

South Korean capital celebrates first pride parade in 3 years

By Kim Tong-Hyung
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Thousands of gay rights supporters marched under heavy police guard in the South Korean capital in July as they celebrated the city's first major Pride parade in three years after a COVID-19 hiatus.

Police were on alert because church-backed counterprotesters rallied in nearby streets, highlighting the tensions surrounding the rights of sexual minorities in the deeply conservative country. There appeared to be no significant scuffles or disruptions.

Revellers wearing or waving rainbow banners cheered during speeches and swayed to music from a stage in front of city hall at the Seoul Queer Parade. They later formed a queue of umbrellas as they marched toward a downtown business district amid drizzling rain, calling for laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Police established perimeters to separate them from conservative Christian protesters, also numbering in the thousands, who marched in nearby streets. They held up banners and chanted slogans opposing homosexuality as their leader shouted prayers into a microphone pleading that god "save the Republic of Korea from anti-discrimination legislation."

Some of the protesters denounced conservative Seoul mayor Oh Se-hoon over the city's unwillingness to block the "lewd" Pride parade. Gay rights activists are also unhappy with Oh, who in an interview with a Christian newspaper said the city may prohibit the Pride event from using the city hall plaza starting next year if this year's participants "exhibit indecent materials or overexpose their bodies."



"Who knows if Seoul City Hall employees right now are carrying around rulers, trying to determine whether our skirts are too short," Bae Jin-gyo, a gay rights activist, said from the stage. "What the Seoul city government should watch is not the length of our skirts or what we are wearing, but the environment of discrimination that surrounds us."

Following a standard they've maintained for years, the Pride parade's organizers required photojournalists to take pictures of participants from the "farthest possible" distance and obtain the consent of every individual whose faces are identifiable in photos — a measure to protect participants from backlash as their images may circulate on the internet.

"I first realized I was [a] sexual minority when I was in kindergarten, but I didn't come out until 2021," said Jang Yong-geol, 29, one of the few who was willing to speak to reporters. "This is my first time participating in the festival and I really love it. I don't know why people hate (sexual

minorities) when we are all humans."

Thousands of police officers from nearly 60 units were deployed to watch the demonstrators from both sides, said Kim Man-seok, an official at the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency. Police didn't immediately provide a crowd estimate but had previously forecasted a turnout of around 40,000 for the duelling events.

While major South Korean politicians avoided the Pride parade, the event drew a number of foreign diplomats, including newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Philip Goldberg, whose endorsement of gay rights has raised the ire of conservatives and Christian groups. Some protested in front of the U.S. Embassy in recent weeks, denouncing Goldberg's appointment as part of the Biden administration's "homosexual cultural imperialism."

Goldberg tweeted during the Pride parade that "no one should be discriminated against because of their identity," and that he stands with President Joe

PRIDE PARADE RETURNS. Volunteers sit next to a huge rainbow flag before a parade held as a part of the 23rd Seoul Queer Culture Festival, in Seoul, South Korea, on July 16, 2022. Thousands of gay rights supporters marched under heavy police guard in the South Korean capital while celebrating the city's first major Pride parade in three years after a COVID-19 hiatus. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

Biden in applauding "all those working to advance the human rights" of sexual minorities in South Korea.

British Ambassador Colin Crooks drew cheers as he delivered a speech in Korean, saying "discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity has no place in the 21st century."

"The experience of Britain shows that the best way to guarantee rights (for sexual minorities) is through establishing a system of legal protection," he said.

While views on sexual minorities in South Korea have gradually improved in recent years, they are still harshly stigmatized and frequently exposed to hate speech and crimes. Calls for equality have so far been stymied by a powerful Christian lobby that has blocked politicians from passing laws banning discrimination. Representation is an issue as there are no prominent openly gay politicians or business leaders, although some celebrities have carved out roles in show business.

The Seoul Queer Parade wasn't held in 2020 and 2021 because of stringent social-distancing measures to fight COVID-19. The country's anti-virus campaign has also exposed problems with homophobia. A string of infections linked to Seoul night-spots popular with gay men in 2020 sparked a huge public backlash that critics say possibly intimidated many sexual minorities from coming forward for testing.

Associated Press photojournalist Lee Jin-man contributed to this report.

Harris vows U.S. will strengthen its Pacific islands relations

SUVA, Fiji (AP) — U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris assured Pacific island leaders of more U.S. engagement after acknowledging the United States may not have previously provided the diplomatic attention the region deserved.

Harris's virtual address to the Pacific Islands Forum, meeting in the Fijian capital of Suva, came as China vies for more influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

She proposed new embassies in Tonga and in Kiribati, a Micronesian state that split in July from the 18-nation forum in a major blow to regional harmony.

