

NICARAGUAN WOMEN FIGHT SEXISM TO BECOME LANDOWNERS

MATAGALPA, Nicaragua: When Maria Magdalena Moran was told she had lost her land she didn't know what to do. The deed for the property in an indigenous village in Nicaragua's mountainous north had been forged, she learned. The discovery was a harsh blow for the 70-year-old, whose only asset was the small plot where she grew corn and kidney beans. Magdalena had broken what in Nicaragua is a patriarchal model that usually consigns women to the kitchen while viewing farming as "man's work".

According to a national farming census, only 22 percent of women in Nicaragua are able to work the land. Magdalena bought her small parcel after looking after her aunt for 24 years. From her savings, she paid 10,000 cordobas - just \$350 at the official exchange rate, but a sizable sum in this poor country. Technically, indigenous territory in Nicaragua is protected by national and international law. But cases like the one she encountered are common.

Magdalena said an indigenous leader forged documents to take her land and sell it, using some of the proceeds to

bribe witnesses to back his account. "I've cried my tears. Something really serious has happened to me. I'm a woman, alone, and they took advantage of me. Machismo treats us as if we're nothing. But from now on they are going to know about the rights we women have," she said.

A struggle against tradition

Magdalena went to ADIC, an community-development organization that fights for women's rights in rural communities, and was told that she could get her land back. "I went hungry, put up with rain in the streets of Matagalpa," the town where she had to begin the legal process, she said. "In the end I managed to get the deed, to rescue the land." Her case illustrates the struggle many Nicaraguan women face in securing land rights.

Silvia Elena Gonzalez is a mother of four who has been farming for 15 years. But to grow her corn and beans she has to rent the land. "If we had land of our own we could provide food and for our children's studies," she said. Her brothers are landowners, but an inheritance cut her out simply because she was a daughter,



MATAGALPA, Nicaragua: Maria Magdalena Moran (left) poses with Silvia Elena Gonzalez in the community of Samulali. —AFP

not a son. "I know I have a right, if my brother doesn't want to give me a share (of an inheritance), to bring in a lawyer to

represent me," she said. "We are four sisters and three brothers, but the inheritance was only for them (the males)."

A law ignored

Nicaragua's National Assembly in 2010 approved a law meant to redress the balance, to guarantee rural women access to land. But not one woman has managed to successfully use it, according to the Rural Women's Coordinating Group, which is demanding the law be applied. A spokeswoman for the group, Marla Teresa Fernandez, said Nicaragua's government under President Daniel Ortega had shown little interest in providing funds to meet the goal.

The law was supposed to create a fund to promote equality by facilitating the purchase of land by rural women. It was meant to fix an imbalance created in the 1980s, when Ortega's Sandinistas, having taken power, enacted farm reforms that massively benefited men while leaving women with just eight percent of agrarian land. The Rural Women's Coordinating Group is urging the government to make good on its commitment to fund the equality initiative. "It's an act of justice. We are demanding a legal measure that's already been approved. We're not going against the law," Fernandez said. —AFP



MOSUL: Iraqi women wait outside the University of Mosul as students arrive to take their exams on June 13, 2017. —AFP

MOSUL STUDENTS RETURN FOR EXAMS AMID DEVASTATION

SECURITY AT MOSUL UNIVERSITY TIGHT

MOSUL: Amid buildings destroyed by heavy fighting, University of Mosul students are returning to take exams interrupted three years ago when militants took control of their city. The university and an army of volunteers are working to clear up rubble and repair the damage left by fierce battles between Iraqi forces and Islamic State militants. "The fact that I am here with my friends today shows our determination and our will to resist," says Ahmad Chehab Ahmad, 23.

Around 40,000 students were studying at the university, one of the biggest in Iraq, when IS seized the city in a sweeping summer 2014 offensive across Iraq and Syria. Elite Counter-Terrorism Service forces seized the campus back in January as part of a months-long operation to oust the militants from the capital of their self-declared "caliphate". "Less than a month after we were liberated, I was back in class," says Sanaa Nafih, minutes before going in for her English exam. "I feel good, despite all the destruction I see," says the 21-year-old, who hopes to finish her studies and become a teacher.

With Iraqi forces still fighting militants across

town in Mosul's old city, security at the university is tight. Heavily armed guards check ID cards and search students at the campus entrance. The signs of fighting are clear - some buildings have been completely demolished, while others are pock-marked by shelling and small arms fire. While the science department remains closed, humanities students have returned after years without setting foot in a lecture hall.

"We girls stayed at home" under IS rule, says Nafih. "In the beginning we had electricity and we could receive news - I could use the Internet to download books. But after a few months the Internet was cut off and a period of darkness began," she says. "People could only imagine what was happening in the world."

