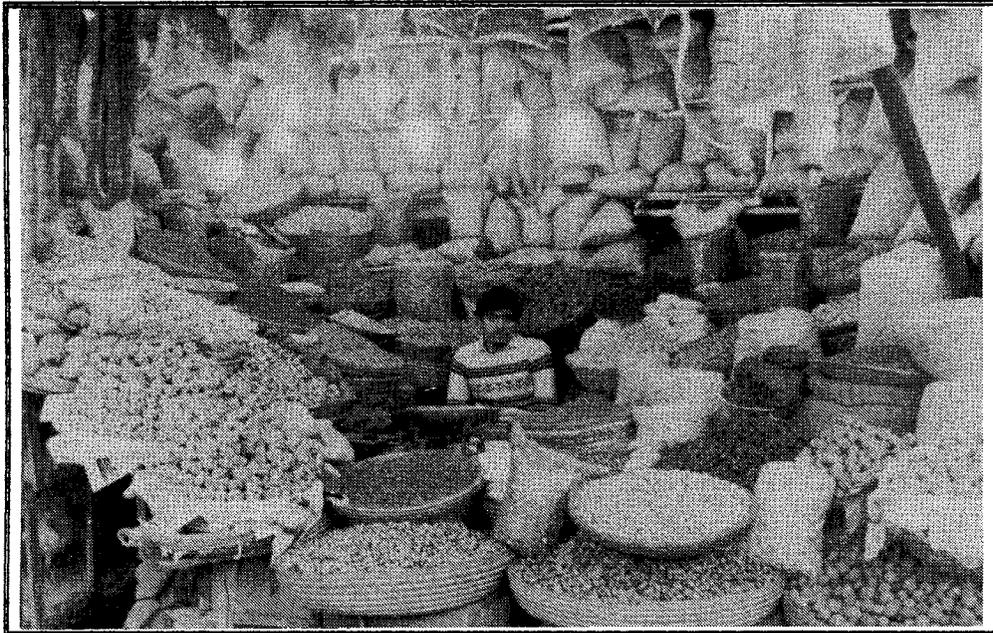


CVR-5

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

10 January 1991  
Peshawar, Pakistan



A Peshawar fruit and nut vendor displays his wares.

PORTRAIT OF PESHAWAR

by Carol Rose

*Allahu Akbar* (God is most great) cries one voice, then another, and another until the pre-dawn darkness is engulfed in a cacophony that calls faithful Muslims to the first of five prayers they perform each day.

As the sun hits the nearby Himalayan foothills, the air is filled with the crowing of roosters, the clip-clop of the horse-drawn tonga wagons, and the pop-popping of Kalishnakov rifles being fired toward the heavens. Morning sounds in one of the world's oldest cities reflect the spirit of Peshawar: its religious reverence, rustic beauty and atmosphere of violence. And in the back streets, bazaars and tea shops of this ancient cross-roads, a newcomer easily falls under the spell of the Asian subcontinent.

---

Carol Rose is an ICWA fellow writing on the cultures of South and Central Asia.