Harris also proposed requesting that the U.S. Congress triple funding for fisheries assistance to \$60 million a year and appoint the first U.S. envoy to the forum.

"The United States is a proud Pacific nation and has an enduring commitment to the Pacific islands which is why President Joe Biden and I seek to strengthen our partnership with you," Harris said.

"We recognize that in recent years the Pacific islands may not have received the diplomatic attention and support that you deserve. So today I am here to tell you directly, we are going to change that," she added.

The United States and the forum's wealthiest nations, Australia and New Zealand, are concerned about a security pact signed this year between China and the

Solomon Islands.

They fear the pact could lead to a Chinese navy base being established in the South Pacific less than 1,200 miles from the Australian northeast coast.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese held a bilateral meeting with Solomons Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. Albanese's government was elected in May with promises of more action on climate change and an additional 525 million Australian dollars (\$358 million) spent on regional aid. Climate change was the forum's greatest security concern.

Australia also has a security pact with Solomon Islands and Australian police have been maintaining peace in the capital of Honiara since violence late last year.

In a third test, Facebook still fails to block hate speech

By Barbara Ortutay
AP Technology Writer

Facebook is letting violent hate speech slip through its controls in Kenya as it has in other countries, according to a new report from nonprofit groups Global Witness and Foxglove.

It is the third such test of Facebook's ability to detect hateful language — either via artificial intelligence or human moderators — that the groups have run, and that the company has failed.

The ads, which the groups submitted both in English and in Swahili, spoke of beheadings, rape, and bloodshed. They compared people to donkeys and goats. Some also included profanity and grammatical errors. The Swahili language ads easily made it through Facebook's detection systems and were approved for publication.

As for the English ads, some were rejected at first, but only because they contained profanities and mistakes in addition to hate speech. Once the profanities were removed and grammar errors fixed, however,

the ads — still calling for killings and containing obvious hate speech — went through without a hitch.

"We were surprised to see that our ads had for the first time been flagged, but they hadn't been flagged for the much more important reasons that we expected them to be," said Nienke Palstra, senior campaigner at London-based Global Witness.

The ads were never posted to Facebook. But the fact that they easily could have been shows that despite repeated assurances that it would do better, Facebook parent Meta still appears to regularly fail to detect hate speech and calls for violence on its platform.

Representatives for Meta did not immediately respond to a message for comment. Global Witness said it reached out to Meta after its ads were accepted for publication and did not receive a response.

Each time Global Witness has submitted ads with blatant hate speech to see if Facebook's systems would catch it, the company failed to do so. In Myanmar, one of the ads used a slur to refer to people of east Indian or Muslim origin and call for

The new Australian government has described the China-Solomons pact as Australia's worst policy failure in the Pacific since World War II.

"My message will be that Australia is back, reengaged, with the Pacific," Albanese told Australian Broadcasting Corp. before he left Sydney.

"It's a new era, a new era of cooperation and one of my messages will be that (our) support for the Pacific doesn't come with strings attached," Albanese added, in a reference to conditions placed by China on its aid.

Both the Solomon Islands and Kiribati recently shifted their diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing. Kiribati's withdrawal from the forum is being interpreted as a deepening of China's influence in the region.

their killing. In Ethiopia, the ads used dehumanizing hate speech to call for the murder of people belonging to each of Ethiopia's three main ethnic groups — the Amhara, the Oromo, and the Tigrayans.

Why ads and not regular posts? That's because Meta claims to hold advertisements to an "even stricter" standard than regular, unpaid posts, according to its help center page for paid advertisements.

Meta has consistently refused to say how many content moderators it has in countries where English is not the primary language. This includes moderators in Kenya, Myanmar, and other regions where material posted on the company's platforms has been linked to real-world violence.

Kenya is readying for a national election in August. On July 20, Meta posted a detailed blog post on how it is preparing for the country's election, including establishing an "operations center" and removing harmful content.

"In the six months leading up to April 30, 2022, we took action on more than 37,000 pieces of content for

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Avoiding counterfeit at-home COVID-19 tests

The FDA has identified two counterfeit tests that are made to look like Flowflex COVID-19 Test Kits and iHealth Antigen Rapid Test Kits.

If you have either of these tests, look for these signs that they may be counterfeit. Note: iHealth tests distributed by OHA are not counterfeit.

- ✖ Poor print quality of text or images
- ✖ Missing information on the outside box label, such as lot number, expiration date, barcode or QR code
- ✖ Grammar or spelling errors on the product label
- ✖ Kit components don't match box description

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