

'Healing' Powers of Taleban Graves

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People are flocking to a bizarre new shrine north of Kabul after reports of miracle cures.

Just days after residents of Intifat, 25 km north of Kabul, buried two Arab pro-Taleban fighters killed in a shoot-out in their village last October, strange things began to happen.

First, there were reports of ghostly lights near the graves, and stones began to fall from the sky. The people were frightened, but then one man - who was suffering from a hand injury - touched the site accidentally and experienced a "miraculous" cure.

The legend grew very quickly. People soon flocked to the site, in the hope of being healed: a mute claimed the graves gave him the gift of speech.

A renowned military commander has since taken charge of the new tourist attraction - and has built a mosque and even a guest-house for the visitors.

Mohammad Barad travelled from Kabul with his wife and child to visit the site. "I have heard that by coming to this place lots of people have been cured, so I brought my child here because he is being plagued by demons," he said.

The two men killed in Intifat were part of a contingent of Arab fighters who joined forces with the Taleban to fight the Northern Alliance, but were abandoned when the student militia fled the capital.

Haji Abdul Rahman, the head of Intifat village, recalls how the militants died. "Three Arabs went to my neighbour Karim's house to get some water. Karim's sons informed the closest military post, which sent soldiers to surround the house and capture the men," he told IWPR.

"When the fighters realised what had happened, they opened fire. While one Arab escaped, two were killed, as was one local soldier. One of Karim's young sons was seriously injured in the gunfight.

"After the event the Imam of the village, Molavi Zareef, secretly performed their death prayers and buried them at the side of a hill close to the village."

Faizurahman, another villager, was the first to discover the alleged healing properties of the graves. "My hand was in great pain. I went to many doctors in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, but didn't get better. When I visited the graves, it got well," he said.

The shrine came to national prominence when Asif Khan, a mute from Shakar Dara north of Kabul, was suddenly able to speak - and promptly told everyone he met.

The popularity of the graves became such a problem for villagers they asked for them to be moved. After six months, Haji Qayoom, a senior military commander, reburied them near Qara Dushman, 10 km away.

Qayoom is now the caretaker of this new shrine. Money collected in a box on top of the graves goes towards the upkeep of the site and three attendants. Enough money has been collected to build a mosque and a guest-house at the site.

One of the attendants Zahir Khan said, "More people come here on Wednesdays and Fridays because these are the shrine days in Afghanistan. At such times, there is no room to move here.

"I am making 500,000 Afghanis - 12 US dollars - a day from visitors. Hundreds of people come here daily and God has made them well."

On the day IWPR visited the shrine, it was also attended by a group of people from the Koe Safi area of Kapeesa province, 80 km away. One of the visitors Ali Baba said he hoped to cure his back trouble, saying, "These shrines are the friends of God."

He took a stone from the grave, rubbed it on his body, and tasted the soil. Another woman kissed the small pieces of cloth that hang from the shrine before adding a piece herself. "I haven't had a baby for a long time, so I have come here to ask God to give me a child," she said.

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