---

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

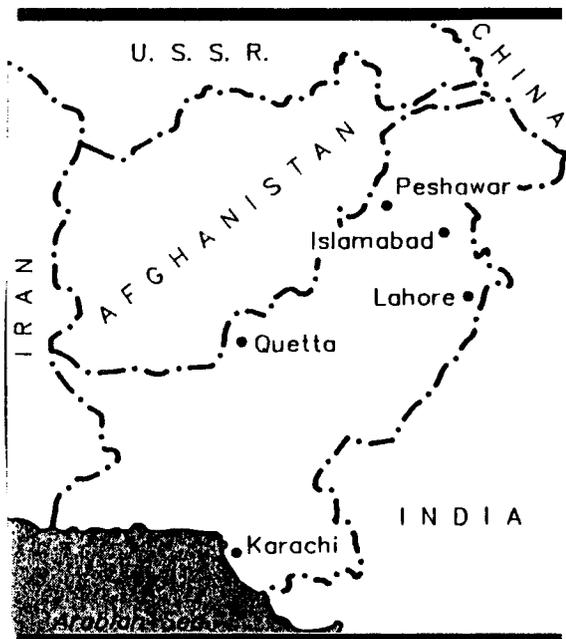
## GOD WILLING WE WILL LAND

"Insha-allah (God Willing) we will soon be landing," announces the pilot of the Pakistan International Airlines propeller plane. The flight from Pakistan's capital city, Islamabad, to Peshawar has lasted less than an hour. In that short time we have crossed the iron-red desert outside of Islamabad and climbed over a range of black razor-sharp mountain peaks. On the descent into Peshawar, we glide over the green quilt fields of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), one of Pakistan's five provinces. Peshawar is the capital of the NWFP. It also is my new home.

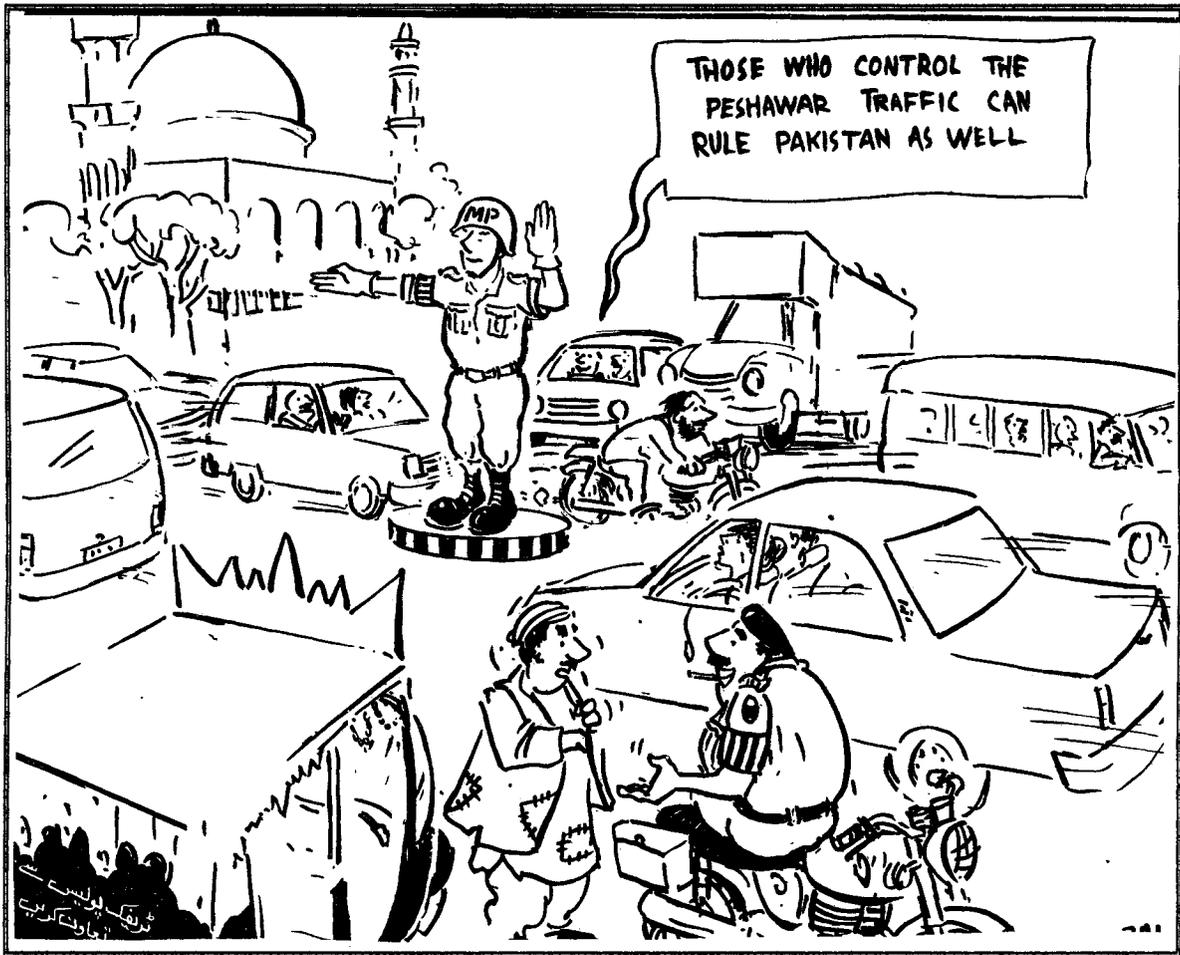
Poised at the eastern entrance of the Khyber Pass, Peshawar was founded 2,000 years ago at the gateway between the steppes of Central Asia and the hot plains of the Indian subcontinent. It began as a Buddhist mecca, adorned with magnificent stupas and statues of the Buddha, most of which are now destroyed or in the local museum. In the 16th century, Mogul rulers planted flowers and extensive gardens here, turning Peshawar into a "city of flowers" -- one of the meanings of its name. The gardens were decimated in 1818 when the city was overrun by Sikhs from the East. Thirty years later, the British captured Peshawar and turned it into a frontier outpost of the Raj with a distinctly colonial flavor.

