

Australians Reject Constitutional 'Voice' for Indigenous People



'We never meant you harm': Australian Indigenous leaders lament referendum loss.

SYDNEY (AFP) – Australians have roundly rejected greater rights for Indigenous citizens, scuppering plans to amend the country's 122-year-old constitution after a divisive and racially-tinged referendum campaign.

With two-thirds of polling places reporting, 55 percent of voters had voted "no" to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the country's constitution for the first time.

The reforms would also have created a consultative body -- a "Voice" to Parliament -- to weigh in on laws that affect Indigenous communities and help address profound social and economic inequality.

Despite support from the country's centre-left government, the "yes" campaign had trailed in opinion polls for months, and

a defeat was widely expected.

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles acknowledged the defeat early in the evening, telling public broadcaster ABC "Australians have not voted for a change to the constitution."

Despite pre-referendum polls pointing to a defeat, Indigenous Australians expressed anger and anguish that the white majority had rejected calls for a reckoning with the country's bloody colonial past.

"This is a difficult result, this is a very hard result," said Yes23 campaign director Dean Parkin.

"We did everything we could and we will come back from this," he said.

More than 230 years since the first British penal ships anchored in Sydney, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese proposed the reforms as a step towards

racial reconciliation.

But instead, it has sparked a deeply rancorous and racially-tinged debate that exposed a gulf between First Nations people and the white majority.

Polls have consistently shown that voters -- most of whom are white -- rank Indigenous issues far down their list of political priorities.

In the days before the vote, media attention has focused as much on events in the Middle East as the political debate at home.

The opposition campaign had deftly channeled fears about the role and effectiveness of the "Voice" assembly, encouraging people to vote "no" if they are uncertain.

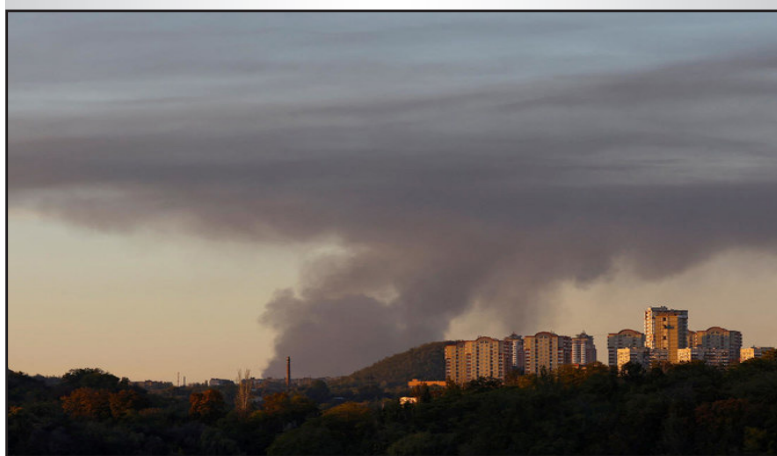
The debate was accompanied by reams of online misinformation: suggesting the "Voice" would lead to land seizures, a South African-style system of apartheid or was part of some United Nations plot.

Indigenous leader Thomas Mayo expressed fury at the conduct of the "No" campaign, which was backed by conservative opposition leader Peter Dutton.

"They have lied to the Australian people. This dishonesty should not be forgotten in our democracy by the Australian people," he said.

"There should be repercussions for that sort of behavior in our democracy. They should not get away with this."

'Heated' Fighting Erupts in Eastern Ukraine



Smoke rises from the area in the direction of Avdiivka in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict, as seen from Donetsk, on Oct. 11, 2023.

KYIV (AFP) – Kyiv reported "heated" fighting around its eastern city of Avdiivka Saturday, saying Russian forces had "not stopped assaulting" the symbolic industrial hub for days in their attempt to surround it.

Ukraine last week said Russia had stepped up assaults on the frontline city, which lies just 15 kilometers from Moscow-held Donetsk.

Avdiivka has been a symbol of Ukrainian resistance since 2014, after it briefly fell to Russian-backed separatists.

Russian forces now control territory to the east, north and south of Avdiivka.

"For the fifth day already, the enemy has not stopped either assaulting or shelling positions around the city," Vitaliy Barabash, the head of the city, said on Ukrainian television.

"It is very heated, very heated," he said of the fighting.

"They are trying to surround the city," Barabash added, claiming that Moscow was deploying "more new forces" to the area.

He described intense battles: "There is certainly no silence there at all. Shooting battles continue, both from the north and from the

south of the city."

Kyiv's interior ministry said Russian shelling had "destroyed" a five-story building in the city, saying it believed a man in his sixties was under the rubble but that it was "impossible to retrieve the body."

