



Clockwise from below left: police on guard after raid on drugs bunker in Villa La Lata, Rosario; a memorial mural to the three teenage friends murdered last year in the Villa Moreno area; two people arrested in a drugs bunker raid; eight-year-old Leonardo Pintos, who was shot as he slept



# NO ONE IS SAFE: DRUGS WAR HITS ARGENTINA

The events of that evening in January are etched into Vilma Jaime's memory. The sun had set, but it was still oppressively hot and neighbours were outside in the street, chatting and drinking traditional mate tea. Then the gunshots began.

Ms Jaime ran into her house, and watched through the keyhole of the front door as the blood started to spill. Three people were shot that night – miraculously, no one was killed. But many others have not been so lucky.

Ms Jaime, 32, lives in the Nuevo Alberdi neighbourhood of Rosario – a city of just over a million inhabitants, some 200 miles north-west of Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires. The gunshots have become increasingly frequent in the city's poorest quarters, where turf war for control of a lucrative local cocaine market have caused the murder rate to spiral.

"Here we're used to hearing shots in the morning, at midday, at whatever time really," she said, pointing out the house across the road where the Ferreyra family used to live. They were forced to flee the area after receiving threats from a local drug gang.

As little more than a through-route, Argentina had escaped the worst of the drug-related violence that has plagued many South American countries for decades. Now, the effects of the drug trade are increasingly visible – particularly in Rosario, which is fast acquiring the inauspicious title of Argentina's "narco" capital. In the first few weeks of 2013 alone, there were some 20 killings in Rosario, mostly of innocent people caught in the crossfire. The murder rate in the city bordering the muddy-brown Parana river is nearly three times the national average, and 70 per cent of last year's murders were committed with firearms.

Surrounded by several large ports,

Rosario has long been a transit point for drugs brought across the border from Bolivia and Paraguay headed for European markets.

According to Mauro Federico, author of *Narco Country*, cocaine often enters Argentina from Bolivia and is transported in trucks to Rosario via the route 34 highway. He says neither the provincial nor the federal police have the resources to stop the cargo or the gangs which facilitate its journey.

"At the end of the 1990s, local groups who were helping camouflage the drugs for Colombian cartels operating in Argentina starting asking to be paid in drugs instead of money," he said. "They saw the growing local demand and realised that, by cutting up cocaine and selling it in Rosario, they could multiply their earnings."

As the death toll in Rosario grows, Argentina's President, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, has blamed the provincial police force in Santa Fe – under whose domain

Rosario falls – for failing to tackle the narco gangs. The opposing Socialist government in Santa Fe blames federal forces for failing to stop drugs entering the country.

With the two sides passing the political football, residents say too little is being done to halt the vicious cycle of drugs and violence that now grips Rosario and is rapidly spreading across other major cities in Argentina, including Buenos Aires.

The violence Ms Jaime witnessed in Nuevo Alberdi was spurred by a dispute over a drugs "bunker", breezeblock houses located in slum alleyways where cocaine is sold to punters. Many of the bunkers employ "soldaditos" (little soldiers), teenagers armed with

For years the country was largely untouched by the brutal cartels that control the narco trade in Latin America – but eight-year-old Leonardo is proof those days are over. By Ed Stocker in Rosario

pistols who earn up to AR\$350 (£45) a day as guards. "Kids of only nine or 10 are already wandering around with firearms," Ms Jaime says.

After the shooting, the neighbours vented their anger on the bunker, razing it to the ground. But the problem is far from over, Ms Jaime says, explaining that a rival bunker is only a few streets away.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect about Rosario's drug problem is the apparent impunity drug capos and rank-and-file gang members enjoy. At the end of last year, the PSA, a federal investigative body, revealed links be-

tween the Santa Fe provincial police force and the drugs trade, in an investigation that employed phone taps and hidden cameras. Accused of protecting dealers, the then police chief Hugo Tognoli was forced to step down.

Mr Tognoli, previously head of Santa Fe's dangerous drugs unit, was subsequently arrested and imprisoned. A judge later ordered his release after 15 days due to "lack of merit", though he continues to be investigated. His replacement, Cristian Sola, lasted just 109 days and is being scrutinised for illicit gains.

The new chief, Omar Odriozola, met

*The Independent* in a government building in Rosario's centre. Etched in crude white graffiti on the road surface outside are the words "narco police". The writing accuses the force of corruption, and calls for "justice for Mercedes Delgado", a social worker killed by a stray bullet when gangs fought in the western barrio of Ludeña in January. The same people Ms Delgado helped at a local food shelter were responsible for her death.

Dressed in a suit, Mr Odriozola said Mr Sola's removal was part of "certain changes taking place". He made solemn promises to clean up the force, but did not give direct answers to questions on corruption in the Santa Fe police.

As a handful of court cases continue to implicate Santa Fe police personnel, PSA findings have exposed officers guarding drugs bunkers and suspected police tip-offs being given to narco gangs.

"We've begun to discover that the drug dealers and the police are one and the same," said Estela Maris Gomez, speaking next to a football pitch in the south-eastern Rosario neighbourhood of Villa Moreno.

The stretch of turf behind Ms Gomez may look like any other community playing field, but in the early hours of New Year's Day last year, it became a bloodbath. Her son, Claudio "Mono"

Rodriguez, was with two friends on the field, waiting for some girls.