Today, Peshawar is home to just under one million Pakistanis, as well as thousands of Afghans who fled here over the Himalayan mountains to escape the Soviet invasion of their country. More than three million Afghans escaped to the Northwest Frontier Province in the last 12 years, the vast majority living in the enormous refugee camps surrounding Peshawar.

MAP I: SOUTH-CENTRAL ASIA



The taxi ride from the airport provides a glimpse of the city. All modes of transport share the road: sheep and cows, pedestrians, wooden-wheeled "tonga" carts drawn by bullock or horse, bicycles, three-wheeled scooter taxis known as "tuk-tuks", wildly weaving jeeps, and gaily painted buses and lorries. The traffic pattern is Darwinian: the largest modes of transport rule the road and survival depends on a loud horn, good brakes and quick reflexes.



Cartoon from the Frontier Post newspaper, showing military police in control and local policeman taking a bribe.

Willows, cottonwoods, eucalyptus, pine and banana trees line the road. Women and children gather on the roadside to collect wood and dry brush for fuel, which men bundle on bicycles for the ride home. Shepherds herd flocks of fat-tailed sheep alongside or in the street, stopping to let them graze on the leaves that have fallen from the trees.

Peshawar looks, and is, ancient. The side streets are narrow and unpaved, lined on either side with high walls behind which families live in protective compounds. In the wealthier parts of town, well-tended flower gardens provide a splash of color in an otherwise sandy-brown environment of dirt roads and mud walls.

Odors of manure, burning wood, and copious amounts of diesel exhaust hang in the air, contributing to respiratory ailments. It is a truly suffocating experience to be caught in the wake of

a Pakistani bus or lorry spewing clouds of black fumes. Nevertheless, the streets of Peshawar are almost litter-free, since poverty forces people to recycle rather than waste.

## RETRACING THE SILK ROAD

### University Town

Peshawar is divided into three neighborhoods: University Town, the Defense Cantonment, and the Old City. University Town is a quiet residential area where over 100 western aid organizations have set up offices in bungalows rented from rich Pakistani landlords. Most of the people who live in University Town are American, European or upper-crust Afghans and Pakistanis. As elsewhere in the city, homes and offices are surrounded by high walls and guarded round-the-clock by armed guards, or chowkidars.

At one end of University Town is the local market, a row of shops. Many stores are 10 foot square with one wall open to the street, while others are merely wares displayed on top of blankets thrown on the ground. This open-air bazaar is crowded with shoppers, beggars, tonga wagons, and tuk-tuks. Dozens of vendors sell fresh and dried fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Whole cows and lamb carcasses drip with blood as they hang from hooks in the street, and butchers hack off large hunks of raw flesh. No part goes unappreciated: hooves, brains and testicles are

