'They are us'

PM refuses to bow to hatred in the 'darkest day' of NZ

AGENCIES

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has been praised for her leadership in the wake of the horror that has gripped Christchurch following a terrorist attack that killed 49 people.

Dozens are dead and injured in the attack, in what Ardern described as "one of New Zealand's darkest days".

The prime minister's staunch rejection of the "extremist ideology" behind the attacks, which she said had "no place in New Zealand society", was applauded by those watching events unfold from around the world.

Ardern said New Zealanders were not chosen for this act of terror because they condone racism but rather that they represent diversity, kindness, compassion and a refuge for those who need it.

"And those values, I can assure you, will not and cannot be shaken by this attack," she said.

"Many of those directly affected by this shooting may be migrants to New Zealand, they may even be refugees here.

"They have chosen to make New Zealand their home. It is their home. They are us. The person who has perpetrated this violence against us is not. They have no place in New Zealand."

"There is no place in New Zealand for such extreme and unprecedented acts of violence."

Ardern said the attacks on people in places of worship was abhorrent. "It happened in a place where people should've been expressing their religious freedom, where they should've been safe," she said.

"The people subject to this attack today, New Zealand is their home. They should be safe here."

Ardern has been praised on social media for her response to the attacks, briefing the nation on developments in between attending briefings with security agencies.

(Clockwise from top) Police escort distraught witnesses away from a mosque in central Christchurch following a massacre; a man breaks down in tears as he speaks on a mobile phone near the mosque; an injured person is loaded into an ambulance following the shooting; a still image taken from video circulated on social media shows the gunman retrieving weapons from the boot of his car. PHOTO: MAIL ONLINE, REUTERS

17 MINUTES OF CARNAGE

A gunman who killed 49 people at two New Zealand mosques live-streamed the attacks on Facebook for 17 minutes using an app designed for extreme sports enthusiasts, with copies still being shared on social media hours later.

The live footage of yesterday's attacks, New Zealand's worst-ever mass shooting, was first posted to Facebook and has since been shared on Twitter, Alphabet Inc's YouTube and Facebook-owned Whatsapp and Instagram.

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube all said they had taken steps to remove copies of the videos. Facebook said it had deleted the gunman's accounts "shortly after the livestream commenced" after being alerted by police.

But Reuters found videos of the shooting on all five platforms up to 10 hours after the attacks, which began at 1345 local time in the city of Christchurch. Twitter and Google said they were working to stop the footage being reshared. Facebook did not immediately respond to additional questions.

In a 15-minute window, Reuters found five copies of the footage on YouTube uploaded under the search term "New Zealand" and tagged with categories including "education" and "people & blogs". In another case, the video was shared by a verified Instagram user in Indonesia with more than 1.6 million followers.

The shootings in New Zealand show how the services they offer can be exploited by extremist groups, said Lucinda Creighton, senior advisor to the Counter Extremism Project. She said the attacks were shown live on Facebook for 17 minutes before being stopped.

"Extremists will always look for ways to utilise communications tools to spread hateful ideologies and violence," she said. "Platforms can't prevent that, but much more can be done by platforms to prevent such content from gaining a foothold and spreading."

The gunman filmed and shared the attacks using a mobile phone app called LIVE4. The app is usually used to share videos of extreme sports and live music, but on Friday the footage recreated the carnage of a computer game, showing the attacker's first-person view as he drove to one mosque, entered it and began shooting randomly at people inside. SOURCE: REUTERS

Sickening act of violence

World leaders slam 'Islamophobia', 'horrible massacre' at New Zealand mosques

AGENCIES

Leaders around the world expressed disgust and sorrow at the killing of at least 49 people in New Zealand mosques on Friday, and some also expressed anger at what they described as the demonisation that fuelled such attacks.

Western leaders from Donald Trump to Angela Merkel expressed solidarity with the people of New Zealand and deplored what the White House called an "act of hate". The response from some Muslim countries went further, blaming politicians and the media for stoking that hatred.

"I blame these increasing terror attacks on the current Islamophobia post-9/11 (where) 1.3 billion Muslims have collectively been blamed for any act of terror," Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan wrote on social media.