'I broke down in tears'

Part of the university continued to operate under IS control, mostly serving the relatives of IS fighters, according to a staff member who worked there at the time and asked to remain anonymous. Before they fled the campus, the jihadists set fire to the university library, turning

the large building into a blackened shell. "Daesh destroyed hundreds of thousands of books, valuable encyclopedias and rare manuscripts," says university employee Zaid Muhieddine, using an Arabic acronym for the group. "The first time I saw the library in this state, I broke down in tears."

But for Maher, a third-year geography student, life must go on. "As long as there are classes, it doesn't matter so much that the buildings are burned or destroyed," he says. The university's management hopes to have courses up and running as normal by October. In the meantime, it is trying to catch up on exams. "The clean-up has been finished in most faculties, thanks to volunteering by the city's youth - both university and school students," says Osama Hamdun of the university's maintenance department. "In four months they removed thousands of tons of rubble and remnants of the fighting." Re-opening the university is a "message to the world", he adds. "Mosul is a city of civilization. Neither Daesh nor anyone else can break the will of Mosul's people to live," he says. — AFP

DISPLACED SEE LITTLE CHANCE OF PEACE

JUBA: When South Sudan's civil war erupted in 2013, Nyayath Uluak was caught in crossfire in the northern town of Malakal and a bullet tore her leg apart. She survived, but the lower half of her limb didn't. On leaving hospital, she found refuge with family in Yei, to the south, but then had to flee again as the war spread last year. Now, home is a camp outside the capital ringed by barbed wire and sandbagged positions manned by UN peacekeepers.

The elderly lady has little hope that South Sudan's warring leaders, President Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, and his former deputy Riek Machar, a Nuer, will heal the personal and tribal animosity that split South Sudan just two years after it became the world's youngest nation. "I don't think the leaders will resolve this any time soon," she said, sitting on the dirt floor of a shelter that was once used to teach children grammar and maths, but is now occupied by new arrivals. "I don't even know what they are fighting over."

The camp outside Juba hosts 30,000 people, 50 percent more than it was designed for. The fugitives are part of the biggest movement of people in Africa since the 1994 Rwandan genocide - some two million within South Sudan and nearly the same again outside its borders. UN experts say the conflict, which also has roots in ethnic cleansing and risks escalating to genocide. "People told me stories of fear and violence," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said after walking through the tent city, where the stench of latrines hangs in the air and children play football on pitches of baked red earth. The destitute camp-dwellers took advantage of Grandi's presence to list their daily hardships. Kun Chuol, an education coordinator, complained of congestion and a lack of rations. Angelina Nyagak, a women's representative, said those

who left the camp to try to top up rations face the risk of attack and rape by armed men.

In the last major bout of fighting, in July, 60 people in the camp were killed. Today, white armored personnel carriers are parked around the perimeter. Grandi pledged to speak on their behalf in meetings with South Sudan's leaders. "I can only speak to their sense of responsibility, hoping there is one," he said. "The flight of people is a clear testimony that you are not taking enough responsibility for your own citizens. People wouldn't go away if they weren't afraid."

Peace Efforts

After several failed peace efforts, South Sudan has launched its own national dialogue, while regional leaders have sought to revive internationally brokered talks. But few in the

camp hold out much hope while Riek Machar, who is being held in South Africa under virtual house arrest, remains outside the negotiations. "It is about power. The problem came when Riek said he would stand in the election against Salva," said John Wiyual, a Nuer whose home is just 5 km away but says he fears setting foot outside the camp. "They just need to bring those two people back together. There will be no peace in South Sudan if Riek is excluded."

Grandi said the failure of previous agreements, from those that ended decades of war with Khartoum and granted South Sudan independence to the more recent peace efforts, meant rebuilding trust would be tough. "There will have to be a bloody good agreement to convince people to go back," Grandi said. "And it has to be sustainable." — Reuters



ABUROC, South Sudan: This photo taken on June 05, 2017 shows an aerial view of a new settlement of displaced families. — AFP

ISRAEL GOODWILL RAMADAN MEASURE CUT AFTER ATTACK

JERUSALEM: Israel revoked yesterday the permits of 200,000 Palestinians to enter Israel that were approved for the holy month of Ramadan following two near simultaneous Palestinian attacks on police that killed a young female officer near Jerusalem's Old City. Israeli defense body COGAT, posted the announcement on its Arabic language Facebook page. Earlier, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that preparations are underway to destroy the homes of the Palestinian attackers and tighten security at the entrance to the Old City, home to sensitive holy sites sacred to Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Three Palestinian attackers armed with an automatic weapon and knives assaulted officers on duty near the Old City in two locations Friday evening. Police said Staff Sgt Maj Hadas Malka, 23, was rushing to respond to that initial attack nearby when a Palestinian assaulted her with a knife. Malka wrestled with the man for several seconds as he stabbed her multiple times before other officers saw what was happening and opened fire, killing him, police said. She later died of her wounds in hospital.