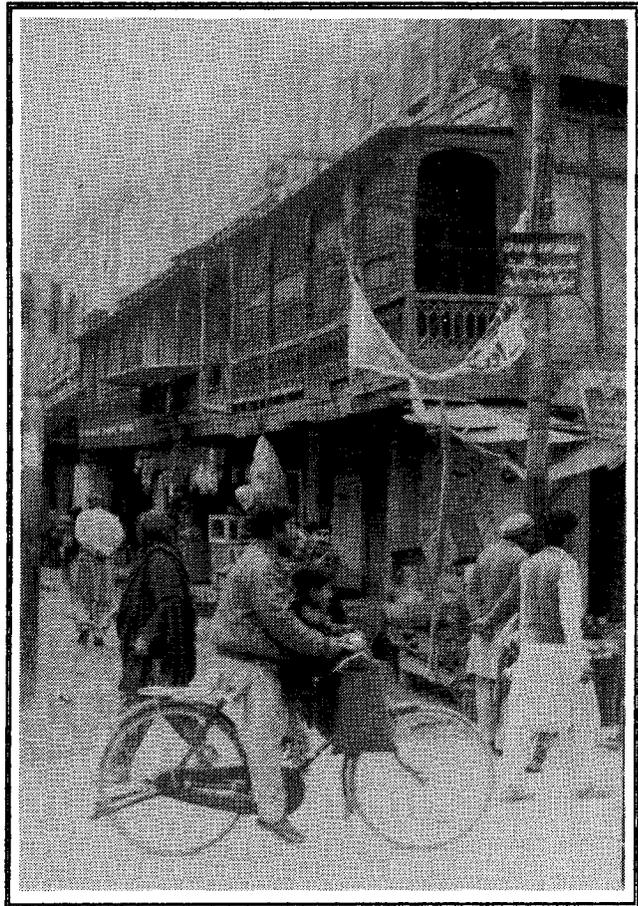


A "tuk-tuk" motor taxi in Peshawar's Saddar Bazaar.

available for the brave gourmet.

At the bakery, men squat around the oven: a large hole in the ground resembling a well, which is gas heated. Reaching down, they slap dough to the clay sides of the oven, where it sticks and bakes into a pita-style bread called "nan." Unfortunately, piles of this fragrant fresh bread typically are transported home unwrapped on the back of a bicycle rack, exposed to the grimy street environment.

Near the bakery stands a white mosque, before which vendors spread sweaters, socks and plastic shoes on the ground to lure shoppers with a sort of Third World "Blue Light Special." Nearby are a handful of medicine shops, where prescription drugs are available over-the-counter, as well as a 10-foot square pool hall, into which someone squeezed a pool table. It doesn't look like there is room enough to actually use a cue, but the place is always packed.



Street corner in Saddar Bazaar.

### Defense Cantonment

Gaily-painted public buses link University Town with the rest of Peshawar. The ride itself is an adventure: these so-called "flying coaches" are decorated inside and out with gaudy enamel paintings of palm trees, geometric patterns, air planes, mirrors, baubles, etc. The buses don't actually stop at any point, but merely slow down to let passengers leap on or off at their own considerable risk.

A 15 minute ride from University Town takes passengers to the Defense Cantonment, home to Pakistan's military establishment in Peshawar. Built by the British in the last century, the Cantonment reflects a military genius for order and the colonial charm of the Raj. Wide streets are laid out in grids, and



Egg seller balances chicken cage on his head during chat in Saddar Bazaar.

spacious homes are adorned with second-story balconies and elaborate gardens. Here, too, is the exclusive Peshawar Club, complete with a pool, squash facilities, and grass tennis courts: all monuments to the British talent for recreating home in the furthest outposts of the empire.

In the heart of the Defense Cantonment is the Saddar bazaar, a well-ordered maze of shops and vendors laid-out by the British. It is crowded and colorful, with throngs of shoppers, motorcycles, tuk-tuks, and bicycles weaving in and out. At Saddar you can buy almost anything if you have the money: electronics and car parts, refrigerators, books and magazines, hand-crafted furniture, shoes or trinkets. My favorite shop sign says, "Prince of Wales: A Hairdresser."