"With this attack, hostility towards Islam that the world has been been idly watching and even encouraging for some time, has gone beyond the boundaries of individual harassment to reach the level of mass killing," said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

New Zealand police said 49 people had died. Three men and one woman were in custody and one man had been charged with murder. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said some of the victims may have been new immigrants or refugees.

Britain's Queen Elizabeth, who is New Zealand's head of state, said she was "deeply saddened by the appalling events".

US President Trump described the attack as a "horrible massacre" and said the United States stood by New Zealand.

In Europe, German Chancellor Merkel mourned "with the New Zealanders for their fellow citizens who were attacked and murdered out of racist hatred while peacefully praying in their mosques". Her foreign minister, Heiko Maas, said: "When people are murdered solely because of their religion, this is an attack on us all."

British Prime Minister Theresa May offered deepest condolences "after the horrifying terrorist attack in Christchurch. My thoughts are with all of those affected by this sickening act of violence."

Sadiq Khan, the first Muslim mayor of London, said Londoners stood shoulder to shoulder with the people of Christchurch. He also pointed his finger at those who promote religious hatred:

"When the flames of hatred are fanned, when people are demonised because of their faith, when people's fears are played on rather than addressed, the consequences are deadly, as we have seen so sadly today."

The European Commission said the "senseless act of brutality on innocent people in their place of worship could not be more opposite to the values and the culture of peace and unity that the European Union shares with New Zealand."

Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg said the attack brought back memories of 2011, when anti-Muslim extremist Anders Breivik killed 77 at a youth gathering on a Norwegian island: "It shows that extremism is nurtured and that it lives in many places."

Al-Azhar University, Egypt's 1,000-year-old seat of Sunni Islamic learning, called the attack "a dangerous indicator of the dire consequences of escalating hate speech, xenophobia and the spread of Islamophobia".

(Clockwise from left) Students shout slogans as they march in a strike and protest by students highlighting inadequate progress to address climate change in Sydney yesterday; youths show their hands bearing the inscriptions "Our future in your hands" during the "Fridays For Future" movement in Berlin; Indian students and children carry placards as they participate in a school strike to protest against climate change in New Delhi. PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

Nations set to agree plastic cuts

AFP, *Nairobi*

Nations yesterday were expected to commit to "significantly reduce" single-use plastics over the next decade, in a series of voluntary pledges that green groups warned fell short of tackling Earth's pollution crisis. After marathon talks in Nairobi, countries appeared to have reached a deal over throwaway plastic items such as bags, cups and cutlery to reduce the more than eight million tonnes of plastics entering oceans each year. The world currently produces more than 300 million tonnes of plastics annually, and there are at least five trillion plastic pieces floating in our oceans, scientists have estimated.

Guaido a 'viceroy'!

AFP, *Athens*

Bolivian President Evo Morales on Thursday called Venezuela opposition leader Juan Guaido a "viceroy" as he criticised talk of an armed intervention to topple President Nicolas Maduro. "Have we returned to a colonial setting? Juan Guaido has been recognised as viceroy," Morales said at the start of a two-day visit to Greece at the invitation of fellow leftist Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. Viceroys were royal appointees that ran Latin American colonies in the name of Spanish and Portuguese kings during colonial rule.

Negligence case over Mumbai bridge collapse

AFP, *Mumbai*

Indian police yesterday said they had filed a negligence case against Mumbai's civic and railway authorities after a footbridge collapsed killing six people and injuring dozens more. The bridge, which was under repair, gave away around 7.30 pm on Thursday as rush hour commuters made their way into Chhatrapati Shivaji terminus, the city's main train station.

US, Kabul ties tense over Taliban talks

AFP, *Washington*

A close aide to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday sparked a diplomatic spat with the United States by offering tough criticism of Washington's talks with the Taliban.

The advisor, Hamdullah Mohib, took particular aim at US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and his personal "ambitions" in Afghanistan.

"We don't know what's going on. We don't have the kind of transparency that we should have," Mohib, Afghanistan's national security advisor, told media during a visit to Washington.

"The last people to find out are us."

