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'I've grown up in fear': Jewish Australians say rising antisemitism made attack predictable

15 December 2025

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Tiffanie Turnbull and Tessa Wong, Bondi Beach



Watch: BBC at the scene of Bondi Beach shooting

Bondi Beach is almost unrecognisable. The sun is out but the surf is empty. The usually heaving main street is hushed.

Helicopters track overhead. Forensic investigators - bright blue figures in the distance - comb over the crime scene from Sunday afternoon when two gunmen opened fire at an event marking the Jewish festival of Hannukah, killing at least 15 people and injuring more than 40 others.

Beach chairs, crumpled towels, wads of clothing, a pair of children's sandals lie in a neat pile at the edge of the sand - all the things people left behind as they fled what police are calling Australia's deadliest terror attack.

Nearby, a wall of floral tributes has begun to grow over the footpath. Milling around are shocked locals. Hands cover trembling lips. Sunglasses do their best to hide puffy eyes.

"I've grown up in fear my whole life," 22-year-old Jess tells the BBC. As a Jew, this felt inevitable, she adds.

That is the overriding sentiment here today – this is shocking for such a "safe" country and yet predictable for one that has been grappling with rising antisemitism.

"Our innocence is over, you know?" says Yvonne Haber who was at Bondi on Monday to mourn the previous day's horror.

"I think we will be forever changed, a bit like Port Arthur," she adds, referring to the massacre in 1996 – Australia's worst – which prompted sweeping, pioneering gun reform.

A 10-year-old, two rabbis and a Holocaust survivor - Who are the Bondi shooting victims?

'It was pandemonium': Jewish community in shock after deadly Bondi Beach attack

Questions and regrets



Many Australian Jews say they've been fearing an attack like this

More than 24 hours on, the Jewish community is still locating the missing and counting the dead.

Among them is a prominent local Rabbi, Eli Schlanger, who only a month ago had welcomed his fifth child.

"The family broke. They are falling apart," his brother-in-law Rabbi Mendel Kastel told reporters after a sleepless night. "The rabbi's wife, her best friend, [they] both lost their husbands."

The youngest victim is a 10-year-old named Matilda, whose only crime was being Jewish, says Alex Ryvchin, the co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the main body for the Jewish community here.

"A man who I knew well, in his 90s, survived the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, only to be slaughtered standing next to his wife at a Hannukah event on Bondi Beach."

Mr Ryvchin says he is somehow both numb and distraught. "It's our worst fear, but it's also something that was outside the realm of possibilities."

His organisation has been warning about a spike in recorded antisemitism incidents since Hamas's 7 October 2023 attack on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza. But, Mr Ryvchin says, authorities didn't heed the alarm.

"I know these people. They get up every morning to try to keep Australians safe. That's all they wanna do. But they failed, and they will know it better than anybody today."



BBC/Isabelle Rodd

Evidence of the night's chaos lingered on Bondi Beach on Monday

From the moment news of this attack broke, leaders including Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, New South Wales premier Chris Minns and the state's Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon have fielded questions to this effect – why wasn't this prevented?

There have been a spate of antisemitism-related offences in Australia recently. A synagogue was set on fire in Melbourne last year, a Jewish MP's office was vandalised and a car was torched in Sydney. A childcare centre in Sydney was also set alight and sprayed with anti-Jewish graffiti in January.

Two Australian nurses were suspended and charged this year after a video appeared to show them threatening to kill Israeli patients and boasting about refusing to treat them. There was also an anti-Jewish protest outside the New South Wales (NSW) parliament in November, organised by a neo-Nazi group.

As people began to quietly gather on a grassy slope on Monday in front of the iconic Bondi Pavillion, reflecting on the terror of the night before, Prime Minister Albanese visited to pay his respects.

"What we saw yesterday was an act of pure evil - an act of terror and an act of antisemitism," he said later on Monday, before rattling through a list of things he says his government has done to stamp it out.

This includes setting up a federal police taskforce to investigate antisemitic incidents, and an amendment to hate crime laws. Hate symbols, including performing a Nazi salute, and terror offences are now punishable with mandatory jail terms. NSW set up its own state-level task force because many of the recent incidents were in Sydney.



Katherine Pierce is worried about the country's future

But Albanese's words were nowhere near enough to console Nadine Saachs.

Standing side by side with her sister, both draped in Israeli flags, she says the government set the tone in October 2023 on the day after the horrific attack on Israel by Hamas. She points to the official response to a protest outside the Opera House, where some members of the crowd started offensive chants.

"If they had put their foot down straight away this would not have happened. The Albanese government is a disgrace as far as I'm concerned."

