

## International

# Custom, caste deny land rights to Asian women, indigenous people

## Indigenous communities have legal rights to only 10% of land

**UDAIPUR:** Women, lower-caste and indigenous people across Asia are failing to benefit from land reform laws because of custom and deep-rooted social biases, land rights activists said yesterday. Globally, indigenous communities have legal rights to only 10% of land, according to Washington, DC-based advocacy group Rights and Resources Initiative.

"Land conflicts in Asia are increasing in coverage and intensity, not only because of clashes with industry, but also because of social exclusion, discrimination and historical disenfranchisement," said Nathaniel Don Marquez, of ANGOC, a non-profit network for agrarian reform in the region. "Recognition of indigenous lands has become increasingly difficult as commercial pressure on land grows, and land reforms fail to recognize how assets are controlled in households where women are excluded," the executive director said.

A recent survey by ANGOC of eight Asian countries including the Philippines, India and Bangladesh found land reform laws that recognized indigenous

rights and women's rights were not implemented in full, and that land had not been redistributed. When indigenous people claim their land rights, they are often met with violence, said Marquez. The Philippines



**Land conflicts in Asia increasing in coverage, intensity**

was ranked as the deadliest country for land rights activists last year, by Britain-based Global Witness. In India, land titles are almost always in a man's name. Indian women own just 13% of farmland despite mak-

ing up more than a third of the agricultural workforce, according to census data.

Amendments in 2005 to the country's Hindu Succession Act, which governs inheritance among Hindus who make up about 80% of the population, made women's rights equal to those of men, yet customary laws and tradition have denied women these rights, said Ginny Shrivastava, an Indian women's rights activist. "There is a mindset that land must be in the name of men," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation at a land forum in Udaipur city in the western state of Rajasthan.

"With increased migration of men to cities for jobs, there is increasing feminisation of agriculture across Asia. Yet women's ownership of land remains unequal," she said. Women are often pressured to give up their right to ancestral land at the time of marriage, she said. While widows can legally inherit their husband's property, in Rajasthan widows are customarily not allowed to leave the house for a month, or even a year, and so can miss the deadline to transfer the title

within 30 days of a death, she said.

"Simply having something in the law is not enough. Gender audits of land laws are needed to identify the gaps in implementation and address them," she said. Lower-caste Dalits and indigenous Adivasis are also kept from owning land because of deep-rooted biases, even though India banned caste-based discrimination in 1955, said Sujatha Surepally, a Dalit activist. At least half of India's lower-caste population is landless. "They do all the work, yet they own so little land, despite state laws to give land to the landless," she said.

A year-long global peace march from Delhi to Geneva, that kicks off in the Indian capital on Wednesday, aims to highlight the struggles over land, said Rajagopal PV, president of Ekta Parishad, an Indian human rights advocacy group. "The land, the forests belong to the people who have tended to them for generations," he said. "We have the old problems of poverty and injustice, along with new and escalating problems such as the effects of global warming that hurt them the most," he said. — Reuters

## Greece struggles to cope as migrant arrivals soar

**SKALA SYKAMINEAS:** The hulking Greek coastguard officer gazed intently as another group of migrants, the fifth of the day, boarded a minibus after landing on a beach on the island of Lesbos. "We're taking it day by day," he sighed, amid talk of a new refugee crisis, four years after nearly one million asylum seekers arrived on Europe's doorstep, sparking EU-wide panic.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) announced on Tuesday that arrivals by sea from Turkey to Greece, mostly Afghan and Syrian families, increased to 10,258 in September. It said this was the highest monthly total since 2016, when the EU reached an accord with Turkey to stem the flow of arrivals. The surge has left an already overburdened Greek asylum camp network - which the UN terms "inhumane" - struggling to cope.

"In the last couple of months (there has been) an incredible contrast... a huge increase, quite sudden," said Patrick Foley, emergency response coordinator for the Swedish NGO Lighthouse Relief that operates in the north of Lesbos, where most asylum seekers land. "Each month is typically more than the month of the previous year". In May, the NGO was helping around 70 people land safely on Lesbos beaches and giving them temporary shelter.

### 'Unpredictable'

This climbed to over 2,800 in September after similar numbers in August, Foley said. "It's really unpredictable. It could literally overnight just go back to normal again and it could be a short trend, or it could be a continued increase," he said. Greek islands opposite Turkey now host more than 26,000 asylum seekers in camps built to handle just a fraction



**LESBOS ISLAND:** A woman migrant reacts, following a rescue operation by a Frontex patrol vessel, at the port of Skala Sikamias, on the island of Lesbos yesterday. — AFP

of these numbers.

