

Canada Hijab Event Aims to Combat Islamophobia



Londoners came together in Victoria park in support of the Hijabs for Harmony event to combat Islamophobia Friday, June 18, 2021.

ONTARIO (Dispatches) – Muslim and non-Muslim women in the Canadian city of London have joined forces to organize an event in which all of them wear the Islamic headdress called hijab as part of a national call against Islamophobia in the country.

The Friday night rally drew hundreds of participants in London in an effort to educate local residents on the hijab and the need to combat persisting Islamophobia across Canada following the terrorist killing of a Muslim family in the city by a man, local news outlet Global News reported.

Dubbed Hijabs for Harmony, the rally was organized by local lawyer Barbara Legate and was modeled on

a similar event that took place after an attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019 that left 51 people dead and 40 injured.

The event was part of a number of other gatherings held across the country to press the Canadian government to address the issue of Islamophobia amid surging attacks against Muslims and Islamic places of worship in recent months.

Legate said in a speech to the crowd, she organized the rally to show support for Muslim women following what police said was a hate-motivated attack June 6 on a Muslim family in London that killed four people.

"It is to demonstrate we are your

allies, my Muslim sisters," Legate said. "To be good allies we must educate ourselves."

After a short program of speakers the crowd walked to the park's Richmond Street gate before returning to the bandshell for a moment of silence and more speakers.

The rally, which began at 5 p.m. and featured several speakers from the Muslim Association of Canada (MAC), was followed by what was referred to as "a solidarity walk" around the city's Victoria Park and a moment of silence for the Azaal family, four of whom were killed earlier this month when the man plowed his pickup truck into the Muslim family of five as they were taking a walk.

"In a time when a lot of women are scared to go out with their scarf on because now they have become a visible minority, this show of support encourages them to continue on with the choice they have taken," said London resident and a MAC member Reem Sultan.

Sultan said following the June 6 attack in London, she and her family were scared and wondered if they should leave their house because wearing the hijab made her visibly Muslim.

The suspect accused of killing the Canadian Muslim family is now facing terrorism charges in the case.

Nathaniel Veltman, 20, faces first-degree and attempted murder charges. New charges alleging the attack was an act of terrorism were unveiled last Monday.

Brushing Aside Reform Movement Some GOP States Give Police More Power



Protesters rally against the United States police killing of unarmed black man George Floyd, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on June 1, 2020.

COLUMBUS (AP) – After a year of protests over police brutality, some Republican-controlled states have ignored or blocked police-reform proposals, moving instead in the other direction by granting greater powers to officers, making it harder to discipline them and expanding their authority to crack down on demonstrations.

The sponsors of the GOP measures acted in the wake of the nationwide protests that followed George Floyd's death, and they cited the disturbances and destruction that spread last summer through major U.S. cities, including Portland, New York and Minneapolis, where Floyd died at the hands of officers.

"We have to strengthen our laws when it comes to mob violence, to make sure individuals are unequivocally dissuaded from committing violence when they're in large groups," Florida state Rep. Juan Fernandez-Barquin, a Republican, said during a hearing for an anti-riot bill that was enacted in April.

Florida is one of the few states this year to both expand police authority and pass reforms: A separate bill awaiting action by the governor would require additional use-of-force training and ensure officers intervene if another uses excessive force.

States where lawmakers pushed back against the police-reform movement included Arizona, Iowa, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Wyoming, according to an Associated Press review of legislation.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a bill Thursday to expand qualified immunity for police officers and enhance penalties for protesters, including elevating rioting to a felony.

"This is about protecting law enforcement and giving them the tools they need to keep our communities safe and showing them that we have their back," said state Rep. Jarad Klein, a supporter of the bill.

The bill passed the GOP-controlled Legislature despite promises last summer by the Republican governor and GOP legislative leaders to try to end discriminatory police behavior and adopt other criminal-justice reforms.

Reynolds introduced measures at the start of the 2021 legislative session to ban racial profiling by police and establish a system for tracking racial data on police stops. Both ideas were recommended by a task force the governor appointed in November 2019.

Instead, Republican lawmakers left out those proposals and pushed through the new bill.

Reform advocates found the quick reversal by Iowa Republicans disappointing.

"Would it have been too hard to do the right thing?" Democratic state Rep. Ras Smith asked during a floor debate over the bill. "You decided to make this an either-or, to trample on freedom, to show support for law enforcement in ways that they didn't even ask for."

Pakistan PM Turns Down CIA Request to Use Bases



Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan giving interview to Axios.