It urged residents still in Avdiivka to evacuate.

Some 1,600 civilians are believed to be in the city, which had a pre-war population of 31,000.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has said Kyiv was holding its ground in Avdiivka, but Moscow claimed it had improved its positions there.

Ukraine also claimed Saturday that a Russian attack killed an 11-year-old boy in the eastern village of Bagaty, also in the Donetsk region, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of Avdiivka.

Russia's intensified assault on Avdiivka has come after months of a Ukrainian counter-offensive, which has been slower than expected.

Russia meanwhile said it had "repelled enemy attacks" in several villages in eastern Ukraine, including in Andriivka — an eastern village that Kyiv has claimed it recaptured but Russia says it controls.

UAW President: Strike in 'New Phase' in Fifth Week

CHICAGO (Xinhua) – The United Auto Workers (UAW) is ready for more walkouts against three major U.S. automakers "with little notice," the chief of the union says.

"We are prepared at any time to call on more locals to stand up and walk out," UAW President Shawn Fain said in a webcast on the month-long strike against General Motors, Ford and Stellantis. "We will be calling out plants when we need to, with little notice."

In a social media live appearance, Fain called this a "new phase" in the union's fight against the Big Three as the strike enters its fifth week.

In addition, he said that union members went to Ford's World Headquarters to negotiate, and the automaker tried to present the same deal the union had rejected two weeks ago.

Ford Motor and Stellantis said Friday that they will temporarily lay off 1,250 employees due to the impact of the UAW strike.

Ford has temporarily laid off another 550 employees after the UAW walkouts at its Chicago and Kentucky plants.

At about 6:35 p.m. local time (2235 GMT) on Wednesday, the union announced an expansion midweek for the first time, and without warning, 8,700 UAW workers suddenly went on strike at Ford's largest factory, the

Kentucky Truck Plant, in response to Ford's refusal to move further in contract bargaining, according to local media.

"We're not gonna wait around forever," Fain said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"If Ford can't get that after four weeks on strike, these 8,700 workers shutting down their biggest plant will help them understand it," he added.

The UAW president's remarks come as the union and the Big Three automakers still appear at loggerheads over a new contract.

Ford officials told local reporters Thursday that the company has gone as far as it can on the additional money it can offer members. Executives responded to the Kentucky factory strike by saying the company had reached its financial limit in contract negotiations with the union.

"On the economics, I would say, yes, we're pretty much -- we have reached our limit," said Kumar Galhotra, president of Ford Blue, the automaker's hybrid division.

"You know who's reached their limit? The tens of thousands of Ford workers with no retirement security, the Ford workers who didn't get a single raise for a decade," said Fain in a video announcement, noting that Ford CEO Jim Farley made 21 million U.S. dollars in 2022.

News in Brief

MOSCOW (Sputnik) – Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan has signed a law ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. "Khachaturyan has signed a law ratifying the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court signed on July 17, 1998 and accepting the application for retroactive recognition of the ICC jurisdiction," the statement published on the Armenian Presidency's website read. On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Moscow absolutely disagrees with the justification of Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan for the need to adopt the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the country's security. Peskov called the move "extremely hostile" to Russia, as the ICC had previously authorized the arrest of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Children's Ombudsman Lyova-Belova. The Russian Foreign Ministry said that Armenia's decision to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) will have the most negative consequences for its relations with Moscow. Countries with more than half of the world's population do not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction. These include Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, China, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Turkey.

WARSAW (Reuters) – Polish police negotiators persuaded a man to come down from a monument in a central Warsaw square, a spokesperson said, putting an end to an incident that had seen part of the capital cordoned off amid reports of a bomb threat. Private broadcaster Polsat News reported that at around 1130 GMT the man surrendered to police. Its footage showed him climbing down from the monument, taking off his jacket and walking away with his hands in the air. Police spokesperson Sylwester Marczak told reporters officers had seen the man climbing onto the Smolensk monument at around 0800 GMT. "They approached him but then there was a very worrying statement which indicated that there was a very real danger for people on the square," he said, adding that police were now examining his backpack using an x-ray to make sure it was safe. The incident came a day before Poland holds a high-stakes parliamentary election.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The U.S. has accused North Korea of providing Russia with a shipment of weapons, claiming that Pyongyang is sending more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Moscow. "We condemn the DPRK for providing Russia with this military equipment," White House spokesman John Kirby said. Kirby said North Korea is seeking military assistance from Russia, including fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, armored vehicles and other advanced technologies in return. The U.S. is closely monitoring whether Moscow will deliver the weapons, but early signs of Russian ships offloading materials in North Korea may represent initial deliveries, he further said. "This expanding military partnership between the DPRK and Russia, including any technology transfers from Russia to the DPRK, undermines regional stability and the global non-proliferation regime," he added.