In addition to poor hygiene and frequent outbreaks of violence, many of the residents sleep in tents and complain of having to queue for hours to obtain food, take a shower or use a toilet. "Keeping people on the islands in these inadequate and insecure conditions is inhumane and must come to an end," the UNHCR said Tuesday.

On Sunday, a fire killed a woman in the Lesbos camp of Moria, sparking brief rioting between asylum-seekers and police. "We urge the Greek authorities to fast-track plans to transfer over 5,000 asylum seekers already authorized to continue their asylum procedure on the mainland," the UNHCR said in a statement. "In parallel, new accommodation places must be provided to prevent pressure from the islands spilling over into mainland Greece, where most sites are operating at capacity." EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris

Avramopoulos is set to visit Greece and Turkey this week with the foreign ministers of Germany and France to discuss the situation. Greece's minister for migration also travels to Ankara on Wednesday for talks with the Turkish interior minister. Many in Greece say Turkey is not doing enough to keep its end of the bargain in thwarting attempts to cross the Aegean Sea, which result in hundreds of deaths annually.

But according to Foley, it appears that fear of arrest in Turkey spurs many migrants - Afghans in particular - to head to Greece as fast as possible. "A lot of people coming from Afghanistan (spend just) a couple of weeks in Turkey and then make the crossing. A lot of people are becoming afraid of deportation from Turkey," he said. Foley notes that migrants and refugees are "somewhat" aware of the grim conditions that await them in Greek camps even before attempting the perilous crossing. —AFP



**LIMA:** Police forces are deployed in downtown Lima, in the surroundings of the Peruvian Congress building after Peruvian President Martin Vizcarra dissolved the parliament. — AFP

## Peru: 2 decades of political upheaval

**LIMA:** President Martin Vizcarra's dissolution of Peru's parliament Monday is the latest in a series of political crises to rock the country over the past two decades. Here is a recap:

### Fujimori impeached

In November 2000, Congress impeaches corruption-accused President Alberto Fujimori, elected 10 years previously, on the grounds of "permanent moral incapacity." He had resigned by fax from Japan the previous day. He would be sentenced in April 2009 to 25 years in prison for corruption and human rights abuses during his time in office.

### Social crisis

Opposition leader Alejandro Toledo scrapes through presidential elections in June 2001, starting a crisis-filled term. The country is paralyzed by weeks of strikes in May-June 2003, when Toledo declares a state of emergency. His cabinet quits in June 2003. In December, Toledo demands the resignation of his entire government to defuse a politically damaging sex scandal involving his prime minister, Beatriz Merino.

### Garcia back

The July 2006 presidential vote returns Alan Garcia to power, despite criticism over his first 1985-1990 term marked by four-digit inflation, leftist insurgencies and rampant corruption. In October 2008, Garcia's entire 13-member cabinet resigns in a bid to avert an opposition censure resolution in Congress over the granting of concessions to Norwegian company Discover Petroleum.

### Left in power

In June 2011, leftist ex-military man Ollanta Humala narrowly wins presidential elections over Keiko Fujimori, daughter of the jailed ex-

president. He is Peru's first leftist president in 36 years. The first year of Humala's presidency is marked by dozens of social conflicts that leave several people dead and lead him to declare a state of emergency three times. In July 2012, he shakes up his cabinet for the second time since taking office. In March 2015, Congress sacks prime minister Ana Jara over allegations that the national intelligence agency had spied on lawmakers, reporters, business leaders and everyday citizens for years.

### President quits

Ex-Wall Street banker Pedro Pablo Kuczynski narrowly wins the June 2016 elections against Keiko Fujimori, whose right-wing Popular Force party retains a large majority in Congress. In March 2017, prosecutors order investigations into his possible links to a wide-ranging scandal involving Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht, accused of paying millions of dollars in bribes to Peruvian officials between 2005 and 2014. He survives a Congress impeachment vote in December 2017, after support from lawmakers led by Kenji Fujimori, brother to Keiko. Days later, Kuczynski pardons Alberto Fujimori. Thousands of people protest. A day before a

second impeachment vote in Congress, Kuczynski resigns in March 2018. He is replaced by his deputy, Vizcarra.

### Suicide, arrests

In November 2018, Keiko Fujimori is taken into custody pending the outcome of a probe into claims she accepted illicit Odebrecht funding for her party. In April 2019, Garcia commits suicide as police are about to arrest him on allegations of taking Odebrecht bribes, which he denied. In May 2019, Humala and his wife are charged with allegedly laundering assets as part of the Odebrecht scandal. In July 2019, Toledo is arrested in the United States after years on the run following accusations that he also took a massive payout from Odebrecht.

