

International

Central Americans flee crime, poverty for better life in US

Stories of struggle and success from the controversial border

MESILLA: Ovidio Lopez Tum sold tortillas in his hometown of Chicaman in Guatemala to support his wife and eight children. But after being wounded in machete and grenade attacks by extortionists, the 53-year-old Lopez said he decided to flee to the United States. To bolster his request for asylum, he brought along documentation of his injuries — cuts to his head and fingers from the 2014 machete attack and shrapnel wounds from the 2017 grenade blast.

He also brought along his 12-year-old daughter, Ingrid Maribel, hoping to provide her with an education she could not receive at home. Lopez and his daughter are among the thousands of migrants from Central America turning up at the US southern border with Mexico. President Donald Trump has described the situation there as a humanitarian and security crisis and is engaged in a standoff with Congress over his demand for \$5 billion to build a border wall.

AFP spoke with a few families who have arrived in the United States — where they await an uncertain future. Lopez and his daughter said they left Chicaman, where they lived in a crude home with dirt floors, on December 20. They arrived at the US border 10 days later, after walking and taking buses through Mexico. They were released after two nights in detention during which they said they were well treated by the US immigration authorities.

Upon their release, they were housed in the Basilica of San Albino, a church in the New Mexico town of Mesilla, before leaving by bus the next day for Alabama, where Lopez has family. Lopez said he hopes to eventually bring his wife

and other children to the United States — or at least to provide them with enough money to move to somewhere safer in Guatemala.

Phone number to call help

Ricardo Chub-Bo, a 40-year-old corn farmer, also made the perilous voyage from Guatemala to the United States with his 14-year-old daughter, Rosa Maria. He said he decided to come to the United States because he could no longer support his wife and three children growing corn.

They were released into the care of the Basilica of San Albino after eight days in detention and will head to Philadelphia by Greyhound bus. Since neither one speaks English, the church provided them with written instructions to help them on their three-day bus trip along with a phone number to call if they need help. Most of the refugees arriving at the US-Mexico border are from three violence- and poverty-wracked nations in Central America — El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

'You will get robbed'

Gerbin Asmar Hernandez, 26, is from Santa Barbara, a town in Honduras near the border with Guatemala. Fed up with high crime back home, Hernandez made the journey to the United States through Mexico with his 10-year-old daughter, Annarut, leaving his wife and a son behind. Hernandez said that a few years ago, about a week before Christmas, he was robbed of the \$300 he had made while working for a month on a coffee plantation. "I was just one hour away from my town and I got robbed," he said. "You can't carry

seems to have a consistent effect on sharing fake news," the authors reported.

"It is possible that an entire cohort of Americans, now in their 60s and beyond, lacks the level of digital media literacy necessary to reliably determine the trustworthiness of news encountered online," they suggested. The authors also suggested the impact of aging on memory could have an effect. "Under this account, memory deteriorates with age in a way that particularly undermines resistance to 'illusions of truth,'" they wrote.

Although the study found that Republicans shared more fake news than Democrats, and ideologically, conservatives shared the most fake news stories — this could be due to the fact that most fake news articles produced during the 2016 presidential campaign favored US President Donald Trump. "Had the slant of fake news been pro-Clinton instead of pro-Trump, it is possible that more liberals than conservatives would have shared this content," the authors wrote in a Washington Post op-ed.

Facebook has been hammered for failing to stop information manipulation and misinformation, including from Russian organizations during the 2016 US election. Its leaders have promised more transparency in hearings in the US Congress and elsewhere, and the network has stepped up efforts to find and root out fake accounts and foreign influence campaigns. — AFP



MESILLA: Ovidio, 53, poses for a portrait with his daughter, Ingrid Maribel, 12, inside the church hall of the Basilica of San Albino. — AFP

around money because you will get robbed." Hernandez and his daughter flew to Washington state, where they will await a court date — and for a judge to decide whether they can remain in the United States. In the meantime, he is wearing an ankle bracelet to track his movements.

Also from Honduras is Fanny Mencia, 26, who made the voyage from her hometown of Siguate-

peque to the border with her son Anderson Rodriguez, age seven. "We suffered along the way, sleeping in the street," Mencia said of the trip through Mexico. Mencia, who is six months pregnant, said she left behind the father of her unborn child, whose meager wages did not cover the food bill for everyone. She and her son are heading for Tennessee, where her sister lives. — AFP

Old people more likely to share fake news: Study

WASHINGTON: Facebook users aged 65 plus and conservatives are more likely to share fake news on the platform than younger or more liberal counterparts, according to a new study published Wednesday. Researchers from Princeton University and New York University analyzed the Facebook posts of nearly 1,200 people who agreed to share their data in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election.

They then compared links the respondents had shared on Facebook with several lists — including one compiled by BuzzFeed — of websites known to share false information. The study, published in *Science Advances*, found less than only 8.5 percent of respondents shared a link from one of these websites. However, those that did tended to be older and self-identified as being on the conservative end of the political spectrum.

In fact, users over 65 — regardless of political affiliations — shared "nearly seven times as many articles from fake news domains" as 18 to 29-year-olds, the youngest age group studied. "No other demographic characteristic

Anger at arrests in Malaysia for alleged royal insults

KUALA LUMPUR: Three people have been arrested in Malaysia for allegedly insulting the former king on social media after his shock resignation, sparking anger yesterday from activists at the use of "draconian" laws. Sultan Muhammad V stepped aside at the weekend after just two years on the throne. No official reason was given, but it came after he reportedly married a Russian ex-beauty queen while on medical leave.

It was the first time a Malaysian monarch had given up the throne before the end of his term. Under a unique arrangement, the throne changes hands every five years between the rulers of the nine states headed by Islamic royalty. National police chief Mohamad Fuzi Harun said two men aged 46 and 27, and a 26-year-old woman, were arrested under tough sedition laws Tuesday for allegedly posting insulting remarks about the resignation on Facebook and Twitter. The trio face up to three years in jail

if found guilty. While their role is ceremonial, Muslim-majority Malaysia's royalty command great respect, and criticizing them is seen as deeply offensive. People are regularly arrested under the colonial-era sedition act for insulting royals. But Lath-eefa Koya, executive director of rights group Lawyers for Liberty, criticized the arrests, telling AFP: "The police should not give in to mob rule amid the push by some people for the authorities to act."

A statement from the group, which pushes for legal reforms, added that the sedition act was a "draconian piece of legislation" and it was shocking Malaysia's new administration was using it. The government, which came to power last year after ousting an authoritarian regime, had pledged in its election manifesto to abolish the act and several other laws seen as repressive, but is yet to do so.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad also suggested authorities should not overzealously target people accused of posting insults. "With regards to freedom of speech, if someone speaks factually, you cannot criminalize the person," he said. "If we shut everyone's mouth ... even when a crime has happened, then there will be injustice in the country." — AFP