ISLAMABAD (Sputnik) – Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan told Axios in an interview that the CIA will "absolutely not" be allowed to operate from Pakistani soil after the U.S. completes its withdrawal from Afghanistan later this year.

CIA Director William Burns and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin have both visited Pakistan in recent months to discuss continued cooperation. However, the Pakistani government has rebuffed all attempts as a compromise.

Pakistan's Inter-Service-Intelligence (ISI) agency was Washington's gateway to Afghanistan for decades before the U.S. invasion in October 2001, providing an avenue by which the U.S. could funnel financial and materiel support to Afghan tribesmen fighting the socialist Afghan government and its Soviet allies in the 1980s, including those that later became the Taliban, and then to groups resisting the Taliban government that came to power after the socialist government collapsed in 1996.

According to the New York Times, the U.S. is once again searching for

proxies in Afghanistan to support after the last U.S. troops leave on September 11, apparently reflecting a belief that the Taliban, now out of power, won't take peace talks seriously and that the U.S.-backed Afghan government will quickly collapse in the face of a renewed Taliban offensive.

While the U.S. and Taliban reached a peace deal in February 2020 for the U.S. to end its 20-year occupation of the country and remove its remaining soldiers, a similar deal between the Taliban and the Afghan government has proven more elusive.

However, while Islamabad won't cooperate with the U.S. any longer, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has signaled that his administration might seek out their help in achieving stability without the U.S.

"Peace will primarily be decided upon regionally, and I believe we are at a crucial moment of thinking. It is first and foremost a matter of getting Pakistan on board," Ghani told Der Spiegel last month.

"The U.S. now plays only a minor role. The question of peace or hostility is now in Pakistani hands," he added.



KAMPALA (AP) – Ethiopians will vote on Monday in a landmark election overshadowed by reports of famine in the country's war-hit Tigray region and beset by logistical problems that mean some people won't be able to vote until September. The election is the centerpiece of a reform drive by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, whose rise to power in 2018 seemed to signal a break with decades of authoritarian rule and led to his Nobel Peace Prize the following year. He has described the poll as "the nation's first attempt at free and fair elections." Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party, formed in 2019 by merging groups who made up the previous ruling coalition, is widely expected to cement its hold on power. The party that wins a majority of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives will form the next government. "We will secure Ethiopia's unity," Abiy said ahead of his final campaign rally on Wednesday, repeating his vow of a free and fair election after past votes were marred by allegations of fraud. But opposition groups have accused Ethiopia's ruling party of harassment, manipulation and threats of violence that echo abuses of the past.

YEREVAN (Dispatches) – Armenia's premier is facing a tough challenge at the polls after a humiliating defeat for Armenian forces in last year's fighting with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called the early election for Sunday, seeking to assuage public anger over the peace deal he signed in November that triggered months of protests demanding his resignation. The Moscow-brokered agreement ended six weeks of fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, but saw Azerbaijan reclaim control over large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas that had been held by Armenian forces for more than a quarter-century. The deal was celebrated as a major triumph in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, but thousands of Armenians took to the streets in Yerevan and denounced it as a betrayal of their national interests.

BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) – Thousands of Argentines took to the streets of the capital Buenos Aires on Friday to demand improved pay and financial relief amid a stalling economy. The protesters, who were made up of labor unions and other activists, marched through Argentina's capital carrying banners calling for a strong welfare state and speaking out against the country's international debt obligations. Latin America's third-largest economy was in a deep crisis already before the pandemic hit. The health crisis is now expected to shrink output 12% this year, driving millions into poverty and leaving almost six out of every ten children and adolescents below the poverty line, United Nations data show.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The deadly Delta coronavirus variant will "probably" become the dominant strain in the United States in the coming months, according to the director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "It's more transmissible than the Alpha variant or UK variant that we have here. We saw that quickly become the dominant strain in a period of one or two months," Rochelle Walensky told "Good Morning America" on Friday. Walensky added, "I anticipate that is going to be what happens with the Delta strain here." The deadly B.1.617.2 variant, known as Delta coronavirus variant, was first identified in India. Walensky noted that vaccines have been effective against the new variants of the coronavirus; however, she said the virus could mutate, making the vaccines presently administered less effective. Meanwhile, U.S. President Joe Biden, who also warned about the deadly risks posed by the deadly and highly contagious Delta coronavirus variant, urged Americans who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 to get inoculated as quickly as possible.

