

## International

# Biden, Kamala Harris vow to 'rebuild' America post-Trump

## Democratic duo vows to end Trump's presidency

**WILMINGTON:** Joe Biden and Kamala Harris launched their joint White House bid Wednesday, with the newly-minted vice presidential nominee saying Americans are "crying out for leadership" to overcome the triple crisis of a pandemic, racial injustice and a ravaged economy. Making their first appearance as running mates, before a small crowd of reporters and staffers at a Delaware high school closed to the public due to coronavirus concerns, the Democratic duo vowed to end Donald Trump's presidency and, in Biden's words, "rebuild this country." "Everything we care about," said Harris. "It's all on the line." A formidable 55-year-old US senator from California and a daughter of immigrants, Harris has already made history as the first woman of color tapped for a major party presidential ticket.

Describing a country at the crossroads, she left little doubt of her determination to go on the attack, saying Trump "just isn't up for the job" and has left the nation "in tatters." "America is crying out for leadership, yet we have a president who cares more about himself than the people who elected him," said Harris. Despite the awkwardly intimate setting, a far cry from the typical campaign rollout featuring an audience of thousands, Harris appeared telegenic and confident in her first speech as vice presidential nominee - for which she and Biden both arrived wearing facemasks.

"The case against Donald Trump and Mike Pence is open and shut," said the former California attorney general as she assailed the president's "failures of leadership" on containing the deadly pandemic and an economy hobbled by measures to fight the contagion. The daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants to the United States sought to tap into the nationwide upheaval over police violence and racial disparities.

## Sympatico? Biden-Harris chemistry put to test in 2020 and beyond

**WASHINGTON:** In searching for his vice presidential running mate, Joe Biden above all wanted someone "sympatico" with his political strategy. How will he fare with his pick, Kamala Harris, who eviscerated him in debates and harbors her own presidential ambitions? Chemistry is closely studied as a barometer of compatibility-in governing style, policy, campaigning and political aspirations.

A presidential nominee and his or her partner on the ticket either have it and benefit, or they lack it at their peril. And while there is visibly little to suggest Biden, 77, and Harris, 55, would be anything but agreeable political collaborators during-and perhaps after-their campaign to oust President Donald Trump, both nominees will be challenged to present a united front. Mission accomplished, at least on Wednesday, when Biden and Harris appeared together for the first time as running mates. Each had warm words for the other, with the former vice president stressing he has "no doubt" that he chose the right running mate and declaring to the Harris clan that "you're all honorary Bidens now." Harris for her part highlighted Biden's "empathy" and sense of duty, and turned personal when she spoke of her good friendship with

"We're experiencing a moral reckoning with racism and systemic injustice that has brought a new coalition of conscience to the streets of our country demanding change," she said. For Biden - who leads Trump in most national polls and in swing states like Florida and Wisconsin despite conducting the campaign mostly from his Wilmington, Delaware home - his VP reveal marks a crucial moment as he aims to build a broad coalition of voters to defeat Trump. Biden spoke of why he chose Harris as his partner, stressing she was a tough and experienced legislator who is "ready to do this job on Day 1."

### 'America's story'

And he said that Harris' story as the child of immigrants and a woman of color who fought her way to the top ranks of US legal and political circles would inspire the country. "Her story's America's story," Biden said. "She's worked hard (and) she's never backed down from a challenge." He also laced his remarks with optimism about the future, promising that a Biden-Harris administration will do what it takes to "turn the corner on this pandemic." The event capped a 24-hour flurry since Biden's running mate announcement, with Biden saying they raised an impressive \$26 million during the period, the campaign's one-day record.

The Biden-Harris ticket already strikes a contrast with 2016, when nominee Hillary Clinton and running mate Tim Kaine struggled to unite a Democratic Party weakened by infighting between her supporters and those of progressive candidate Bernie Sanders. Harris's politics lean left of Biden's, but the pair have made a point of highlighting their shared values and goals - despite their clashes during the primaries last year. She is the first Indian American

Biden's late son Beau, who served as Delaware's attorney general while she held the same post in California.

