



Nik Wallenda (R) and Lijana Wallenda walk a high wire over Times Square, passing each other halfway through

Wallenda siblings complete Times Square tightrope stunt



A mass of people gathered to watch the Wallenda siblings attempt their daredevil stunt

● The undertaking, which was broadcast live, saw the duo start the wire walk on opposite sides, slowly moving towards each other holding balancing poles as a throng of onlookers gawked from below.

New York

Siblings from a famed circus family - the Flying Wallendas - walked a wire strung 25 stories over New York's Times Square Sunday, in a hair-raising balancing act performed across five city blocks.

"If you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere -- so let's make it in New York," Nik Wallenda, 40, told his sister Lijana before they began the fearsome feat.

The undertaking, which was broadcast live, saw the duo start the wire walk on opposite sides, slowly moving towards each other holding balancing poles as a throng of onlookers gawked from below.

When the siblings met, Lijana sat on the 396-meter (1300-foot) wire strung between skyscrapers so her brother could step over her, before standing back up and finishing the walk.

Tensions were running particularly high as it was the 42-year-old Lijana's first such attempt since 2017, when she and four others fell more than 9 meters while rehearsing an

”
If you can make it in New York you can make it anywhere -- so let's make it in New York

NIK WALLEENDA, 40, TOLD HIS SISTER LIJANA BEFORE THEY BEGAN THE FEARSOME FEAT.

eight-person pyramid on a wire.

The near-fatal incident left her seriously injured, including breaking most bones in her face.

During the approximately 36 minutes the acrobats took to complete the nerve-wracking stunt Nik -- who in 2012 traversed Niagara Falls on a wire, and the Little Colorado River Gorge close to the Grand Canyon a year later -- offered words of encouragement to his sister via earpiece microphones, as she audibly prayed for

36
minutes of stunt is yet another feather in the cap of the Wallendas, a family famous for jaw-dropping endeavours

and sang.

New York allowed the siblings to attempt Sunday's walk on the condition that they wear safety harnesses, a mandate Nik had said added physical weight and stress to the challenge.

In 2013 the city had declined him permission to cross a wire anchored between the Empire State and Chrysler buildings.

Sunday's never-before-attempted stunt is yet another feather in the cap of the Wallendas, a family famous for jaw-dropping endeavors executed from dizzying heights -- without safety nets.

The clan's performances date back generations to the Austro-Hungarian empire and debuted in the United States in 1928, as part of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

In 1978 Karl Wallenda -- Nik and Lijana's great grandfather, who brought the family act stateside -- tumbled to his death at age 73 while attempting a wire walk in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

New York has long attracted daredevils seeking to make headlines: Harry Houdini escaped a crate in which he was chained and thrown in the river over a century ago, and Evel Knievel soared on his motorcycle over ten vehicles in 1971.

In 1974, Frenchman Philippe Petit famously walked a tightrope between the tops of the Twin Towers of the former World Trade Center, 400 meters above the pavement.

"Dream big people. Nothing's impossible," Nik said just before reaching the tightrope's end.

Won't let me drive, then Khallas



Sabeeha al-Fakher, a 68-year-old Saudi widow, poses next to her pearl-silver Lexus in the coastal town of Qatif, about 400 kilometres east of the capital Riyadh

'I don't want you'

Dammam | Saudi Arabia

Saudi salesman Majd had just begun his wedding preparations when his fiancée sought to enshrine in their marriage contract a condition already guaranteed by law -- her right to drive.

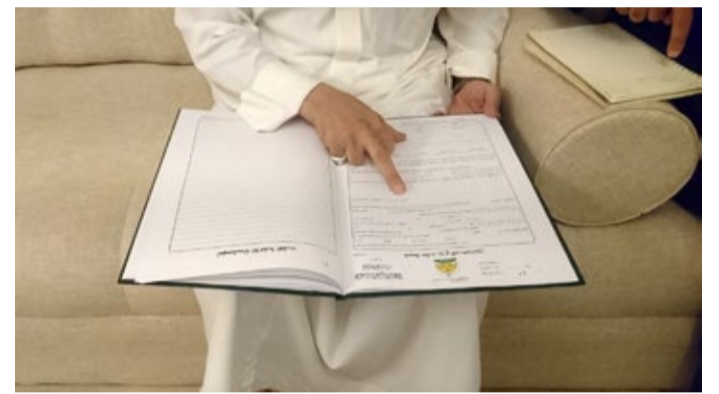
Wedding contracts have long been a safety net for brides in the deeply patriarchal society, used to guarantee demands that are often otherwise vulnerable to the whims of the husband or his family.

