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Delhi bombs follow haunting script

By Soutik Biswas
BBC News, Delhi

Twenty-seven-year-old Mohammed Shoab was making a regular business trip to a crowded market in the Indian capital, Delhi, when the bomb went off.

Gaffar Market is globalisation's unruly child. On its dirty, traffic-clogged streets are hawked Chinese mobile phones, Taiwanese computer peripherals, Japanese knock-offs, local flowers and ice cream, imported wine and beer. There are also currency exchange shops, one of which advertises itself as a "full and fledged money changer".

Shoab, who owns a phone shop with his brother, Yusuf, on the other side of the city, was walking down a street in the sprawling market with a friend when the force of the explosion knocked him out.

With dust and smoke rising from the pavement, bicycles parked near a tree twisting in the heat and bloodied people howling in pain or running helter-skelter, Shoab managed to make a call to Yusuf before he passed out.

"*Blast ho gaya. Tu..* (There has been a blast. You..)", Yusuf, 26, remembers his brother saying on the phone, before the line went silent.

Mohammed Shoab is among the 90 people wounded in Saturday evening's bomb blasts which ripped through busy shopping areas in Delhi. The explosions killed at least 20 people.

Waiting outside the hospital where his brother lies with deep wounds, Yusuf is at a loss for words.

"Every other day, we go to this market to pick up our supplies. This day he drove a friend on his bike and I stayed back."



The blasts scattered debris across a large area

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Languages

Spree of attacks

Such days are becoming increasingly common in the lives of Indians. More than 400 people have died since October 2005 in bomb attacks in its cities.

The police have blamed Islamist militant groups and a shadowy students' group for some bombings. A few suspects have been picked up in each case, but there have been no convictions.

On Saturday evening, the blasts in Delhi took the lives of the well-to-do and the poor, of men and women, of the young and the old, and of India's ubiquitous "unknown" people, usually dirt-poor migrants or beggars who roam the city to eke out a living.

At one city hospital, the youngest of the eight dead there was 20-year-old Babita, and the oldest 60-year-old Harichand. Three of the dead are listed as unknown or "UK", 15 hours after the explosion. Three are women, two are men, and the unknown have no sex on the hospital list.

Among the 69 wounded at this hospital, 14 are women. The oldest victim is 60-year-old PA Purusottam, and the youngest is 18-year-old Sonal Jain. There are, again, three "unknowns".

The dead and the wounded come from all over India in a city driven by hard-working migrants.

Like 20-year-old Babita Negi, one of the youngest victims of the blast, who met a friend at a circular park, which sits atop Delhi's biggest underground railway station.

One of the bombs in a rubbish bin exploded as she took a walk in the park with her friend and snuffed out her life. Babita was the daughter of a government canteen worker and had just taken up a beautician's course.

The lush park which overlooks Delhi's elegant colonnaded shopping district of Connaught Place is an unlikely location for an explosion.

A board outside prohibits "plucking of flowers, cooking, smoking, pitching of tents, loudspeakers, shooting, washing of clothes, swimming, bathing, cricket, football and hockey games".

And yet, somebody walked in with a bomb and put it into a rubbish bin, leading to the bloody havoc.

Unexpected

Chander Negi, father of Babita, still cannot believe that his daughter died taking an evening walk with her friend at a pretty city park.

"You don't expect people to die in such places. That's why I kept waiting for Babita to return home till somebody called up to say that she was caught up in the blast," he says.

You also do not expect a bomb to go off at a downtown bus station, while waiting for a bus to take you home.

Shakil Ahmed, 32, used to drive the car of a employee with the Indian parliament.



More than 90 people were wounded in the explosions



More than 400 people have died since

He finished his work, parked the car in the office garage, and stood at a bus stand to take a bus home to his wife and two children, a five-year-old-son and a three-year-old daughter.

That is when a bomb in a pale green rubbish bin nearby exploded and killed him.

"He was just waiting to come home to family, waiting for a bus," says his father-in-law, waiting to take Shakil's body home.


The latest Delhi bombings follow the eerie script of recent blasts in other parts of the country - an e-mail from a group calling itself Indian Mujahideen reaches a newspaper or TV news office, and then serial, low-intensity blasts are triggered in busy places.

The only difference this time is that the perpetrators struck in more unusual places: a quiet city park, a downtown bus stand, a cinema sidewalk.

The aim, clearly, is to impose fear over the city.

But it is not going to be easy. The morning after the blasts, people crowded the Gaffar Market streets, young couples stood outside the shuttered park wondering whether it would reopen on Monday, and at a main city hospital, gloved cleaners scrubbed bloodstains off a row of yellow-painted stretchers.

"It was really bad and busy last night. Now we are back to normal," said one of the cleaners.

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