The Islamic State group took responsibility for the attacks but two Palestinian militant groups, Hamas and People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine quickly retorted the three attackers were their members and accused IS of trying to undermine their efforts. At his weekly Cabinet meeting, Netanyahu lashed out at Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas for not condemning the attack.

Israel had previously announced its annual goodwill measures for Ramadan that included 200,000 thousand visiting permits for family visits for Palestinians from the West Bank and access for 100 Gaza residents to attend prayers at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque. COGAT said the visiting permits were canceled but the prayer permits

remain unchanged. Netanyahu criticized the Palestinian government for not condemning the attack. He called for the world to "demand the immediate cessation of Palestinian Authority payments to the families of terrorists, something that only encourages terror."

Israel has long unsuccessfully pushed for the Palestinians to halt the "martyrs' fund" payments to roughly 35,000 families of Palestinians killed and wounded in their long-running conflict with Israel, including suicide bombers and other militants. Last week US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said the Palestinians had agreed to stop the payments but both the Palestinians and Israel disputed the claim.

Israel argues that such pay promote violence. It stepped up a campaign against the fund after a wave of Palestinian attacks began in Sept 2015. Since then, Palestinian assailants have killed 43 Israelis, two visiting Americans and a British student, mainly in stabbing, shooting and car ramming attacks. In that period, some 250 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire. Israel identified most of them as attackers.

At times the attacks were daily occurrences, but they have relatively subsided in recent months. However there have been a string of recent attacks near the Old City in east Jerusalem. Israel captured the territory with its key holy sites from Jordan in the 1967 war. Israel considers the city its eternal, undivided capital while Palestinians want the eastern sector as the capital of their future state. The fate of the area is an emotional issue at the heart of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel blames the violence on incitement by Palestinian political and religious leaders compounded on social media sites that glorify violence and encourage attacks. Palestinians say it stems from anger over decades of Israeli rule in territory they claim for their state. — AP



JERUSALEM: Israeli border guards frisk Palestinian men outside Damascus Gate in Jerusalem's Old City yesterday. — AFP

SAUDI-TURKISH TIES STRAINED OVER DIFFERING QATAR VIEWS

RIYADH: Ties between Saudi Arabia and Turkey have begun to fray due to sharply different policies toward Qatar. Saudi Arabia has led other Arab nations in cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar over allegations the small Gulf nation backs terror groups and that its policies, including its support for Islamist groups, threatens the region. Qatar denies it backs terror groups and says the decision to isolate it is politically motivated.

Turkey, which is a strong backer of Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, has criticized the measures against Qatar and authorized the deployment of additional troops to Qatar in a show of support. Turkey also sent additional supplies of dairy products to Qatar's capital, Doha, after Saudi Arabia sealed shut Qatar's only land border, impacting a significant source of food imports.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu held talks late Friday with Saudi Arabia's King Salman about the crisis engulfing Qatar. No statement was issued after their meeting. Saudi tour guides Khalid Abdullah and Edris Ismail told AP on Sunday that some Saudis are cancelling planned visits to Turkey for the upcoming Muslim Eid holiday, which starts next week. Saudi Arabia says around 250,000 Saudis visited Turkey last

year. An Arabic hashtag on Twitter has also appeared calling for Saudis to cut ties with Turkey.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan raised eyebrows over the weekend when he said King Salman agreed to consider an offer to establish a Turkish military base in the kingdom alongside a Turkish base in Qatar. In an interview aired Thursday with Portuguese broadcaster RTP, Erdogan said work on the Turkish base in Qatar began in 2014 with the aim of supporting regional security. Erdogan added that he had previously raised the possibility of a Turkish base in Saudi Arabia and said the Saudi king agreed to consider the offer.

The official Saudi Press Agency released a statement Saturday strongly rejecting any such offer. "Saudi Arabia cannot allow Turkey to establish military bases on its territories," the statement, adding that the country "has no need for this". Ties between Saudi Arabia and Turkey had become strained under King Salman's predecessor over Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood during the height of Arab Spring protests. Those ties, however, had begun to improve under Salman after he aligned Saudi Arabia closer with Turkey and other Sunni Muslim countries in a bid to counter Shiite-ruled Iran. — AP