



Military vests are on display at a shop in Yemen's third city of Taz. — AFP photos



A partial view of a weapons shop in Yemen's third city of Taz.



A Soviet-produced TT-33 pistol is pictured at a shop in Yemen's third city of Taz.

FROM CRAFTS TO KALASHNIKOVS: ARMS SOUK THRIVES IN YEMEN'S TAEZ

Once overflowing with handicrafts, the old Al-Shinayni market in Yemen's third city of Taz is now bursting with Kalashnikovs and bullets as traders scramble to scratch out a living in the war-ravaged country. Yemen has been plunged into a devastating war since the Iran-aligned Huthi rebels swept into the capital Sanaa in a late 2014 offensive, sparking a military intervention months later by a Saudi-led coalition. The southwestern city of Taz is controlled by government forces but under siege by the Huthis, who have repeatedly bombed the city of 615,000 people.

Many civilians in tribal Yemen, the Arab world's most impoverished country, carry personal arms even under normal circumstances and weapons trade is common. But the war has seen the arms market surge, and traditional trades pushed aside. "In the past, the city's old souk (market) used to sell mainly handicraft items made by blacksmiths, potters and tailors," said merchant Abu Ali. "When the war erupted, most merchants turned to selling weapons," the tailor-turned arms trader told AFP. "Some sell (Yemen's highly popular mild narcotic leaf) Qat, and others have fled. Half of the shops have shut down," he added.

Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed since March 2015 when the Saudi-led military coalition intervened in support of the internationally recognized government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi.

'Arms trade flourished'

Taz has not been spared from the violence. Dozens of people, including children, were killed earlier this year in battles between the rebels and forces loyal to the government, as well as infighting among rival pro-government groups, according to local and medical sources. Abid Al-Rashdi, who still sells handmade goods at Al-Shinayni, said he struggles to keep up his line of work amid a conflict that shows no sign of abating.



Bullets are on display at a shop in Yemen's third city of Taz.



A picture shows military camouflage textiles on display at a shop in Yemen's third city of Taz.

'Bullets and weapons'

Armed men on motorcycles whizz in and out of the market, once a hub for selling clay pots and jugs. Fatigues, tactical vest and helmets are on display outside the shops. Inside, AK47 assault rifles hang on the walls, with bullets and mortar shells neatly lining the shelves. "It's an arms market," said Abu Ali. Different weapons carry different price tags. An AK47 rifle is sold for \$1,090, a pistol for \$818, and a bullet for half a dollar. Like Abu Ali, the war forced Mohammed Tajer, a handicraft merchant, to turn to the arms trade to make ends meet.

"We used to work well" before the war, Tajer told AFP. "But once the war started, we had to resort to selling bullets and weapons. If the conflict ends, we will go back to our previous professions." In front of one shop, a young boy in a yellow T-shirt sits on a cushion as he bangs away on a piece of metal. An older man next to him stands near a forge hammering a sharp object. The conflict in Yemen has triggered what the United Nations describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 24 million Yemenis—around two-thirds of the population—in need of aid.



A picture shows military fatigues on display at a shop in Yemen's third city of Taz.

As Bauhaus marks 100 years, Tel Aviv's White City stands tall

While many in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv start the weekend at a sidewalk cafe, there is a small group of visitors walking the streets in search of Bauhaus buildings. Practitioners of the minimalist architectural movement, founded in Germany a century ago, were among European Jews who fled to British-ruled Palestine when the Nazis took power. Today Tel Aviv is a leading repository of the modernist style that celebrates its 100th year in 2019.

Bauhaus and its variations are prominent among the 4,000 buildings which make up what is known as Tel Aviv's White City, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The name comes from the white-painted facades, which together with rounded balconies epitomize the Bauhaus style. The Bauhaus design school was founded in Weimar, Germany, by Walter Gropius in April 1919, exactly a decade after Tel Aviv was born as a small seaside village on sand dunes near the ancient Mediterranean port of Jaffa. Driven out by the Nazis in 1933, Bauhaus is part of the modernist movement that had emerged in the 1920s. In a break with the past it favored a functional aesthetic and the use of glass, steel or concrete.

World's biggest

On the streets of Tel Aviv, a group of about 30 from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden were on a walking tour organized by the Bauhaus Centre, which is headed by co-founder Micha Gross. The Swiss psychologist and architecture enthusiast told AFP that no other city in the world has a larger collection of Bauhaus buildings than Tel Aviv. UNESCO says that the master development plan was the work of Britain's Sir Patrick Geddes, a leading modernist. "Tel Aviv is his only large-scale urban realization," its World Heritage website says.

The first stop on the Bauhaus Centre tour was Shulamit Square, just off Tel Aviv's central Dizengoff Street. With its sleek, rounded buildings, the site embodies the way Bauhaus shaped the city with its ethos of seeking to create homes for all social classes. Unlike their predecessors who built for the German climate, the architects who settled in Tel Aviv had to adapt their work to the local climate. They used less glass to minimize heat and incorporated balconies to catch the sea breezes.

Another stop was at nearby Dizengoff Square, a city landmark dominated by prominent Bauhaus buildings, including the immaculate white Hotel Cinema. Gross says that while the number of visitors to the Bauhaus Centre has tripled in recent years, the White City is more of an impulse destination than Jerusalem and its holy sites, which every year attract millions of visitors. Katell Piboules and Yann Becouary are two French visitors to the center in their 40s. Armed with detailed maps showing Bauhaus gems they walk the streets unaccompanied. "There are a lot of things to see here," says Piboules, adding that she and her companion are not great beachgoers.

They say that while some buildings are well-restored and worth seeing, others leave much to be desired. "Maintaining and restoring these buildings is complex," says Gross, who explains that it takes between eight to 10 years to renovate a building. Most of these 1930s buildings are in private hands and restoring them depends on the goodwill of their owners, who get no public funding for the projects.

International style

Architect Sharon Golan Yaron is content manager of the White City Centre, set up in 2015 by the Tel Aviv city council and the German government to "preserve the heritage of the White City". She says that while the Bauhaus influence is notable, other architectural styles have shaped Tel Aviv. Iconic Swiss-born modernist Le Corbusier in particular left his mark, she says, adding that rather than using Bauhaus as a blanket term it would be more accurate to describe Tel Aviv's architectural heritage as "international".

The international style emphasizes space as opposed to mass. It spread throughout the world until the 1980s, driven by the followers of Le Corbusier, Gropius and Oscar Niemeyer. Unlike some other heritage buildings, says Golan Yaron, those of the White City are still lived in.—AFP



Pictures show the Reisfeld House, a building built in 1935 by architect Pinchas Bijonsky. — AFP photos