In a narrow curved alleyway, shoppers wander among bolts of cotton, silk and polyester hanging from a canopy overhead. Tailors

will sew an entire outfit for \$4, plus the cost of the cloth. Another street has nothing but toys. Nearby tea shops emit a melange of smells: spices, teas, and frying food.

### The Old City

Beyond Saddar Bazaar another 15 minutes by bus takes you to the Old City, also known as the kuchi or nomad bazaar. This is the original city of Peshawar, a labyrinth of narrow shop-lined streets that stretches for a least two miles square. It is easy and enjoyable to lose oneself among these winding lanes. Even more than in Saddar, the Old City is at once both exhilarating and exhausting.

The area used to be enclosed by a wall with 16 gates, which the local government tore down in the 1950s. Today, only the names of the gates remain. But the bazaar remains in the shadow of the Bala Hisar Fort, a massive fort of red brick built by the Sikhs in 1834 on the site of an earlier Mogul bulwark. Today, it is a Pakistani army base.

Old City architecture is dominated by brightly colored wooden buildings, decorated with balconies and ornamental windows. Ancient mosques made of intricately carved and colored marble are squeezed between tiny shops, their minarets pointing skyward.

As in Saddar, each tiny lane has its own specialties. In the Meena Bazaar, women dressed in all-enveloping "burqas" shop for beads, buttons, lace, trinkets and embroidery. Nearby are dozens of colorful cloth and shawl shops, a street of song-bird vendors, and a row of copper and silver smiths. Beyond that is a row of shops selling fancy gun holsters and ammunition, another with hand-painted pottery, and many more teeming with beautifully-woven Afghan carpets.

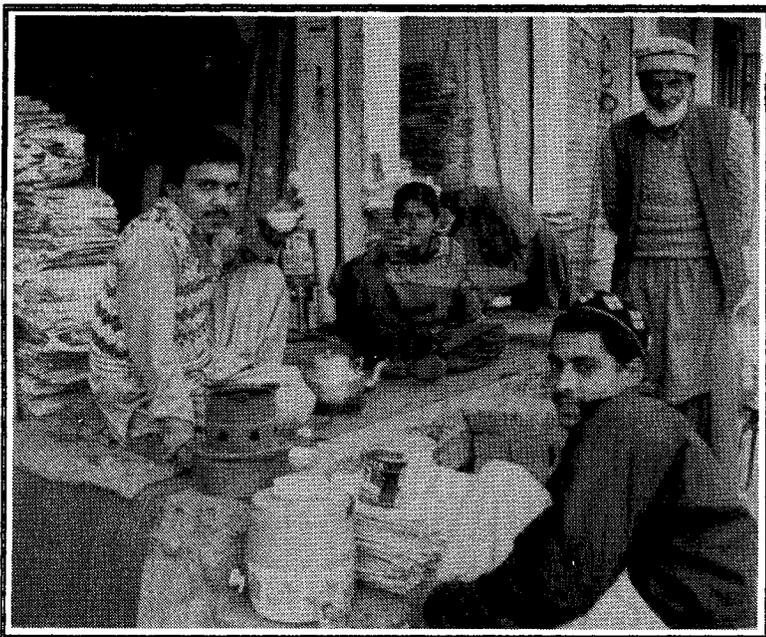
Three-wheeled carts display mountains of spices: golden tumeric, hot-red chilies, green cumin and black peppercorns. Fragrant bakeries and open-air restaurants lure hungry passersby, as do stands of dried apricots, raisins, almonds, walnuts, and pistachios trucked over the border from Afghanistan. Fortunes are told and adventures recounted on storyteller lane, reminding visitors that parts of Peshawar haven't changed much since it was a stop on the Silk Road.