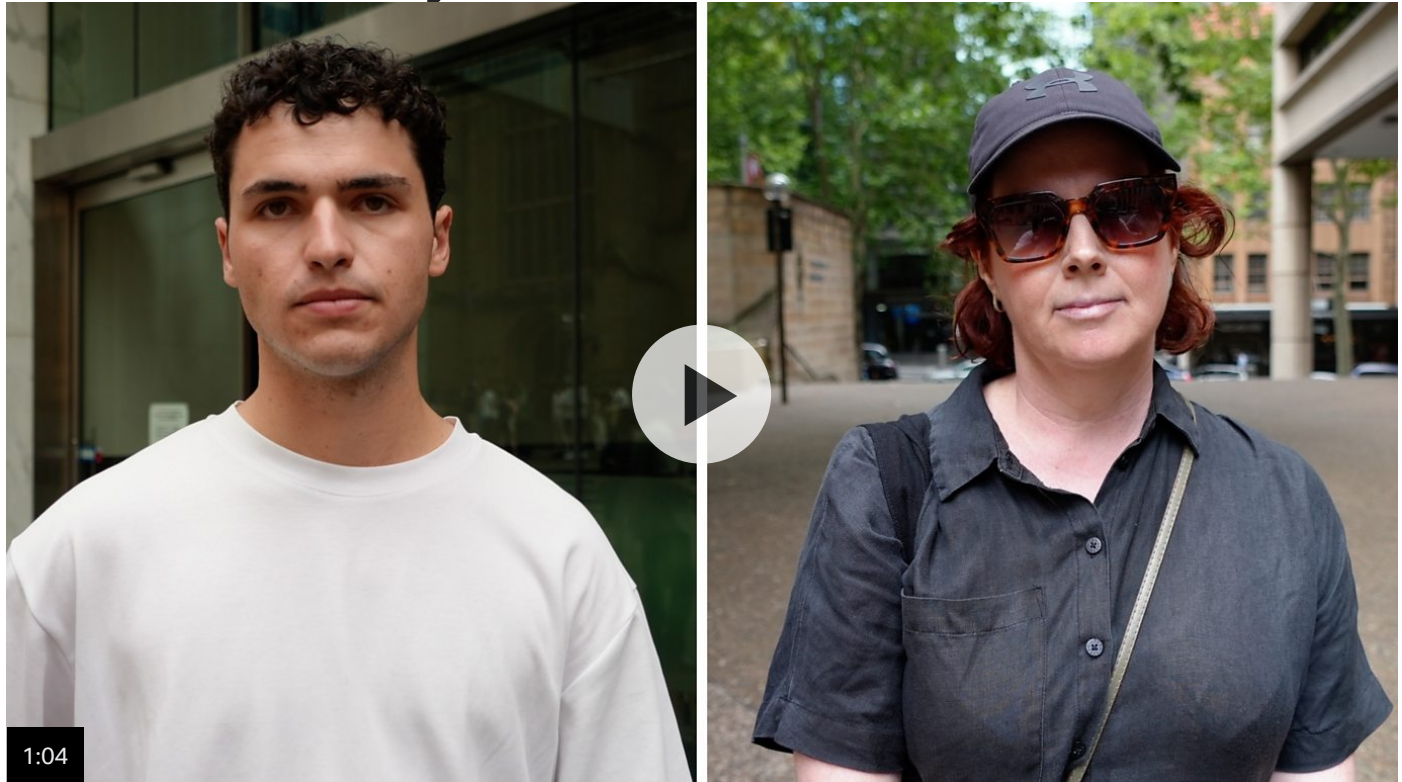
"They have blood on their hands," her sister Karen Sher adds.

Down the beach, a young woman kneels, eyes closed, palms up, praying.

Katherine Pierce, 26, tell me she's driven from Tahmoor, about an hour and a half away, to commemorate those who died.

"I just feel concern for our country... I think Australia needs to wake up to be honest," she says.

'Australia has your back'



'All we can do': Sydney residents line up for hours to donate blood after Bondi attack

As the Bondi community and Jewish Australians reeled on Monday, hospital workers were still desperately trying to heal many of the injured.

They include Syrian Ahmed al Ahmed, who was captured on camera valiantly disarming one of the attackers. He was shot multiple times, his parents have told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Police were combing the house where the attackers – now revealed to be a father-son duo, 50-year-old Sajid Akram and 24-year-old Naveed – lived. They also searched a rental property where they are believed to have planned the assault.

Other community leaders tried to quell divisions. What connections the attackers might have had are not clear, but police admitted they're worried about reprisals.

Authorities have been clear there's also been a drastic uptick in Islamophobia since 7 October.

Leaders from every state and territory met to weigh up tougher gun control measures, a lever they pulled the last time Australia experienced something even remotely like this.

"Do we need a gun crackdown like John Howard carried out after Port Arthur? He took leadership on that. Will you?" Albanese was asked by a journalist on Monday.



Mourners gather at the Bondi Pavillion

There has also been an outpouring of support.

When the agency which oversees Australia's blood banks revealed stocks had dipped dangerously low, thousands of people heeded their call.

The overwhelming demand crashed the booking website, so people like Jim just turned up and joined a queue estimated to be six hours long at some locations.

He says he barely slept, and woke resolved to help.

"I don't necessarily agree with what is happening overseas, but that doesn't mean that you open fire on innocent people here... They cannot justify [it] by saying there are dead children over there, so a... little girl should die here on the beach," he said.

Gesturing to the line stretching out in the sun behind him, 21-year-old Alex Gilders said he hoped the city's reaction was a comfort to the Jewish community.

"Australia has your back."

Additional reporting by Katy Watson.



Watch: BBC's Katy Watson reports from Bondi gunmen's house

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