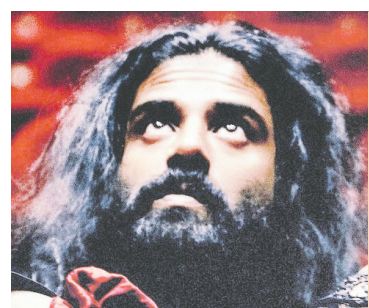


VANCOUVER SUN

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POSTMEDIA

Action against Bishnoi gang exposes gap

Ex-officers ask why Canada hasn't followed U.S.'s lead in laying charges

KIM BOLAN AND SOBIA MOMAN

As three accused drug smugglers appear in B.C. Supreme Court today after a major U.S. investigation targeting the Bishnoi gang, two former cops are asking why no one has been charged in Canada.

The three so-called members of the Dhanda drug trafficking organization — Ravinder Dhanda, Gurtej Smagh and Jaskarn Baghri — were charged in one of three indictments stemming from Operation Hard Ball, headed by the FBI's Los Angeles office. Also among 37 people charged are

gang leader Lawrence Bishnoi, who is imprisoned in India, and his fugitive lieutenant Goldy Brar, who the U.S. alleges ordered the Surrey murder of Sikh separatist leader Hardip Singh Nijjar in June 2023.

The U.S. said the Bishnoi transnational criminal network, and a second gang headed by Jaggu Bhagwanpuria, who is also in jail in India, had hundreds of operatives in Canada and the U.S. involved in murder-for-hire, extortion and drug trafficking.

Longtime B.C. gang associate Garinder Deo was charged in California with aiding the Bhagwanpuria group, while the Dhanda group mem-

bers are facing only drug smuggling charges. Deo's West Vancouver home was one of three Lower Mainland properties searched by police on Tuesday, but he has not yet been arrested.

While the RCMP aided U.S. law enforcement agencies with the massive investigation, two former police officers-turned-politicians said Wednesday that it's troubling no charges have been laid in Canada.

Independent MLA Elenore Sturko, a former Surrey Mountie, said the fact the RCMP didn't lead the investigation "is an embarrassment for Canada."

"I still wonder if our criminal justice system, with respect to our laws, are sufficient for us to bring the same type of prosecutions that the United States seems to be able to manage when it comes to the protection of our own citizens," Sturko said.

And a Richmond councillor and former B.C. solicitor general, Kash Heed, also formerly a longtime police officer, said clearly Canada needs both legislative changes and a more robust policing model to tackle transnational organized crime.

"We've got significant transnational organized crime issues, whether it's related to drug trafficking, money laundering, hired killers, or whatever, right here in Canada, and we do not have the tools, let alone the resources to go after them," Heed said. "These charges are all based on U.S. indictments even when the crimes were committed on Canadian soil."

Both Sturko and Heed said while they welcomed the charges, they don't know if there will be an impact on the extortion crisis in B.C.

SEE BISHNOI ON **A5**



Trained rescue dog Pele, bottom left, helps Burnaby Urban Search and Rescue members scour the rubble after two massive earthquakes in Venezuela on June 24 that killed more than 3,500 people. **BURNABY URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE**

Burnaby rescue dogs are heroes in Venezuela

TIFFANY CRAWFORD

Had it not been for two well-trained B.C. dogs, the story of a Venezuelan toddler pulled from the rubble six days after two powerful earthquakes hit that country may have ended tragically.

But thanks to Pele, a seven-year-old Dutch shepherd, and Reuben, a six-year-old Belgian Malinois, two scrappy rescue dogs from Burnaby, the boy was found alive.

Pele and Reuben made the long journey to Venezuela last week along with seven of their human counterparts from the Burnaby Urban Search and Rescue Team.

"Our dog team is definitely the star of the show," said Ryan Berry, a member of the team that went to Venezuela.

The mission was to join other international canine and rescue crews to help find anyone who may still be trapped, and to search for those who died to help bring closure to families still looking for their loved ones.

Two powerful 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes struck within a minute of each other on June 24, toppling buildings and killing thousands of people.

CBC reported that the death toll had risen to more than 3,500 as of Wednesday.

The Burnaby team went to the La Guaira area north of Caracas, where they searched more than 30 sites.

There, Pele and Reuben helped find 35 people, three of them still alive.

At one of those sites, the dogs — both trained to distinguish between people still alive and bodies — started barking in a way that indicated to the handler that there was a live person nearby.

A team of Venezuelan firefighters were about to give up on the site because they had not heard anything.

But then Burnaby's team offered up Pele and Reuben.

SEE SEARCH AND RESCUE ON **A5**

Sunken charter boat located as rescued passenger dies

JOANNE LEE-YOUNG AND STEPHANIE IP

The company that operated the vessel that sank off the B.C. coast on June 28 actually had two boats on the water that day, according to the distraught mother of the missing captain who is searching for answers.

Richmond resident Ashley Lin, whose son Chen Ming is among six people presumed drowned, told Postmedia News on Wednesday that she had spoken to the owner of the company on the day the vessel sank and the day after, but not since.

Lin said he told her that the company's two boats had gone out, one after another, and weren't more than five

minutes apart from each other. The owner was on the second boat with clients and Lin said he told her he lost sight of the vessel that sank.

"What I understand, and I don't know if it is accurate or not, but what I understand is that, they were following behind it," said Lin.

Lin, who waited along Steveston Harbour for her son to return that night, said her son loved fishing and started going out with the company, Top Vancouver Fishing Charter, as a guest on their trips. Over time, he started taking on different jobs on the boat.

"He went a few times to play," said Lin. "And then, he started going with them, and they said, 'You can come and

fish and you don't have to pay, but you can help out a bit.'"

Her comments came as Richmond RCMP announced Wednesday that the sunken vessel had been located with the help of an underwater drone. Police also confirmed that one of four people who had been rescued had died.

The 2017 Kingfisher boat went down near Roberts Bank. It went by the name "Top Ocean," according to the RCMP.

On board were 10 people — the vessel operator and an assistant, plus eight passengers. Four people were rescued, while six remain unaccounted for and are presumed drowned.

SEE SUNKEN BOAT ON **A5**



PALMER

NDP shovels out excuses for tunnel overruns **A3**

DINING

Murmur packs big tastes into tiny space **A8**

COURTS

Surrogate refused to abort fetus with birth defect **NP1**

SPORTS

Rogers' bad plays highlight need for competition **NP9**