WELLINGTON (Reuters) – New Zealand's centre-right National Party led by Christopher Luxon will form a new government with its preferred coalition party ACT, as Prime Minister Chris Hipkins conceded his Labour Party could not form a government after Saturday's general election. The National Party, now in opposition, had 39% of the votes with 92% counted, while the ACT party had 9%. That would give the two parties enough seats to form a government, according to the Electoral Commission. "On the numbers tonight National will be in the position to lead the next government," Luxon, a former executive who once ran Air New Zealand and entered politics just three years ago, told supporters in Auckland. "We will make this an even better country." National won over voters by promising relief for struggling middle-income New Zealanders, and to bring historically high inflation under control while reducing the country's debt.

PHILADELPHIA (Daily Mail) – U.S. President Joe Biden stumbled once again while ascending a short flight of stairs at an event in Philadelphia on Friday. The president appeared to lose his balance while surmounting a trio of metal steps with a railing just as he was walking to get on stage. He quickly caught his balance and made it up the stairs to begin his speech. The event, about 'Bidenomics' and investing in the U.S., was to tout \$7 billion in investment in new hydrogen production hubs. Biden, 80, has suffered a series of recent stumbles, including while de-boarding Air Force One, and fell to the ground after tripping on a sand bag at a Coast Guard Academy graduation this spring.

France Deploying 7,000 Troops After School Stabbing Pinned on Muslim

ARRAS, France (Dispatches) – France will mobilize up to 7,000 soldiers to increase security around the country after a teacher was fatally stabbed and three other people wounded in a school attack by a former student, the president's office said Saturday.

Some schoolchildren, parents and personnel returned to the Gambetta-Carnot school in the northern city of Arras as it reopened Saturday morning to reconnect and seek support, after the attack Friday that rattled France.

French President Emmanuel Macron's office announced the order on Saturday, just a day after a suspected 20-year-old man of Chechen origin reportedly stabbed to death the teacher.

The assailant, who had been under surveillance by French domestic intelligence, severely wounded three others, including a school security guard, before he was arrested.

After visiting the Gambetta-Carnot high school, Macron branded the attack as an act of "Islamist terror".

No students at the school were hurt in the attack, police added.

According to the Elysee presidential palace, the mobilization of Operation Sentinelle troops in cities and towns will be completed by Monday evening.



French police secure the area after a teacher was killed and several people injured in a knife attack at the Lycee Gambetta-Carnot high school in Arras, northern France, on October 13, 2023.

Sentinelle is a French military operation with 10,000 soldiers and 4,700 police and gendarmes deployed since the aftermath of the January 2015 attacks to guard high-risk areas such as transport hubs, tourist sites and religious buildings.

French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has said there was "probably a link between what's happening in the Middle East and this incident" in Arras, referring to an ongoing war between the Palestinian Hamas resistance group and the Zionist regime that began last week.

Also on Saturday, visitors were evacuated from the Louvre museum in Paris, which closed "for security reasons" while France is on high alert following the attack.

A spokeswoman for the Louvre, the largest museum in the world, told AFP it had "received a written message stating that there was a risk to the museum and its visitors".

"We have decided in the current national context of an 'emergency attack' alert to evacuate and close it for the day, while we carry out the necessary checks," the spokeswoman said.

Russia Slams West for Creating Risk of Armed Conflict Between Nuclear Powers

MOSCOW (TASS) – Western countries are creating the risk of an armed conflict between nuclear powers, Deputy Director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Konstantin Vorontsov said.

"This hostile expansion, which involves the creation of a springboard against Russia in Ukraine, has jeopardized Russia's core interests. When speaking about inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia and drawing deeper into confrontation, the West is teetering on the brink of a direct military clash. This is what is generating the risk of an armed conflict between nuclear powers, while all five nuclear states pledged to prevent it," he stated at a meeting of the UN General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament.

"It seems that the U.S. and its allies believe in their ability to keep tensions under control in all circumstances and exert pressure on Russia without damage to themselves. It's a very dangerous misconception, fraught with disastrous consequences. This is what our signals and warnings to the West are all about. It's not the language of threats but the classical logic of deterrence," Vorontsov stressed.

The diplomat pointed out that "Russia's doctrine provisions related to nuclear deterrence are extremely clear; they do not allow for a broad interpretation and are purely focused on defense.

"Russia's official statements on the issue don't go beyond these provisions and are fully in line with our country's international obligations," Vorontsov concluded.