Such legally binding contracts typically codify anything from the woman's right to have her own house, hire a maid, or to study or work.

But after the kingdom last year lifted a decades-long ban on female motorists, a popular new condition in the contracts is the right to own and drive a car, according to documents seen and interviews with wedding clerics.

Majd, 29, who is due to marry this month in his native Dammam in eastern Saudi Arabia, signed off on two demands from his 21-year-old fiancée -- the right to drive and to work after marriage, according to the contract he shared with AFP.

"She said she (would) like to be independent," explained Majd, who requested his last name be withheld as the discussion was a private family



Saudi cleric Abdulmohsen al-Ajemi, shows samples of wedding contracts during an interview with AFP in the capital Riyadh

matter.

"I replied: 'sure, why not?'"

Overtaking the world's only ban on women drivers is the most palpable social change in the kingdom, which is pursuing a wide-ranging liberalisation drive.

To drive, women do not require the explicit approval of their male "guardians" -- husbands, fathers and other male relatives.

But it remains unclear whether women have any legal recourse should their guardians prevent them from taking the wheel.

"Some women prefer to include the driving condition in their contract to avoid any marital conflicts" over the issue, said Abdulmohsen al-Ajemi, a Riyadh wedding cleric who received his first such enquiry

from the family of an engaged woman last week.

"It's a way to guarantee the husband will keep his promise."

A breach of wedding conditions can be used by women as grounds for divorce, clerics say.

'I don't want you'

There are no official statistics on the number of such contracts. But Munirah al-Sinani, a 72-year-old housewife in Dhahran, a city in the kingdom's east, said she had come across two such cases recently among her acquaintances.

"If you don't let me drive, if you say 'no', then khallas (finished) -- I don't want you," Sinani quoted one of the women as telling her potential spouse.

A man in eastern Al-Ahsa city said that during a marriage within his extended family, the bride demanded that her husband-to-be give up smoking.

Another woman asked that her husband have no access to her salary and another stipulated that she should not fall pregnant in the first year of marriage, according to cleric Ajemi.

A Saudi woman took social media by storm recently when she posted her wedding contract online.

The document prohibited her husband from taking a second wife, even though polygamy is legal in Islam.

Men also sometimes use wedding contracts to stipulate that the "wife will never work" or that she must agree to live with his mother, senior cleric Adel al-Kalbani said.

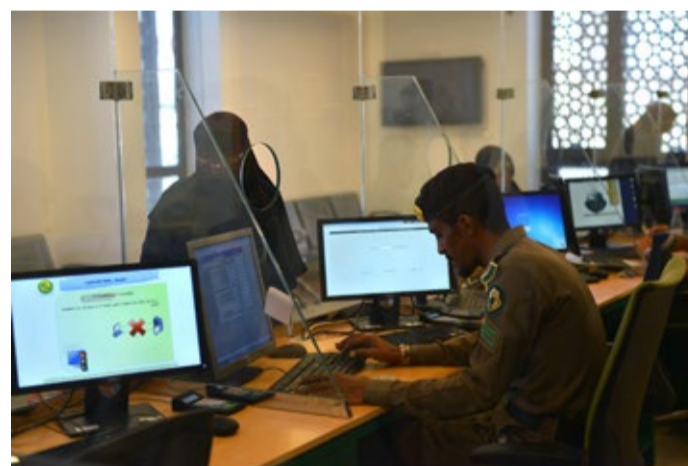
The new conditions are a sign of the kingdom's social transformation that appears to be granting women more rights, Kalbani and Ajemi said.

But they could also cause strains in marriages.

Saudi media has already reported a spike in divorce cases in recent years.

"In the past, society did not listen to women. Husbands would turn around and firmly say 'No'," cleric Ajemi said.

"But now they are listening to the aspirations of women, adapting to their demands."



Saudi women register to receive their driving licences after completing their training at the Saudi Driving School (SDS), in the capital Riyadh



A Saudi woman shows wedding dresses to a friend at a bridal expo in the Red Sea city of Jeddah