



Peshawar's famous Qissa Khawani bazaar before (left) and after (above) a bomb explosion on Sunday. A victim is helped from the scene (below right) ALAMY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

PAKISTAN'S PICCADILLY THE NO 1 TALIBAN TARGET

Omar Waraich reports from Peshawar – a once-great trading centre now under siege

The Qissa Khawani bazaar in Peshawar's old city is known as the "marketplace of storytellers". Local legend has it that invading armies, merchants passing through and other visitors spilling through the Hindu Kush gathered here, in the street between two rows of tightly packed, towering shops, to sip tea and trade tales.

When Sir Herbert Thompson arrived in the city as a magistrate in the 1920s, he was struck by the bustle. "From its waist the city swelled out into its second half which was served

by the main gate," he wrote, "the Kabul gate, at the end of the great shopping centre, the Qissa Khawani bazaar with its rows of matchbox-sized shops."

Around that time, some of the bazaar's most famous local residents left the city in search of fame in Bombay. They were storytellers of a different kind. In the Dahkki Nalbandi neighbourhood lived Prithviraj Kapoor, the famed Bollywood actor, whose children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are some of India's biggest film stars. Shahrukh Khan's father lived nearby, as did the actor Dilip Kumar.

Now, the bazaar that was once known as "the Piccadilly of Central Asia" lies deserted. The shopkeepers, who eventually replaced the storytellers, colonial officers and film stars, are left to survey the ruin. Outside a vast electronics store, there is a crater four feet deep. It was created when a car exploded, carrying nearly 250kg of explosives, phosphorus and artillery shells. The nearby mosque is badly damaged, as is the post office across the street.

Naveed Qureshi was sitting in his shoe store across the street when it began to shake fiercely. He went out



to the street to find roaring flames. "And there were piles of bodies, and body parts, everywhere." At least a dozen shops were destroyed. An entire family of 18 people, shopping for a looming family wedding, was killed.

The deaths of over 43 people in Peshawar last Sunday came just days after two other major bombings in this storied frontier city. Two days before, a bus carrying government employees to the city was bombed, killing 17 people. And on the previous Sunday, Pakistan's tiny and beleaguered Christian community suffered its worst-ever attack, with over 80 people

killed by two suicide bombers.

Faced with this unrelenting assault, the citizens of Peshawar have begun asking questions of their seemingly rudderless leadership. The government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (of which Peshawar is the capital), have insisted they want to negotiate with the militants. But as local residents point out, the militants don't seem interested in talking.

The bazaar is a mere stone's throw away from the 19th-century All Saints Church. When the bomb went off, the parishioners solemnly sitting in their pews became terrified once again. They thought it was a repeat attack, and let out screams of panic until they realised this time it wasn't them.

Inside, the clock still says the time is 11:43. It stopped working when the blast happened. In the church's courtyard, one bomber struck by the steps leading out of the Sunday school, where young children were gathered. Another struck the congregation coming out of the church.

The parishioners of this elegant, domed, Mughal-designed church fear the worst isn't over. "We're very worried that there will be more attacks," says Jamil Naz, a member of the local Christian community. "Imran Khan is talking about letting the Taliban open an office for negotiations. That will be the worst thing."

If the Taliban are allowed to open an office, adds Mr Naz, "they'll be given more space to operate. Then there'll be more attacks." The city of Peshawar voted overwhelmingly for Mr Khan in the May general elections. They said they wanted change, and were war-weary. This is not the first time Peshawar has been under siege, with militants menacing the city in 2008 and 2009.

But the mood has changed. The shopkeepers of the Qissa Khawani bazaar say that the police came to warn them about an impending attack last Friday. "They said that a car was wandering around," says Zafar Yab, the owner of a shoe store. The police didn't offer any protection, Mr Yab recalls, incredulously. They wanted the shopkeepers to protect themselves.

The bazaar has seen much violence before. In 1930, British troops opened fire on a group of non-violent Pashtuns involved in the freedom struggle. The death toll was as high as 400, according to some estimates. Later, the leader of the movement, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, would remark that an unarmed



Pashtun was more threatening to colonialists than an armed one.

