

Analysis

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Kenya tribe divided over women's land rights after ruling

A few months ago, the idea of coming home with a hoe in one hand and a sack of freshly harvested potatoes in the other was only a dream for Rachel Korir. When her father died in 2012, his land in the village of Kapcheboi, in western Kenya, automatically went to his two sons, in line with the customary law of the Kipsigis tribe to which the family belongs. Because Korir, now 70, and her five sisters were all married, tribal rules dictated that they were not entitled to any of their father's land.

"Even when I tried to work for (my brothers) plucking tea on the farm for money, they refused to offer me the job and gave it to other people from the village," said the mother of seven, sitting on a bench outside her small hut. But in April, after a legal battle that lasted almost 20 years, Korir and her sisters got the title deeds to five acres (two hectares) of land each, in a case that land rights groups are calling a landmark victory for the women of Kenya's indigenous tribes.

"This is a welcome ruling that allows not only women but married women for that matter to inherit their father's land," said Pauline Vata, executive director at Hakijamii, a Nairobi-based advocacy group fighting for social and economic justice. Land ownership in Kenya is usually vested in fathers who customarily pass it on to their sons, making it hard for women to secure rights except through their husbands. Women and their children are often evicted if the husband dies or they divorce.

Women in the East African nation were allocated less than 2 percent of about 10 million hectares of land that was registered between 2013 and 2017, according to research by the Kenya Land Alliance, an advocacy network. However, the country's constitution states that all women have equal rights to own property, regardless of whether they are married or not, Vata noted. "The case affirms what our laws have been saying all along," she said. Korir said ever since she and her sisters won the case, many women have come to her for advice on their own struggles to get a share of their families' land. But the ruling has divided tribes in parts of Kenya's Rift Valley, with some people seeing it as a positive step toward equal access to land and others fearing it undermines the traditional laws that have guided generations.

'Milestone decision'

Korir said her fight for a share of the family land started in 1999. After separating from her husband, she moved back into her parents' home. Her brothers had come of age and married by then, so their father had already given them their share of his 42-acre farm, in line with Kipsigis tradition. With no source of income, Korir asked her brothers to give her one acre of the farm so she could grow crops to sell and pay for her children's school fees.

But they refused, she said. Instead, they tried to evict her from the house, and several of their fights ended with them calling the police on her. She was arrested and jailed four times. "My father bailed me out, promising to give me a portion of the land," she said. "But he never did." Korir eventually filed a court case against her brothers for her share of the family's land, convincing her sisters to join her in the lawsuit.

When her father died in 2012, a friend advised her to seek help from the Kenyan Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) advocacy group to speed up her case against her brothers. According to the customs of the Kipsigis, an unmarried woman can inherit land, but it must be less than her brothers. If a woman is married, it is assumed she has access to land through her husband, so she has no right to her father's land, explained Vata, the social justice advocate.

A father can leave land to his married daughter in his will, she said, but to do so is considered such a taboo that few men dare. In 2014, a High Court judge ruled in favor of the six sisters. According to land rights experts, this was the first time married Kipsigis women had been given the legal right to an equal share of their father's land. After years of delays as the brothers filed a series of appeals, all of them denied, the sisters were officially given their land in April. The judge's "milestone decision" to challenge customary law and uphold the equal right to property that Kenya's constitution gives all citizens has set a precedent that "should be protected at all costs," said Janet Anyango, legal counsel at FIDA.

Some fear the ruling undermines their traditional laws and customs, however. "Our culture and identity as the Kipsigis is at stake when such a ruling is made, oblivious of our customary law," argued Bishop Paul Leleito, chairman of the Myoot Kipsigis Council of Elders. Leleito said the council is calling on the government to amend the constitution's protections against gender discrimination, noting that the constitution also guarantees the protection of culture as "the foundation of the nation." — Reuters

All articles appearing on this page are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein.



This combination of pictures shows Democratic presidential candidates Marianne Williamson, former governor John Hickenlooper, former US vice president Joe Biden, Andrew Yang, Sen Bernie Sanders, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Sen Michael Bennet, Rep Eric Swalwell, Sen Kamala Harris, Sen Kirsten Gillibrand, Rep Tim Ryan, Rep Tulsi Gabbard, Sen Amy Klobuchar, Gov Jay Inslee, Julian Castro, Sen Cory Booker, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, former representative John Delaney, Beto O'Rourke and Sen Elizabeth Warren. Democrats will hold the first and second group primary debates of the 2020 presidential campaign season today and tomorrow in Miami. — AFP

Biden vs rest of Dems in 1st 2020 debate

For Democrats seeking to challenge Donald Trump in 2020, the rubber meets the road in Miami this week, where Joe Biden will defend his frontrunner status as presidential candidates finally square off face to face. Americans are bracing for the nation's biggest political debate since the slugfests of 2016, a two-night showdown beginning today with 20 Democrats vying for a breakout moment that could showcase their talents, or see them stumble on the world stage.