What the trio didn't realise was that three other people broadly fitting their description had been in the area 15 minutes earlier, celebrating after having shot the son of an infamous drug dealer known as "el Quemado" (the burnt one). The dealer allegedly decided to exact revenge on the assailants with a machine gun – but instead mowed down Mono and his two companions.

"We arrived at the pitch and Mono was there on the floor, in a puddle of filthy water, and he couldn't breathe," said his brother Chicho, fighting back tears. "We grabbed his hand, talked to him and told him to hang on. He was with us for another half an hour."

The Villa Moreno triple murder shocked Argentina, highlighting the destructive nature of drug-related violence in Rosario. It also lifted the lid on police involvement in the drug trade; three police officers are due to stand trial later this year for allegedly helping to facilitate el Quemado's murder spree.

El Quemado's son, Maximiliano, survived his shooting that day – but not for long. At the beginning of February this year he was murdered in the centre of Rosario with a gunshot to the temple.



hoods in town. People here survive by recycling cardboard and live in makeshift houses made from scrap materials that are incapable of halting a bullet's deadly trajectory.

Pointing out her house's pock-marked walls, Silvia Perea, 43, called it "a miracle of God" that her eight-year-old son Leonardo Pintos wasn't killed last month when a fight outside her house in the early hours of the morning ended in gunshots.

A bullet entered Leonardo's right arm and exited through his right leg as he was curled up asleep. "The child is still afraid," Ms Perea said. "Because there isn't security here in the neighbourhood."

As poor, young people in Rosario are lured by the money and quick thrills that gang affiliation brings, it remains easy for drug gangs to recruit new members. With it the vicious cycle of drugs and violence looks unlikely to end soon.

"My family are religious and they always used to say there was a better life for me," said Jeremia Encia, 28, a former drug seller who spent time behind bars. "I had women, brand new cars and piles of cash. So what could be better than that?" But I now realise that drug trafficking is a trick and a lie that destroys people. Sometimes, too, it destroys families."

## Love's labour: the man who translated all Shakespeare's plays into Punjabi

By ANDREW BUNCOMBE  
in Delhi

Surjit Hans' interest in the works of William Shakespeare was first sparked when he was a student, but it was not until he had retired from academia that he started on the labour of love in which he would lose himself and which took two decades to complete.

Now, the 82-year-old has finally completed his translation of Shakespeare's rarely performed *Henry VIII* into Punjabi, marking the 38th and last of the Stratford Bard's plays to be made available in the South Asian language. An estimated 100 million people speak Punjabi, mainly in India, Pakistan, Britain and Canada.

"It started in my college days when I played a minor part in *Macbeth*," Mr Hans, who studied at Punjab University in Hoshiarpur, told *The Independent*. "And then I played the role of Laertes in *Hamlet*."

Mr Hans began translating the plays in 1993 when he retired as head of the department of history at the Guru Nanak Dev University in the Punjab city of Amritsar. The first work he translated was *Othello*. For each translation, he received 8,000 rupees (£100), which he reckoned worked out as around 40 rupees a day. He averaged two plays a year.

The retired academic said he hoped performances of his translations would be staged and he said he believed Punjabi audiences would respond well to Shakespeare's stories because of the "commonality of themes". He believes it is unfair that Shakespeare's works should only be available to those who speak English.

No north Indian aware of the story of the emperor Aurangzeb, a conservative Mughal ruler of the 17th century who imprisoned his father and murdered his brother, could fail to be moved by the intrigues contained in



Surjit Hans, 82, has just finished translating *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare's last play

*King John*, Mr Hans says. At the same time, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, with its tale of two cousins fighting to the death over the affections of the same woman, has parallels with the plots of many Bollywood films.

"Take for example the treatment of the elderly in *King Lear* – well, we leave thousands of old people at the Kumbh Mela [Hindu festival] because we cannot afford to keep them," he said. "Also, there is the issue of arranged marriage in *The Taming of the Shrew*."

Mr Hans, who spent six years in the late 1960s in London, where he was a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, devoted much of his academic work to the study of Sikh literary sources. These included the *Janamsakhis*, the tales that surround the birth and life of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith.

Having completed the works of Shakespeare, he said he is now keen to expand his repertoire and translate into Punjabi some of the "basic" texts of biology and economics. He added: "There is nothing left for me from Shakespeare. I am thinking about *The Origin of Species* and *The Wealth of Nations*."

## Senate investigation into Zero Dark Thirty dropped

By SAM MASTERS

A high-profile Senate investigation into whether the makers of *Zero Dark Thirty* – the critically-acclaimed film charting the CIA hunt for Osama Bin Laden – were granted "inappropriate access" to classified material has been quietly dropped.

The news comes a day after director Katherine Bigelow's film fell flat at the Oscars where many blamed its lack of awards – it picked up just a single technical prize out of five nominations, including for best actress, Jessica Chastain, right – on the

Senate Intelligence Committee investigation and controversy over its depiction of the CIA's alleged use of torture in the search for the al-Qaeda leader. The committee's Democratic chair Dianne Feinstein and Republican member John McCain had raised concerns about the torture scenes in January.

"Depiction is not endorsement" said Bigelow as she defended the film against Academy member David Crennon's calls for a boycott. A congressional aide, speaking anonymously, said the committee closed its inquiry on Monday. Studio Sony, which produced the film, did not comment.