In recent years, there have been at least four other bombs set off in Qissa Khawani bazaar. And within the old city that surrounds it, there have been at least a dozen. Sometimes the only mercy for the victims is that there is a well-equipped hospital nearby, the Lady Reading Hospital, named for the Marchioness of Reading in the 1920s.

When an explosion happens, ambulances roar through the narrow streets. But once they reach the Lady Reading Hospital, an elegant compound with manicured lawns, they aren't guaranteed emergency attention.

As Dr Shiraz Afridi, the director of emergencies, explains, there simply aren't enough resources to cope with the increasingly frequent bombings.

When a "walking wounded," he says, have to wait. "The people who are near death, or will die soon, and won't survive, are also separated." The attention is given to the broad chunk in between: the people who are too wounded to walk and still have a chance at living. It's one of the busiest casualty wards in the world: they see over 2,000 patients a day. And like the shopkeepers, they speak of dealing with one crisis before bracing for the next.

For the residents of Peshawar, the country's politicians are failing to grasp the gravity of the threat. "Nawaz Sharif says the Taliban haven't claimed responsibility," says Sheikh Yusuf, another shopkeeper with a thick beard and eyes that fitfully bulge with rage. "Fine. But someone else did. And let's say you want to negotiate with one group, but another keeps bombing you. What do you do then?"

SOUTH AFRICA

Number of rhinos killed by poachers hits new high

By JON HERSKOVITZ
In Johannesburg

The number of rhinos killed by poachers has hit a new record, raising worries of a downward population spiral in a country that is home to almost all of Africa's rhinos.

In the 12 months to the end of September, 704 rhinos had been killed by poachers in South Africa, exceeding the record of 668 set in 2012, according to data provided by the environment ministry.

If the trend continues at this pace, more than 1,000 rhinos would be killed in 2014, putting the species on the brink of a population decline that the ministry has said could lead to the end of wild rhinos in about a decade.

The greatest threat to the estimated 22,000 rhinos in South Africa comes from those trying to cash in on the black market value of their horn, which sells at prices higher than gold. Many of the poachers come from neighbouring



South Africa is home to almost all Africa's rhinos GETTY

Mozambique and sell the horn to crime syndicates to feed rapidly rising demand in South-east Asia, where the horn is thought by some to cure cancer and tame hangovers. "We need people to be ashamed of this. The fact that our rhinos are killed is because there is a market out there. There are people who are coming to steal our heritage," said Fundisile Mketeni, a biodiversity official at the ministry. REUTERS.

BURMA

Thein Sein visits after fresh unrest

President Thein Sein toured the country's conflict-torn west yesterday as sectarian violence once again gripped the state of Rakhine, with Buddhist mobs killing a 94-year-old Muslim woman and torching more than 70 homes, officials said.

Attacks were reported in at least two other villages on the outskirts of Thandwe, where tensions have been mounting for days. More than 700 rioters, some swinging swords, took to the streets in Thabyuchaing, about 12 miles north of the coastal town.

An elderly Muslim woman died from stab wounds. AP

IRAQ

Almost 1,000 killed last month

Nearly 1,000 Iraqis were killed in September, one of the highest monthly death tolls in years, the UN said yesterday. The killings reflect the militants' determination to rekindle large-scale sectarian conflict.

Iraq is going through its worst surge in violence since 2008, with near-daily militant attacks and relentless bombings blamed on hardline Sunni insurgents.

The surge followed a deadly crackdown by the Shia-led government on a Sunni protest camp in northern Iraq in April. More than 5,000 people have been killed since then. AP

BANGLADESH

Opposition MP's death sentence sparks violence

By ANDREW BUNCOMBE

A senior opposition politician has been sentenced to death after he was convicted of war crimes carried out during the country's war of independence with Pakistan in 1971. The sentence was met with violent protests by his supporters.

Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, 64, an MP and a senior member of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was found guilty of torture, rape and genocide.

He had been accused of direct involvement in the killing of up to 200 civilians and collaborating with Pakistan's army to kill and torture unarmed people.

Last night it was reported that Chowdhury's supporters had attacked government activists. A number of vehicles were set on fire in Chittagong. The BNP has called for a shutdown in the city today.

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