Former vice president Biden, now in his third White House bid, is the candidate to beat in the most crowded, most diverse field in modern US election history. The 76-year-old leads comfortably in all polls, and will be under pressure to convince millions of voters watching in prime time that he deserves to remain in pole position despite an uproar over his recent comments about the "civility" between him and avowed segregationists in the US Senate.

Like most of his rivals, Biden spent much of last week-end sharpening his message ahead of the debate by wooing residents of early-voting South Carolina. "I'm here to tell you, I hope to be your nominee," Biden told applauding voters in Columbia. "But here's the deal: whomever the Democratic nominee is, we have to stay together and elect a Democrat president of the United States."

Nipping at Biden's heels is a pack of candidates including liberal Senator Bernie Sanders, who is polling second; progressive rising star Senator Elizabeth Warren; young gay mayor Pete Buttigieg; and others desperate to emerge as a viable alternative to the man who was Barack Obama's

vice president. With 24 Democratic contenders now in the race, the debate will have a freewheeling feel. Party organizers chose the top 20 based on poll numbers and fundraising, splitting them into two groups of 10.

Warren, polling third, will take center stage on the first night at 9:00 pm (0100 GMT Thursday), inheriting a prime spot to make her case as she debates ex-congressman Beto O'Rourke, senators Cory Booker and Amy Klobuchar, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and former San Antonio mayor Julian Castro, each of whom is trying to breathe new life into their campaigns. But the main event is likely to be Day 2, when the more moderate Biden goes head to head with Sanders, 77, and Buttigieg, an up-and-coming mayor of South Bend, Indiana who is half Biden's age.

On issues like healthcare and economic inequality, the Democratic socialist Sanders pushed the party towards more progressive positions following his protracted 2016 nomination battle with Hillary Clinton. He has pledged to use the debate as a platform to emphasize his support for universal healthcare, his opposition to the Iraq war and to "disastrous trade agreements." In short, he will emphasize his differences with rival Biden.

"For Biden the debates are a good test of how secure his support is," Kyle Kondik, of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, told AFP, adding that he believes Biden has a "tenuous" early lead in the nomination battle. Tensions have simmered recently after Biden's controversial remarks about the "civility" he shared with two segregationist senators decades ago, when he first joined the

Senate. The comments earned rebukes from rivals Booker and Harris, the two prominent African Americans in the race. They and the other younger candidates - Buttigieg, O'Rourke, Castro, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard - will be looking to draw contrasts with their elders at the debate broadcast on NBC, MSNBC and Telemundo.

'Defeat Donald Trump'

Like Biden, Buttigieg enters the event singing with race-related controversy, after the fatal shooting of a black man by a white officer in South Bend led to black residents jeering the mayor at a town hall meeting. It is the first national-scale test for Buttigieg, a military veteran who rose from virtual unknown earlier this year to a top-tier contender. Some lesser known non-politician candidates could spark interest including entrepreneur and automation soothsayer Andrew Yang. Tension has simmered on the party's left flank, where Sanders and Warren are the two flag bearers. Each has called for stronger controls on financial markets, expanded healthcare, and partial or total elimination of student loan debt. "Whether it's Biden or Elizabeth Warren or anybody else, what I believe is that in fact I am the strongest candidate to defeat Donald Trump," Sanders told CNN last week. The president himself will not be involved in the biggest political showdown yet in 2019, although he hinted he'll be watching and could weigh in via Twitter. "I wasn't thinking about it, but maybe I will now," Trump teased to Fox News recently. — AFP

Boris for premier? It's a love-hate thing, say voters

Delyth Miles should hate Boris Johnson but she loves him. The 66-year-old who worked as a school's careers adviser and volunteers at her local church says the most important principles in her life are honesty, family values and morality. She abhors drug taking and adultery. Miles knows Johnson, the frontrunner to be Britain's next prime minister, has been fired twice for lying, including once for failing to tell the truth about an extra-marital affair. She knows he has been accused of paying for a lover to have an abortion and has admitted taking cocaine.

But when she votes in the Conservative leadership contest next month she will enthusiastically back Johnson, saying that leaving the European Union and reviving the party's flagging fortunes are more important than concerns about his character. "It is complex, I sometimes struggle to explain it to myself," said Miles who is originally from Wales but now lives in the English seaside town of Clacton near London. "You either love him or you hate him. If you do love him you see past his faults, and I am one of them. I don't particularly like his lack of morality."

