super Tuesday. "Now, thanks to the heart of the Democratic Party in South Carolina, I'm very much alive," he said.

"On Tuesday here in Virginia, you could be the launching pad on the path to beat Donald Trump," Sanders continues to hold poll leads in several Super Tuesday states - including California. "I think we've got a great chance to win in California, in Texas, in Massachusetts and a number of states," Sanders said Sunday on CBS. He later congratulated Buttigieg on "running a strong and historic campaign" and angled for his supporters. "I urge them to join us in the fight for real change in this country," Sanders tweeted.

In an already turbulent Democratic race - which has gradually winnowed down a diverse and record-large field - Biden's victory Saturday injected further uncertainty. "The biggest question is whether this will sling-shot Joe Biden into victory in some Super Tuesday states," said Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. The win, powered by support from black voters, was Biden's first in the race, but came at a crucial time, helping dispel doubts about the 77-year-old's energy level and appeal.

Pressure to drop out

South Carolina brought some clarity: billionaire businessman Tom Steyer, who spent \$23 million campaigning in the state, also dropped out of the race after taking just 11 percent of the vote. Pressure is mounting on other trailing Democrats - including Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Amy Klobuchar - to follow Steyer's and Buttigieg's example and then swiftly throw their weight behind a frontrunner. Warren, Klobuchar and billionaire Michael Bloomberg have all made it clear that they will stick around at least through Super Tuesday.

Buttigieg was feted by rivals including Bloomberg, another moderate, who has poured a staggering \$500 million from his personal fortune into campaign advertising. Buttigieg "ran a strong campaign that inspired audiences and made history," Bloomberg said. Biden



INDIANA: With his husband Chasten by his side, former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg announces he is ending campaign to be the Democratic nominee for president during a speech at the Century Center. —AFP

praised Buttigieg for his "trail-blazing campaign based on courage, compassion, and honesty." Many Buttigieg supporters are unlikely to shift their backing to Bloomberg, whom Buttigieg openly accused of trying to "buy" his way into the presidential race.

The money factor

As the race goes forward, money will loom ever larger. Biden claimed he had been outspent 40-to-1 in South Carolina, but said he raised \$10 million over the weekend. Sanders has raised huge amounts in mostly

small donations, including \$46 million in February alone.

Biden argued on Sunday that as a centrist, he would be far more effective atop the party's ticket in November against Trump than Sanders, who calls himself a democratic socialist. "Most Americans don't want a promise of a revolution. What they want is results," he said in Virginia. Biden campaigned yesterday in Texas, Super Tuesday's second largest haul of the delegates who formally pick the party's nominee in July, while Sanders campaigns in Utah and in Klobuchar's home state of Minnesota. —AFP

Abortion in the US in facts and figures

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court is to hear a case tomorrow that could have a bearing on the future of abortion in the United States. The following are some facts and figures about abortion in the US:

Legal basis

The US Supreme Court legalized a woman's right to an abortion in all 50 states in the landmark 1973 case Roe v Wade. In a 1992 case, the court ruled that a woman could terminate her pregnancy as long as the fetus is not viable, which is usually before the 24th week. Besides recognizing a woman's right to an abortion before viability, the court banned restrictions that would put an "undue burden" on access to the procedure.

State laws

What constitutes an "undue burden" has been subject to interpretation, and several conservative states have passed laws restricting access to abortion. These laws have resulted in the closure of numerous abortion clinics. Six states, including Mississippi and Missouri, have only one abortion clinic each. In contrast, the liberal state of California has 150.

The Louisiana law before the Supreme Court requires doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of where the procedure is being performed. Pro-choice groups argue that this would leave Louisiana with just one abortion clinic. Other state laws, for example, prohibit an abortion once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, which can be as early as six weeks - before a woman may even know she is pregnant.