Mohib was "summoned" by the US undersecretary for political affairs, David Hale, who rejected the comments made by the Afghan official "criticizing the US approach to reconciliation," State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said.

Long Brexit delay unless you back PM's deal

Top May ally gives ultimatum to British lawmakers

REUTERS, *London*

Prime Minister Theresa May's deputy yesterday warned lawmakers that unless they approved her Brexit divorce deal after two crushing defeats, Britain's exit from the European Union could face a long delay.

The United Kingdom's divorce from the EU has sown chaos throughout May's premiership and the Brexit finale is still uncertain. Options include a long delay, exiting with May's deal, leaving without a deal or even another referendum.

The British parliament voted overwhelmingly on Thursday to seek a delay to the March 29 exit date enshrined in law.

May says she wants to minimise any delay to just three months, but to achieve that she will need parliament to back her deal at the third time of asking early next week, possibly Tuesday.

In essence, May has handed Brexit supporters an ultimatum - ratify her deal by March 20 or face a delay to Brexit way beyond June 30 that would open up the possibility that the entire divorce could be ultimately thwarted.

May's de-facto deputy, Cabinet Office Minister David Lidington, said he hoped the United Kingdom would leave in an orderly fashion but if May's deal was not approved then a long extension was on the cards.

"You don't just have a short, technical extension to our membership of the European Union you almost certainly need a significantly longer one to find a time for parliament to come to a majority verdict," he told BBC radio.

"I hope that MPs (lawmakers) of all parties will be over this weekend reflecting on the way forward," Lidington said, adding the legal default was that the United Kingdom would leave on March 29, unless something else is agreed.

Senate votes to end border emergency

President Trump vows veto

AFP, *Washington*

President Donald Trump suffered an embarrassing defeat Thursday at the hands of US senators, including fellow Republicans, who voted to terminate his declaration of an emergency on the border with Mexico.

Trump's response was swift and unequivocal: "VETO!" he tweeted after a dozen Republicans joined Democrats in voting down the emergency, declared as a way to secure alternative funding for the border wall denied to him by Congress.

Opponents had argued that Trump's emergency amounted to executive overreach, saying a vote to curtail his authority would preserve the constitutionally mandated separation of powers in Washington.

Half a dozen Republicans had already spoken out publicly against the February declaration. But on the morning of the vote, the simmering revolt grew to 12 Republicans, and the final tally was a resounding 59 to 41.

Unless there is a substantial weakening of support for Trump among congressional Republicans on the issue, the first veto of his presidency is expected to stand.

The Senate and House of Representatives would each need a two-thirds majority to override a block by the White House, and both parties say the numbers are not likely there.

Israel hits Hamas targets after Tel Aviv rocket attack

4 Palestinians injured; US backs Israel's attack

AFP, *Gaza City*

Israel said yesterday its aircraft had struck dozens of Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip overnight in response to rockets from the Palestinian enclave, including rare fire toward its economic capital Tel Aviv.

The escalation followed weeks of growing tensions and came at an especially sensitive time ahead of Israel's April 9 elections.

As the polls approach, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is widely believed to want to avoid a fourth war in the Gaza Strip since 2008 -- but the exchange of fire again showed the risks.

Quiet returned to Gaza and Israel yesterday morning.

UN and Egyptian officials were in contact with both sides "to prevent the situation from spinning out of control", a source with knowledge of the discussions said.

Organisers of weekly protests along the Gaza border fence, which have been accompanied by violence, announced they would be cancelled -- the first such move since they began nearly a year ago.

Four Palestinians were wounded in the Gaza strikes, the enclave's health ministry said, while no Israelis were reported injured.

Explosions could be heard throughout the night in Gaza and fireballs lit the sky.

In the bustling coastal city of Tel Aviv, sirens wailed late Thursday in scenes reminiscent of the 2014 war between Israel and Gaza militants.

Rocket fire toward Israel's southern communities near the blockaded coastal territory is common, but Tel Aviv is rarely targeted.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said yesterday the Gaza militants attacking Israel were "armed and financed by their puppet masters in Tehran".

"We stand by our ally. Israel has the right to protect its citizens," tweeted Pompeo, who is due to travel soon to the Jewish state.