

International

Fear and uncertainty for migrants after S Africa xenophobic attacks

Nigerian leader urges protection for foreigners

JOHANNESBURG: Reeling from a terrifying surge of unrest that saw his shop wrecked and plundered, Nigerian-born Alvan Akujinwa toyed with the possibility of leaving his adopted home of South Africa for the first time in 10 years. His mobile-phone repair business in downtown Johannesburg was targeted when gangs armed with sticks and machetes attacked businesses in the financial capital last month during deadly xenophobic attacks.

Now his wife is too terrified to leave their apartment and Akujinwa is struggling to pick up the pieces. "They jumped in and destroyed all the things we have here, even our shop glass (display cabinet)," he said, glancing nervously through the metal gate between him and the street. "Now we are very, very scared to buy more stuff and put it in our shop." Akujinwa, 38, was among thousands affected by the violence, which left 10 South Africans and two foreigners dead last month.

Many of the attacks were directed at Nigerian-owned businesses and properties, sparking sharp exchanges between Africa's two superpowers. The issue threatens to dominate Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's three-day official visit to South Africa starting Thursday and the presidency in Abuja has said he would use the state visit to discuss the "welfare of Nigerians". More than 500 Nigerians were repatriated by authorities last month following the violence. Akujinwa is one of many others who chose to stay.

'Wait and see'

Originally from Nigeria's southeastern Imo state, Akujinwa sees no future for his three-month-old baby daughter in a country where he himself has never been employed. "I am not equipped to go back," he told AFP. "Maybe the incidents are going to revolve back... Let me wait and (see if) it will be quiet." South Africa is a magnet for economic migrants searching for better job prospects in the region.

The continent's most industrialized economy attracts people from neighboring Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Others come from further afield including Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria and south Asia. Akujinwa left his home city of Owerri in 2009, one year after a similar spate of xenophobic violence left 62 dead. He remembered hearing the news but not thinking much about it. "They said South Africans were fighting," said Akujinwa. "We didn't even know that word, xenophobic."

With no qualifications, he sold fruit on the inner-city streets for three years before switching to phone repairs. "When I arrived here I improved," said Akujinwa, recalling his journey. "When you make a decision to go, job or no job, you find something." Johannesburg's crime-ridden business district is crammed with



PRETORIA: Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari (2nd right) and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa (right) walk past the guard of honor during his official state visit at Union Buildings in Pretoria yesterday. —AFP

small foreign-owned stores like Akujinwa's, providing everything from household goods, electronic gadgets and tailor services.

Seen as competing with locals for jobs, they are often the first under fire when South Africa's chronic unemployment, inequality and poverty boils into xenophobic outlash. Akujinwa had so far remained unscathed. As busi-

ness picked up, he moved to an apartment in Hillbrow—one of Johannesburg's most dangerous and deprived areas—where he has maintained good relations with his South African neighbors. "We are like brothers and sisters. There is nothing like segregation or discrimination," he said. "Black, white or colored. I am with them there." —Agencies

Pope, Pompeo urge religious freedom in Mideast, elsewhere

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo agreed yesterday on the need to protect the rights of Christian minorities in the Middle East during a meeting at the Vatican, the US State Department said. Pompeo, whose trip this week to Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Greece has been overshadowed by an impeachment inquiry at home targeting President Donald Trump, met the pope for about a half an hour. "They reaffirmed the United States and Holy See commitment to advancing religious freedom around the world, and in particular, protecting Christian communities in the Middle East," State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortogus said.

Ancient Christian communities face persecution or harassment in some Middle Eastern countries, and many Christians have left to build new lives in the West. The Vatican did not issue a statement on the contents of the meeting. It usually does so only when the pope meets heads of state. On Wednesday Pompeo attended a Vatican conference on religious freedom where he blasted China over its treatment of Uighur Muslims.

Pompeo, the first Italian-American secretary of state, has already met Italian leaders on his trip and later on paid a visit to his ancestral home town of Pacentro in the rugged Abruzzo region to the east of Rome. According to a pool reporter travelling with him, Pompeo was greeted by a crowd of local residents and a scrum of journalists. A group of children started calling out, "Pompeo! Pompeo!" He greeted them back in English. —Reuters

Zimbabwean women struggle to shake off sex-for-land corruption

BULAWAYO: Catherine Mazorodze was overworked and tired when she quit her job as a farmworker in Zimbabwe's Manicaland province. No job meant she was also homeless, along with her grandmother with whom she had shared a small home provided by the farm's owners. Mazorodze jumped at the opportunity to get a small plot of land of her own — distributed by the leaders of Chisumbanje, her village — but soon realized there was a price to pay.

"The traditional leader of the area told me I was young and not entitled to allocated land, since it was meant to benefit the elderly," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a phone interview. "He blatantly said if I wanted a piece of land ... I had to have sex with him. Out of desperation and poverty, I agreed to his terms," the 37-year-old said.

Land is unevenly distributed in Zimbabwe and women, particularly in rural areas, are largely treated as dependants of men, not as landholders or farmers in their own right, according to the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization. Mazorodze said she was not the only one to be forced to offer sex for land out of desperation, adding that most women she knows are too embarrassed to speak out about their experiences.

She is a victim of sextortion, a growing form of corruption that forces women to offer sexual services in exchange for land, employment or job opportunities, according to Transparency International Zimbabwe (TIZ), an anti-corruption charity. Sextortion is a global phenomenon that causes serious harm, robbing women of dignity and opportunity and undermining confidence in public institutions, rights groups say.

But legally it often falls between the cracks and does not get prosecuted as either a sexual crime or corruption, said Marilyn Sibanda, a legal officer at TIZ. "The moment you consent, the criminal element falls out," she said. "Of course, institutions or companies might have policies in places for people to report sexual offences. But villagers in secluded

rural parts of the country don't have measures to curb this form of corruption," she added. Her organization's research shows sextortion is becoming more common in Zimbabwe, she said, although there are no statistics available at a national level.

John Makamure, a commissioner in the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) said the organization was ready to investigate such cases. "It is crucial for people to bring forward evidence on this corruption, then ZACC can investigate. ZACC cannot just start investigations based on sentiments alone," he said. CORRUPTION RIFE AT 160th place, Zimbabwe ranks towards the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, a tool which ranks 180 countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption.

Studies carried out by TIZ throughout Zimbabwe in 2016 showed women are vulnerable to sexual abuse when they try to access land for both residential, business and agricultural use. "TIZ has conducted mobile legal clinics in rural areas... where we asked women if they knew about 'sextortion'. The women concurred they know about the abuse and some confirmed they were victims of this corruption," Sibanda said.

Researchers also found evidence of sextortion in Zimbabwe's southwestern Matabeleland South province, where women said they were asked for sex in exchange for gold mining rights. "We realize that in mining, it is difficult for women to own a gold mining claim," said Scha Ndlovu, director for Community Youth Development Trust, a charity working with rural communities in the province. "Women are then forced to sleep with Mr So and So to gain mining rights in order fend for their families."

Sextortion in the city

Sextortion is not confined to rural areas, said Farai Mutondoro, head of programs at TIZ. "In urban localities, we gathered information that as a result of demolitions of illegal settlements and displacement, women bear the brunt of 'sextortion' as they need places to stay," he said. Mutondoro added that TIZ recorded cases of land corruption in the southwestern city of Bulawayo where women were excluded from a housing scheme and replaced with male candidates. "Data show widows are losing out on estates because relatives bribe officials at the deeds office and put a different name (on the deed)," he said. —Reuters