The numbers

More than 862,000 abortions were performed in the United States in 2017, which works out to about 13.5 abortions for every 1,000 women aged 15-44. That rate, which is comparable to the rates in both France and Britain, has been trending downward. According to the non-profit Guttmacher Institute, the 862,320 abortions in the United States in 2017 represented a seven percent decline since 2014. The number of abortions performed each year varies widely by state. In the southern state of Alabama, there are 6.2 abortions per 1,000 women, while the rate in New York is 23.1 per 1,000, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Public opinion

Abortion is one of the most controversial issues in the United States. According to a 2018 survey by the Pew Research Center, 58 percent of Americans believe abortion should remain legal, while 37 percent believe it should be banned. The breakdown largely follows party lines, with most Democrats backing a woman's right to an abortion and most Republicans opposing the procedure.

Recent developments

During his presidential campaign, Republican Donald Trump courted the religious right with a pledge to name anti-abortion justices to the Supreme Court. Since taking office he has named two conservative justices - Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh - to the nine-member court. Their appointments have galvanized anti-abortion activists in the country's conservative "Bible Belt," and several states have passed tough laws restricting the practice, including in Alabama in cases of rape. Most of those laws have been struck down by lower courts, but anti-abortion groups are hoping to put the issue before the Supreme Court and force it to revisit Roe v Wade. —AFP

South Korea seeks murder charges as virus kills over 3,000

SEOUL: South Korea sought murder charges against leaders of a secretive church at the centre of a ballooning coronavirus outbreak in the country yesterday as the global death toll rose above 3,000. World stock markets regained some calm as hopes for global interest rate cuts to soften the economic blow of the virus steadied nerves after last week's worst plunge since the 2008 financial crisis.

South Korea reported 599 new coronavirus cases, taking its national tally to 4,335, following the country's biggest daily jump on Saturday of 813 confirmed infections. There were 586 more on Sunday, broadening the largest virus outbreak outside China. There have been 26 deaths in total. Worldwide, the death toll has risen to 3,044, according to Reuters figures. Of the new cases in South Korea, 377 were from the southeastern city of Daegu, home to a branch of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, to which most of South Korea's cases have been traced.

The agency said that in January some members of the church visited the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the disease emerged late last year. The Seoul government asked prosecutors to launch a murder investigation into

No handshake for Merkel as Germany virus cases hit 150

BERLIN: Germany's interior minister rebuffed Chancellor Angela Merkel's attempt to shake hands with him yesterday as the number of novel coronavirus cases in the country rose to 150 with Berlin reporting its first infection. When Merkel reached out to greet Horst Seehofer at a meeting on migration in Berlin, he smiled and kept both his hands to himself. They both laughed and Merkel then threw her hand up in the air before taking a seat. Health experts have recommended avoiding handshakes as a way of preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus.

There are now 150 confirmed cases in Germany, Lothar Weiler of the Robert Koch Institute disease control agency said yesterday - up from 129 the previous day. The alert level has been raised from "low to moderate" to "moderate," Weiler said, with authorities saying there was no need for

drastic measures such as border closures to stem the contagion. The virus has now spread to 10 of Germany's 16 states, with more than half the confirmed cases in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Germany's most populous state emerged as a hotspot after an infected couple attended carnival celebrations there, infecting dozens of people. Amid growing fears over contagion, disinfectants, hand sanitizers and other protective products have sold out in many German shops. In Lower Saxony, 1,200 protective face masks were stolen from a hospital in the town of Sulingen near Bremen, news agency DPA reported yesterday, citing local police.

The hospital reported the theft after a stock check revealed that the masks were missing from a storage room. They were probably stolen on Wednesday or Thursday last week, police said. Germany has cancelled several major gatherings in a bid to curb the spread of the virus, including this week's ITB travel trade fair in Berlin. Health Minister Jens Spahn stressed yesterday that it was too early to say whether further public events would be cancelled. —AFP

leaders of the church, a movement that reveres founder Lee Man-hee. Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon said that if Lee and other heads of the church had cooperated, preventive measures could have saved the people who died.