#### **PEOPLE OF PESHAWAR: INITIAL IMPRESSIONS**

The population of Peshawar is mostly Pukhtun or Pathan, an ethno-linguistic



**Shoe vendor in Saddar Bazaar, Peshawar.**



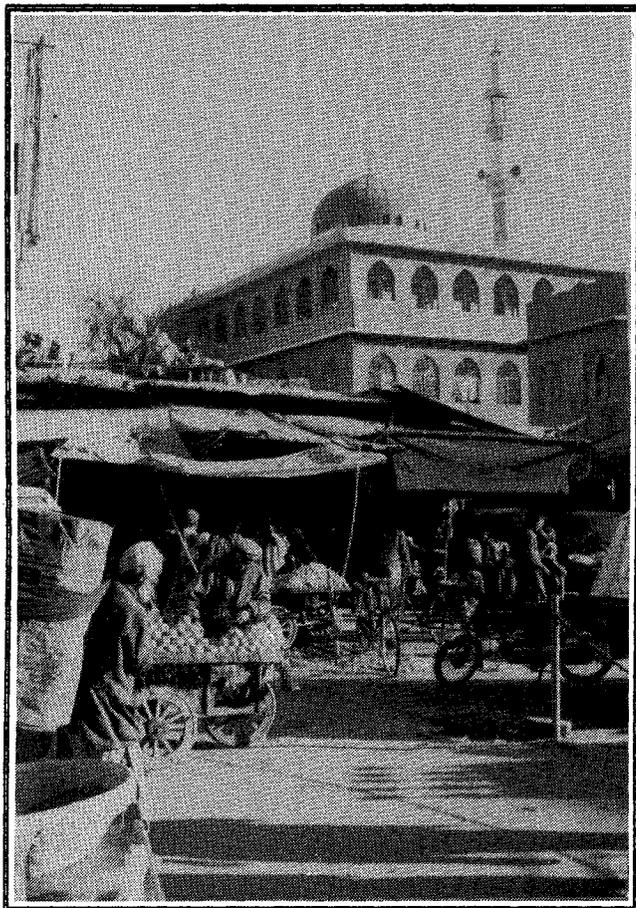
A tea-shop and paper recycling shop, Peshawar.

group that exists both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. They are known for their honor, hospitality and sense of revenge -- all pillars of the "Pukhtunwali", or Pukhtun code of conduct. The fierceness of the Pukhtuns is evident in the faces of the men on the street: bearded, turbaned, and glaring. Among friends, however, these same grim features suddenly are transformed into warm ear-to-ear grins and welcoming embraces.

Pukhtun women represent male honor in Pukhtunwali, and so are to be defended at all costs. In practice, this means many women live in *purdah* -- covering their faces and bodies when in public and generally remaining secluded within the home. Only poor women walk on the streets and even then they stay in groups. Virtually all Pakistani and Afghan women wear the *chador* when they are in public, a shawl that is about six feet long and three feet wide. In the house, they may drape their shawls over their shoulders, but outside they wear them as a hooded cape to cover the heads. Women usually pull the *chador* over their face when strangers pass or hold the cloth in their teeth if they are carrying packages in their arms.

More conservative women wear *burqa*, a cape that completely envelopes the head and shoulders, with a woven grate covering the eyes. The *burqas* not only prevent people from looking at women, but block the vision of the women themselves. It is not unusual to see young children leading their mothers across the street because the *burqa* completely blocks off her peripheral vision.

Men and women both wear the *shalwar kameez*, a long tunic shirt with baggy pants. Men usually wear brown or gray *shalwars*, with turbans or woolen hats on their heads. Women wear *shalwar kameez* in a variety of colors. The most expensive *shalwars* are made with bright pink, blue, red or yellow shiny polyester or silk, while daily wear is cotton or wool blend.



A Mosque in the Old City.

### AMERICAN MARHABAD!

Most western women here refuse to cover their head in public. But most foreign women also travel in private automobiles to separate them from the people. Local reactions to an American woman walking alone -- even when wearing a *chador* -- include curious stares, offers to assist and occasional hostility, such as being spit upon. There are many reasons for this animosity. In part, a woman walking alone is considered shameful and vulnerable, risking her honor and that of her father, brothers and husband.