Britain is looking for a new prime minister because Theresa May has said she will step down after failing to unite the nation behind her plan to leave the EU on schedule in March. Britons voted by 52 percent to 48 percent in a 2016 referendum to leave. Her successor will lead a fragile minority government. He will face a deeply split parliament where there is no consensus on what Brexit should look like, and a negotiating partner in Brussels whose patience with British politics has worn thin.

The ruling Conservative Party's 160,000 members, mostly pro-Brexit and rightwing, will choose between Johnson and foreign minister Jeremy Hunt. The result will be announced on July 23. Johnson, 55, a former mayor of London, is the overwhelming favorite to win despite a chaotic private life and a reputation for lies, exaggerations, a lack of seriousness and discipline.

Over the weekend, Johnson faced fresh questions about his suitability to be prime minister after reports emerged that he had an argument with his girlfriend. She was heard saying "get off me" and "get out of my flat". The fallout from the altercation has dominated headlines in the British press for days. Some of his opponents have asked him to explain what happened and criticised the way he treats women in relationships.



Boris Johnson

No Mother Theresa

Ed Costelloe, the chair of the group Conservative Grassroots, says most party members want Johnson because they see him as a savior who can deliver Brexit amid opposition from the political establishment. "Brexit cannot be achieved by a civil service, administrative approach. It has to be achieved like big guns blazing a la Trump," Costelloe said, referring to US President Donald Trump's unconventional, combative approach to politics. "Boris is a flawed character and flaky but most politicians are underneath," he added.

Costelloe said former prime minister David Lloyd George, who led Britain to victory in World War One, and US President John F Kennedy were examples of successful politicians with flawed personal lives. "It would be lovely to have Mother Theresa as prime minister, but it ain't going to happen," he said. Hunt, Johnson's rival, has also promised to deliver Brexit but - like May - he voted 'Remain' in the 2016 referendum and says he would consider a delay to ensure a smooth exit - two factors that make party members suspicious about his commitment.

By contrast, Johnson was the public face of the 'Leave' campaign and says Brexit will happen on Oct. 31 "deal or no deal". Some members certainly see Hunt, 52, as a safer bet. Mary Douglas, a Hunt supporter and Conservative councillor in Wiltshire, southern England, draws a parallel with the United States, where she thinks voters made a mistake in backing Trump despite concerns about his character. "I am so keen that we do not repeat that mistake because it is my strong view that you get the ruler you deserve. I would hate for us to be in the same position as America," she said.

But many members think only a charismatic, unambiguously pro-Brexit leader like Johnson can ensure victory in an election - which may come quite soon, given the deadlock in parliament - over left-winger Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party and Nigel Farage's new Brexit Party, which topped the European Parliament election in Britain last month mainly at the Conservatives' expense. "Corbyn, like it or not, is a popular figure who can energize crowds, get headlines and make people stop and follow him," Stephen Canning, a Conservative councillor in south-east England. "We need a leader of the Conservative Party who can do exactly the same, and to me Boris Johnson is the only one of the two of them ... who could really electrify audiences and build a following." — Reuters

Libyan women set up businesses against the odds

When inflation began eating into her state-paid salary Libyan architect and assistant professor Seham Saleh started selling drawings over the internet to help pay the bills. She joins a growing number of Libyan women launching start-ups in the conservative Arab country, where many still think a woman's place is in the home but where the strains on personal and family income following years' of political chaos have forced women to look for more work.

Libya has only a tiny private sector, which means there is a market for locally-produced goods. The economy is dominated by the state, which employs most adults under a structure set up by Muammar Gaddafi, who was toppled in 2011. Men are the traditional breadwinners, although around 30 percent of women were in the labor force as of 2015, according to a UN report. "I cannot live on my assistant professor salary of 1,000 dinars (\$256) even if it is paid out," said Saleh. She has been selling drawings of people in Libyan dress or book marks she created on a computer. "Thank God... people wanted to buy the products," she said. She also does freelance work as an architect.

Once one of the richest countries in the region, the chaos and civil war that ensued after the fall of Gaddafi has seen Libya's living standards erode. Little is now produced in Libya other than oil, even milk is imported from Europe. Cumulative inflation over the last four years has seen real incomes lose more than half of their purchasing power, and the government effectively devalued the dinar last September.

A cash crisis means public servants often do not get their salaries paid out in full. Lenders have no cash deposits as the rich prefer to hold their cash themselves, rather than deposit it in a bank. Women rarely had jobs outside of sectors such as teaching, although the need for more family income has changed the situation, said Jasmin Khoja, head of a women's business support venture. Her organization, the Jusoor center for studies and development, has trained some 33 would-be female entrepreneurs, offers legal advice and office space as women often can't afford their own. — Reuters