

INDIA'S DIPLOMATS 'UNTOUCHABLE' DESPITE LINKS TO ALLEGED CRIMES

KILLINGS, EXTORTION

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The RCMP's allegations that India's diplomats stationed in Canada are linked to serious, violent criminal activity — including killings, extortions and death threats across Canada — add a striking dimension to the underworld concept of an “untouchable” crime boss.

According to an extraordinary public briefing by senior RCMP officials, last year's murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, an outspoken Canadian Sikh separatist shot dead in Surrey, B.C. — sparking a diplomatic row when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly accused India of involvement in the killing — was not an isolated incident or unexpected overreach by Indian officials or supporters.

There have been many more criminal acts, authorities allege, including other killings and murder plots in Canada over at least two years, linked to the government of India, often using organized crime groups as agents or proxies to attack designated targets or to gather information for possible target selection.

More than 13 times since September 2023, police in Canada felt a threat to the safety of someone was so serious, credible and imminent they had to warn them to take precautions.

Most of the targets were members of the South Asian community, RCMP Commissioner Mike Duheme said, and specifically Sikh members or supporters of a pro-Khalistan movement that advocates for an



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Last year's killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, an outspoken Canadian Sikh separatist, was not an isolated incident, according to the RCMP, who say the government of India has been linked to many more criminal acts in Canada.

independent Sikh state in India. India has denied the allegations.

A national task force in Canada, led by the RCMP with various federal agencies and police in several jurisdictions, was established in February to investigate and co-ordinate responses to related incidents linked to India. The problem continued and, in fact, escalated, said RCMP Assistant Commissioner Brigitte Gauvin.

There have been arrests for some of the specific incidents in various locations, which police would not itemize, citing concern of interfering with ongoing court proceedings.

“In regards to homicide, there are approximately eight individuals that have been

arrested and charged; in relation to extortions there are at least 22 individuals that have been arrested and charged. Some of these have connections to the government of India,” said Gauvin.

One of the killings, according to the Washington Post, is the Sept. 20, 2023 shooting death in Winnipeg of Sukhdool Singh Gill, also known as Sukha Duneke.

Duneke was attacked the day after he appeared on a public list of wanted gangsters released on social media by the National Investigation Agency, a law enforcement agency in India, and two days after Trudeau made public his allegations of Indian government involvement in Nijjar's murder. Indian media reported that Duneke

fled India for Canada in 2017 and was, himself, involved in crime and linked to the Khalistan movement.

The RCMP have not accused diplomats of directly committing violent attacks but link them to chains of events under investigation.

“Investigations have revealed that Indian diplomats and consular officials based in Canada leveraged their official positions to engage in clandestine activities, such as collecting information for the government of India, either directly or through their proxies; and other individuals who acted voluntarily or through coercion,” Duheme said.

The Washington Post said Indian officials have directly been involved in physic-

al threats and coercion on people of Indian descent living in Canada, such as threatening to deny immigration documents as encouragement to snitch on Sikh activists.

The RCMP said the hands-on violence is carried out by several organized crime groups in Canada acting as the Indian government's proxies on the street.

One of the groups involved, the RCMP alleged, is a criminal syndicate led by Lawrence Bishnoi, who is currently in prison in India but maintains an organizational presence and influence in Canada.

After Duneke's slaying, for example, Bishnoi's organization claimed responsibility for the killing on social

media, saying it was retaliation for his past violence.

“We believe that that group is connected to agents of the government of India,” Gauvin said. She declined to name other crime groups allegedly involved, citing ongoing investigations and prosecutions.

A big part of the problem, the RCMP said, was the protected role of members of the international diplomatic corps.

Certain designated diplomats, under international law and conventions, are not subject to the jurisdiction of local courts and other authorities in the country where they are stationed, not only for their professional activities but also in personal affairs, making them, in the language of the street, untouchable.

“There has been some conversations in the past about lifting the immunity for these individuals so we can interview them, and we were not successful in doing so,” Duheme said. He outlined repeated attempts by the RCMP to discuss the situation with national police agencies in India, without success.

That led to the RCMP's unexpected and rare public presentation on Thanksgiving Monday.

“It is extremely concerning,” said Gauvin. “Indian diplomats and consular officials are here to protect the interests of their nationals that are based in Canada and their country's national interest — and not to be part of criminal activity or intimidation or coercion of these individuals.

“That is without a doubt a contravention of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations but also it goes against Canada's values as a society.”

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