In the last year, hostility has been directed against all Westerners, men and women. This is due in part to the arrival of foreign aid workers in response to the influx of Afghan refugees. The invasion of non-Moslem foreigners to Peshawar has

had a profound effect on the local economy and social structure. Peshawar is a profoundly conservative and parochial place, especially when compared to the larger and more modern cities of Pakistan: Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi.

Nonetheless, Peshawar now has hotels and shops catering to western tastes and rents that are sky-high. But the once-abundant aid money -- and the jobs that it supported -- is now drying up. Moreover, concern is expressed in local papers and elsewhere that Westerners are contaminating Islamic culture with "vices" ranging from drinking to letting women drive alone.

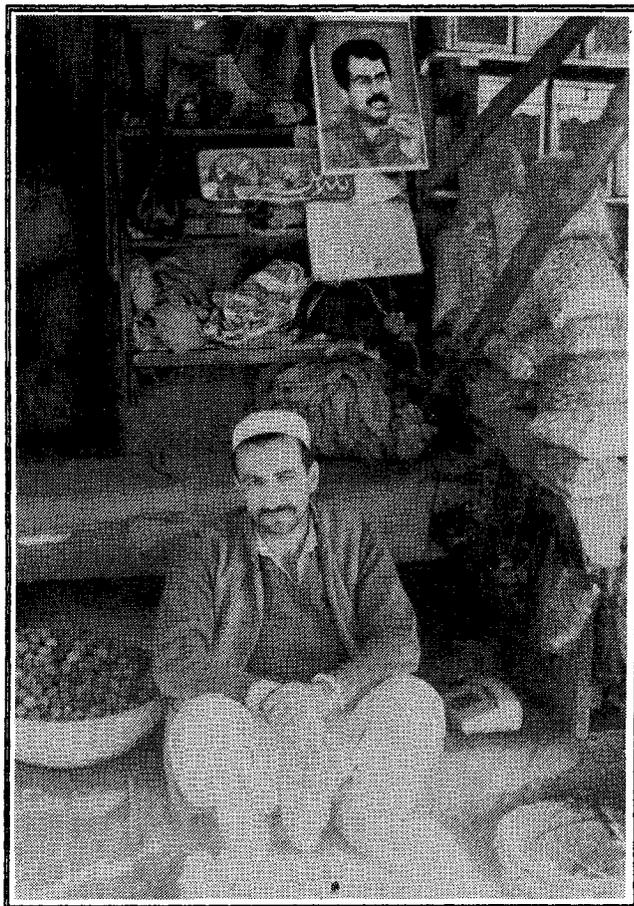
Afghan enmity toward Americans has increased more dramatically in the last couple of years since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and rumors of a deal between Washington and Moscow to cut off aid to both sides in the war. Pakistan's ambiguous loyalty to the United States also is being tested by the recent suspension of all U.S. aid to Pakistan over the nuclear issue.

The U.S. military operation against Iraq in the Persian Gulf has further exacerbated the security situation. The government of Pakistan officially is neutral in the conflict, but the local newspapers are filled with calls for Islamic unity against American "infidels" on Saudi Arabian soil and there have been a series of pro-Iraqi marches in the Old City. Local cars display photographs of Saddam Hussein. Graffiti around town calls for "American marhabad!"

Roughly translated:  
Death to Americans.

Unfortunately, these are not empty threats. In the last year there have been a number of assassinations of Afghan moderates, attempted (and a couple of successful) abductions of foreigners and locals, stone-throwing attacks against foreign women, armed robberies in aid offices, and death threats against Westerners and Afghans who work for aid organizations. The U.S. Embassy already has ordered a "voluntary departure" for U.S. government employees and their dependents, and recommends strongly that all Americans leave as soon as possible. Thus, I shall soon become something of a refugee myself.

Insha'allah, as they say, I will soon return to Peshawar. It is a fascinating and oddly beautiful place, and I've only just fallen under its spell.



Shopkeeper in the Old City and his poster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Received in Hanover 1/30/91

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT  
WORLD AFFAIRS  
4 W. WHELLOCK ST.  
HANOVER, NH 03755  
U.S.A.

\* Photographs by Tom Harrington.