But in the era of coronavirus, the rollout event-normally high-energy outdoor affairs with thousands of cheering attendees and loud music-was a public-free zone: a high school gymnasium near Biden's home in Wilmington, Delaware, with almost no physical interaction. While both nominees emerged together and delivered sharp, on-point speeches that targeted Trump and called for a rebuilding of a broken nation, there was little in the way of body language to assess.

Absent was the requisite hug or high five. No arm-in-arm double wave by two candidates locked in a delicate dance in which the running mate must appear competent and engaging while not outshining the principal. Observers say that in his history-making two terms as the nation's first black president, Barack Obama's secret to his chummy relationship with his deputy Biden was that he felt little threat from the older Washington veteran. In 2020 Biden is again the senior half of the political pairing, faced with a charismatic, confident and clearly ambitious partner from a younger generation.

### Team player

Voters rarely care much about vice presidential candidates, but this year is different, argues David Barker, director of American University's Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, because of the perception that Biden may only serve one term and is therefore grooming the future leader of the Democratic Party. "There will be questions about whether she is a team player in the White House and not looking



**WILMINGTON:** Democratic presidential nominee and former US Vice President Joe Biden and his wife Jill Biden (left) wave to his vice presidential running mate, US Senator Kamala Harris, and her husband Douglas Emhoff after their first press conference together in Wilmington, Delaware. —AFP

to be a presidential running mate, personifying the diversity seen as key to building enthusiasm for the Democratic ticket - and black lawmakers and activists were largely thrilled with the pick.

### 'Fine choice'

Harris, who is two decades younger than Biden and Trump, could appeal to younger voters and women, particularly those in the suburbs who have been fleeing the Republican president, according to polling. Trump, who last month acknowledged Harris would be a "fine choice" for Biden, attacked her following Tuesday's announcement as "nasty" and a radical leftist who would implement "socialized med-

icine" and confiscate Americans' guns. "I think she's going to be a big failure," he added Wednesday. Biden sniped at the presidents' attacks, asking if anyone was "surprised Donald Trump has a problem with a strong woman?"

And veteran political analyst David Axelrod put it more bluntly. "If I were watching this @Kamala-Harris rollout in the WH, I'd be deeply concerned. She nailed it. And then," he tweeted. "Not 'nasty.' Powerful." For Harris, being elevated onto a presidential ticket is political gold. If she and Biden win, the telegenic but tough Harris would almost certainly become the 2024 or 2028 Democratic presidential frontrunner. —AFP

out for herself and ahead to the next election," Barker told a journalist roundtable.

Another "potential danger," he said, is that Harris is "so charismatic" and effective a political communicator that she could inadvertently highlight related shortcomings in Biden, who has been criticized as gaffe-prone and bland on the campaign trail. Biden and Harris appear to share an affinity despite past clashes, including a searing exchange at the first Democratic debate last year when Harris assailed Biden's opposition to 1970s busing programs that desegregated schools. Biden appeared taken aback by her assault, perhaps because he believed her relationship with Beau insulated him.

Trump himself picked up on their debate spat, saying on Tuesday that she was "very disrespectful" to Biden. And the president's campaign has sought to paint Harris as radical extremist and powerful would-be "socialist" puppeteer pulling the strings on a Biden presidency. If Biden sees himself as a bridge candidate that would help the nation transition to a new generation of leadership, as he has signaled, Harris may be considering herself the heir apparent, especially if the pair win in November.

But prior to the election Harris will likely focus on pushing back against Trump, elevating the Democratic platform and solidifying a bond with Biden. "We're going to be seeing what level of vice presidential deference there is to Joe as the presidential candidate," Michael Steele, a former Republican National Committee chairman, told MSNBC. "Does her star peak a little bit more than his?" he added. "All these dynamics are going to play out." —AFP