"The situation is this serious and urgent, but where are the leaders of the Shincheonji, including Lee Man-hee, the chief director of this crisis?" Park said in a post on his Facebook page late on Sunday. Seoul's city government said it had filed a criminal complaint with the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office, asking for an investigation of Lee and 12 others on charges of murder and disease control violations.

Lee apologized yesterday that one of its members had infected many others, calling the epidemic a "great calamity". "We did our best but was not able to stop the spread of the virus," Lee told reporters. It was not immediately known how many of South Korea's dead were directly connected to the church. Wuhan, the Chinese city at the centre of the epidemic, closed the first of 16 specially built hospitals, hurriedly put up to treat people with the virus, after it discharged its last recovered patients, state broadcaster CCTV said yesterday.

'Outbreaks are curbed'

News of the closure coincided with a steep fall in new cases in Hubei province, but China remained on alert for people returning home with the virus from other countries. "The rapid rising trend of virus cases in Wuhan has been controlled," Mi Feng, a spokesman for China's National Health Commission, told a briefing. "Outbreaks



BERLIN: (Left to right) German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier, German Labor Minister Hubertus Heil, German State Minister for Migration, Refugees and Integration Annette Widmann-Mauz, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Sylvie Nantcha, head of The African Network of Germany (TANG) give a press conference at the end of a summit on integration at the Chancellery yesterday. —AFP

Germany's under-fire Catholic Church seeks new leader

BERLIN: German bishops gather for key talks from yesterday where they will choose a new leader to help steer the country's Catholic Church through a controversial reforms process and settle compensation demands from sexual abuse victims.

The four-day episcopal gathering in the western city of Mainz comes at a time of fierce debate about how to modernize Germany's Catholic Church, pitting conservative bishops against more progressive ones. Cardinal Reinhard

Marx, a driving force behind efforts to renew the under-fire Church, last month unexpectedly announced he would not seek another six-year term as head of the German Bishops' Conference, saying he was too old at 66.

The several dozen bishops attending the annual general assembly will choose his successor in a secret vote today, although no clear frontrunner has emerged. Besides confronting calls to relax the rules on priestly celibacy and the roles of women in the clergy, the new chairman will have to deal with the Church's sexual abuse legacy. Stephan Ackermann, the bishop charged with addressing the historic child abuse scandal, recently said he expected a decision "in the coming months" about financial compensation for survivors.

More than a decade after the first abuse revelations emerged in Germany, victims are losing patience. "There's no reason to wait any longer," the Eckiger Tisch victims' group said, calling for a resolution this year. The group has pro-

posed a one-off sum of around 300,000 euros (\$330,000) per person, or the creation of a fund paid for by the Church but run by independent overseers. Several high-ranking Church officials have rejected the proposals as too costly.

A study commissioned by the German Bishops' Conference and released in 2018 showed that 1,670 clergymen had committed some form of sexual attack against 3,677 minors, mostly boys, between 1946 and 2014. The revelations, which mirror paedophile scandals in Australia, Chile, France, Ireland and the United States, prompted Cardinal Marx to apologize on behalf of the German Catholic Church. The Church currently pays victims an average sum of 5,000 euros "in recognition of their suffering", as well as covering their therapy fees. "Recognizing the suffering is not enough," the Eckiger Tisch said ahead of the episcopal gathering, adding that victims were not asking for "a handout". —AFP



DAEJEON: New nurse officers are trained on the COVID-19 coronavirus before heading to Daegu to help medical staff, at the Korea Armed Forces Nursing Academy in Daejeon yesterday. —AFP

in Hubei outside of Wuhan are curbed and provinces outside of Hubei are showing a positive trend."

The virus broke out in Wuhan late last year and has since infected more than 86,500 people, the majority in China, with most in Hubei. Outside China, it has in recent days spread rapidly, now to 53 countries, with more than 6,500 cases and more than 100 deaths. Italy has 1,694 cases, the vast majority in the wealthy northern regions of Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia Romagna. —Reuters