

THE WEEKLY VOICE

EDITOR
Bala Menon

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Preeti Thandi
Harj Chaggar
Amitabh Saxena

Graphic Design
Tamarind Tree

GENERAL MANAGER
Dhruv Ghosh

ACCOUNT MANAGERS
Manu Ramachandran
G Prasaad
Rohit Malhotra

ONLINE MARKETING
MANAGER
Amitabh Saxena

ACCOUNTS
Asha J Singh

PHOTOGRAPHER
Manohar Sagoo

Gross Circulation: 30,000
CCNA Verified Circulation: 29,997
Aug 14, 2015
(Printed at Toronto Star)



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The Weekly Voice
7015 Tranmere Dr, Unit # 16
Mississauga, ON L5S 1T7
Phone: (905) 795-0639
Fax: (905) 795-9801

www.weeklyvoice.com
Email: info@weeklyvoice.com

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Action Plan On Official Languages Unveiled; Extra \$500 M Sanctioned

OTTAWA: The federal government unveiled its action plan on official languages on Wednesday, funded with an extra \$500 million over five years that will go toward a host of services for minority-language communities across the country.

About two-thirds of the new money is dedicated to organizations that promote either French or English in cities and towns where the language is in the minority. The cash is in addition to the \$2.2 billion over five years that had already been earmarked for these community groups.

Canada's plan is a signal the federal government is serious about defending the country's two official languages, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Heritage Minister Melanie Joly said during the announcement.

The government's plan is threefold: reinforce minority-language communities; offer better access to French-language services outside Quebec; and promote bilingualism. "It's not a secret that the French language outside Quebec has regressed over the past few years," Trudeau said to a friendly crowd of francophone commu-



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Canadian Heritage Melanie Joly make an announcement on bilingualism at Ecole el, March 28, 2018. The Canadian Press/ Patrick Doyle

nity workers in Ottawa. He accused the prior Conservative government of underfinancing official languages programs and of not making the country's bilingual character a priority.

In an interview on Tuesday with The Canadian Press, Joly said her government decided to give the money directly to people on the ground working within minority-languages communities.

"The choices that we made were about giving the majority of the investments directly to com-

munities — the vast majority — as opposed to the provincial and federal governments," she said.

French-language education is also a priority in the action plan, as is training for French teachers as well as cultural activities in schools and community centres.

The plan includes \$40.8 million over five years to help increase francophone immigration outside Quebec by 4.4 per cent by 2023, as well as \$20 million over the same period for French-language daycare spaces in English

Canada. Details of the immigration strategy are to be released at a later date. Anglophone communities in Quebec will also have a share of the pie, especially those outside of Montreal.

Sums will be set aside for special projects with the support of the newly created secretariat for relations with English-speaking Quebecers created by the Quebec government.

Joly said Wednesday that Ottawa recognizes Anglo-Quebecers have specific needs.

"The federal government has always played a leadership role to support English communities' linguistic rights in Quebec ... and so we are increasing their budgets in order to better support these communities and we are recognizing their specific needs — especially in rural regions."

There will also be funding to help the City of Ottawa become officially bilingual. A bill to formalize such status for the Canadian capital was passed by the Ontario legislature in December.

The government's action plan followed consultations that took place in 2016 in 22 cities across the country. - The Canadian Press.

Support For Integration Of LGBTQ2 Refugees

Continued from page 3

mitted to working with the LGBTQ2 community and private sponsors to ensure that the necessary supports are in place for those that we are resettling and welcoming to Canada."

The Government will continue to work with LGBTQ2 stakeholders and key partners to help ensure the necessary supports are in place to make refugees' integration in Canada as smooth as possible, it was stated.

"LGBTQ2 rights have no bor-

ders, and in this respect Canada is seen as a champion of human rights protection around the world. Canada strives to be a country where people feel safe and free to be who they are. The extension of the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Pilot Program is another concrete example of the Government of Canada listening and responding to the needs of the community. I am proud of the progress that we are making to ensure that LGBTQ2 refugees are welcomed to Canada."

— Randy Boissonnault, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 issues

The funding through this initiative by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada supports refugees' initial costs when they first arrive in Canada. This includes start-up funds to buy clothes and household items. It also provides privately sponsored refugees with three months of income support for their first year; private sponsors provide the remaining nine months.

• Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada currently funds 10 service provider organizations that give specialized support to LGBTQ2 refugees.

• Although the department does not track refugees by ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, we are aware of at least 7 sponsorship agreement holders who are currently active in resettling LGBTQ2 refugees. They also help to educate and raise awareness of refugee protection needs within the LGBTQ2 community.

• Budget 2017 announced an investment of \$3.6 million over 3 years to establish an LGBTQ2 Secretariat within the Privy Council Office. This secretariat supports the Government-appointed Special Advisor to the Prime Minister in coordinating government initiatives.

• Resettlement cases for those who are persecuted because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or HIV status are generally referred by: the United Nations Refugee Agency, other referral organizations or private sponsors

Sikh Student Attacked In Ottawa

OTTAWA: A Sikh student from India was dragged and his turban ripped by two white men who shouted racial slurs and threatened him with a knife in an apparent racist attack.

The student was swarmed on Friday night by two white men while waiting for a bus near Westgate Shopping Centre. Police are investigating the attack as a possible hate crime, saying on Tuesday that the assault "would appear to have racial overtones."

Apart from robbing him of his phone, bus pass and tearing the turban off his head, the two threatened him with a knife. They also hurled racial slurs at him, the Tuesday's report said.

Two suspects, described as white men by police, approached the victim at 11:25 p.m. while he waited for a bus. They asked the man about his ethnicity and spoke about cutting his beard and hair, police said.

His employer said the student called him on Saturday to quit his job, saying he was "too petrified" to return to work.

His employer said the victim has only been in the city for two months. He said the student said he was going to return to India because of the attack.

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NORTH BRAMPTON
60 Lacoste Blvd., Brampton
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Tel: (905) 794-7744

SOUTH BRAMPTON
900 Ray Lawson Blvd., Brampton
(South of Steeles Ave. on Mavis Rd.)
Tel: (905) 874-8664