WASHINGTON (Sputnik) – Obama-era government ethics chief Walter Shaub has harshly criticized the Biden administration, accusing it of nepotism. "The jobs went to privileged kiddos with mommies & daddies who cozied up to POTUS. Nepotism is illegal", Shaub wrote in his post on Twitter. His statements follow this week's report by The Washington Post, saying that relatives of senior aides have been employed by the administration. According to the newspaper, four children of Biden's most trusted aide Steve Ricchetti work in the government. Daniel Ricchetti is a senior adviser in the office of the undersecretary of state for arms control and international security. His daughter Shannon Ricchetti is deputy associate director of the office of the White House social secretary, while Tyler Ricchetti has worked for two years as an aide to Debbie Dengell. The last person to join the government's ranks is JJ Ricchetti, who was hired last week by the Treasury Department. Eight more relatives of government officials received jobs in the Biden administration, The Washington Post writes.

UN Stops Short of Calling for Global Arms Embargo Against Myanmar



Myanmar's envoy to the UN, Kyaw Moe Tun, voiced regret that it had taken three months for the Assembly to adopt the resolution and that it was not more explicit about an arms embargo

NEW YORK (Al Jazeera) – The UN General Assembly has stopped short of calling for a global arms embargo against Myanmar's military, even as it took the rare step of urging member states to "prevent the flow of arms" into the violence-ravaged country following the February 1 coup.

The resolution condemning the coup also demands that the military "immediately stop all violence against peaceful demonstrators", who continue to take to the streets every day.

It was approved on Friday by 119 countries, with 36 abstaining.

Only one country voted against it. It was sponsored by some 60 countries. "We must advocate for the protection of all fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, access to information and peaceful assembly which have been repeatedly infringed upon by the military in Myanmar," Turkey's Volkan Bozkir, president of the 75th UN General Assembly said in a statement.

At the meeting, UN special envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener also warned the 193-member body that "the risk of a large-scale civil war is real" in the country.

"Time is of the essence. The oppor-

tunity to reverse the military takeover is narrowing," Schraner Burgener said after the General Assembly adopted the non-binding resolution.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees are currently fleeing from violence in the country following clashes between the military and ethnic groups.

The vote came on the same day that the Security Council was holding informal talks on the situation in the Southeast Asian nation, where the military deposed Aung San Suu Kyi in February.

The resolution was not passed by consensus, as had been hoped, but rather through a vote, forcing all 193 UN countries to reveal their views.

In a quirk of history, Myanmar's envoy to the world body, Kyaw Moe Tun, voted in favor of the text. He has passionately rejected the coup and brushed aside the military's claims that he no longer represents Myanmar. The United Nations still considers him as the rightful envoy.

After the vote, the diplomat voiced regret that it had taken three months for the Assembly to adopt the resolution and that it was not more explicit about an arms embargo.

"The military is still operating in its own twisted reality," while ignoring calls to halt the violence," he said.

"The people inside and outside the country are determined to stop the illegal military rule and to restore democracy."

North Korean Leader Vows to Overcome Economic Hardships

PYONGYANG (Dispatches) – North Korean leader Kim Jong Un "solemnly swore" to navigate his country out of economic troubles as he concluded a major ruling party meeting.

North Korea's state media released Kim's comments shortly before President Joe Biden's special representative for North Korea, Sung Kim, arrived in South Korea on Saturday for talks over stalled nuclear diplomacy with the North.

Kim Jong Un had presided over a four-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's Central Committee, which he summoned to discuss efforts to salvage the economy, hurt by years of U.S.-led sanctions.

As he closed the meetings on Friday, Kim "solemnly swore" on behalf of the Central Committee that the party "will surely break through head-on the difficulties lying in the way of the revolution," the Korean Central News Agency reported.

Kim opened the Central Committee plenary on Tuesday by warning of potential food shortages, calling on North Korean officials to find ways to boost agricultural production

as the situation was getting "tense."

The 37-year-old leader said the country should brace for extended COVID-19 restrictions, suggesting that he would extend border closures and other steps despite heightened pressure on the economy.

North Korea has long been under harsh sanctions over its nuclear and missile programs. The U.S. has spearheaded UN sanctions and has imposed several rounds of its own.

Former U.S. president Donald Trump attempted to court Pyongyang, and although he met with Kim three times, he refused to relieve any of the sanctions on the North in return for several steps taken by Pyongyang toward denuclearization. That hampered further diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington and prompted Kim to announce an end to a moratorium on the country's missile tests.

Pyeongyang has blasted the new administration in Washington for pursuing a "hostile policy" after U.S. President Joe Biden said he would deal with the "threat" posed by the North's nuclear program "through diplomacy as well as stern deterrence."