### Parliament dissolved

Vizcarra dissolves parliament on September 30, 2019 after Congress blocks a raft of anti-corruption reforms, and calls elections for January. Shortly afterwards Congress votes to suspend Vizcarra for one year on the grounds of "moral incapacity." There are protests in support of Vizcarra across Peru, while the presidential palace says it has the support of the police and army chiefs. —AFP

## Osmani, the woman taking on Kosovo's 'nasty' politics

**PRISTINA:** Looking back to her childhood in conflict-racked Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani remembers listening quietly as dozens of men gathered in her father's living room to discuss the political future of the breakaway Serbian province. Two decades later, the 38-year-old is determined to be the one leading the meetings as she bids to become Kosovo's first female Prime Minister in October 6 elections. It would be a radical change in a patriarchal society where men reign supreme in politics, business and often in the home.

But Osmani says her gender is an asset. "I can do it precisely because I am a woman," she said from the headquarters of her party, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The curly-haired law professor-turned-MP is hoping to ride a wave of disappointment in the men who have mired the young democracy in corruption and poverty since its 2008 independence. The former province is still led by the ethnic-Albanian guerillas who fought Serbia during the 1998-99 war and for whom gender equality is not a priority.

While a quota ensures women's rep-

resentation in parliament, leadership positions overwhelmingly remain the playground of men. Men run all of Kosovo's 38 municipalities, while the previous 21-member cabinet boasted a single female minister. President Hashim Thaci also has only one woman in his cadre of political advisors. While parliament did appoint a female president, Atifete Jahjaga, in 2011, the people have never elected a woman to lead the government.

### 'Nasty' politics

Osmani wants to upend those norms with the backing of one of Kosovo's largest and oldest parties, whose founder, Ibrahim Rugova, is considered the "father of the nation." Analysts say she has a strong chance of taking home a large share of votes on election day. Yet Kosovo's fractured political scene means no party is likely to win an absolute majority, leaving Osmani to forge a coalition to oust the establishment PDK, in power since 2007.

While her party once allied with the PDK, Osmani appears to be ruling that out under her watch. "We will remove from power those who have strangled Kosovo," she told supporters during a campaign event on Tuesday night in western Pec. "On October 6, we will send the PDK and its corrupt partners into a long opposition." After studying international law in the US and working as a professor, Osmani became a lawmaker in 2011, coming face to face with what she describes as Kosovo's "nasty" political scene. —AFP



**PRISTINA:** Vjosa Osmani, election candidate for prime minister from the opposition party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) gestures as she speaks during an interview with AFP in Pristina. —AFP

## Mom knows best? Boris says mother backs him on Brexit

**MANCHESTER:** It's a bitter issue that has divided families, Britain's prime minister included. But Boris Johnson yesterday revealed that while he may have fallen out with his brother and sister over Brexit, at least his mom agrees. "I know there are some keen students of alleged divisions in my family on matters of the EU but I want you to know, conference, that I have kept my ace up my sleeve, my mother voted Leave," he told the Conservative Party conference in Manchester, north west England.

Johnson's father Stanley, a keen supporter of leaving the EU after initially backing Remain, was seen laughing in the crowd, appearing to mouth the words: "I did not know that." Jo Johnson quit his brother's government last month over its plans to leave the EU on

October 31 "come what may". Their sister Rachel, also a vocal critic of Brexit, has alleged that the prime minister might be pursuing a no-deal Brexit on behalf of speculators betting on a weak pound.

"She's wrong but... I'm not going to get dragged into conversations about my beloved family," he told LBC radio. The family rift has added a Shakespearean subplot to the Brexit crisis consuming the country, echoing similar household feuds across Britain. Johnson generally steers clear of talking about his family, and very rarely discusses his mother, Charlotte Johnson Wahl.

She and Stanley Johnson divorced in 1979, and she has battled with serious mental health problems throughout her life, which saw her in and out of hospital when the future prime minister was a child. Rachel Johnson wrote in the Sunday Times that her mother was "32, had depression and galloping obsessive compulsive disorder... and was finding things hard, trying to combine her painting and looking after Alexander (Boris), 10, me, 9, Leo, 7, and Joseph, 2." During her career, Charlotte Johnson has painted portraits for actress Joanna Lumley, author Jilly Cooper and journalist Simon Jenkins. —AFP