

France's presidential asked to wear Muslim headscarf in Lebanon, cancels meeting with Grand Mufti

22/02/2017 22:15 by admin

Paris: France's far-right political party "Front National" leader Marine Le Pen on Tuesday cancelled a meeting with Lebanon's Grand Mufti after she was asked to wear a Muslim headscarf to the scheduled meeting.

Le Pen, a frontrunner in the French presidential election, is visiting Lebanon in an attempt to garner support before the first round of the elections this year on April 23.

Le Pen said that she was not expecting the demand that she "must wear a headscarf" to meet the top cleric for Sunni Muslims.

"You can pass on my respects to the grand mufti, but I will not cover myself up," Le Pen said, adding that "she had met with grand muftis in other countries without a problem".

"I met the grand mufti of Al-Azhar (in 2015). The highest Sunni authority didn't have this requirement, but it doesn't matter," she noted.

Many fled Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war from 1975-1990 and became French citizens and maintain the ability to vote in French elections.

A spokesman for Lebanon Grand Mufti Abdel Latif Derian said that Le Pen was informed of the headscarf requirement before the meeting was scheduled to take place.

"I personally greeted her at the door of the Edict House and wanted to hand her a white headscarf that was in my hand, she refused to take it. I urged her to put it on, she refused and said she would not put it on and walked out without attending the previously agreed upon meeting with the Mufti. The Edict House regrets such inappropriate behaviour at such meetings," spokesman Khaldoun Awas said.

According to French law, headscarves are banned in the public service and for high school students, in the name of church-state separation and equal rights for women.

Le Pen had in past vowed to extend this ban to all public places if voted to power.

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