

POLICE: Russian and Asian gangs may be flexing muscles in York Region

Markham men arrested in raid

BY CHRISTOPHER DOURIS
Staff Writer

A new combined Russian and Asian gang may be flexing its muscle in York Region.

A couple of Markham residents were among the 16 people arrested by Toronto Police in 16 drug and weapons raids aimed at Eastern European and Asian gangs.

York Regional Police were not involved in the raids Tuesday night and they weren't aware of the six-month investigation that discovered the two ethnic gangs were merging.

Toronto officers seized substantial quantities of heroin, cocaine, marijuana and ecstasy with an estimated street value of \$1 million, as well as several handguns, replica firearms and counterfeit Canadian currency.

York Regional Police were not the only department left out of the loop. A member of the Newmarket RCMP-based Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit, which specializes in Eastern European crime investigations, said he was not aware of the raids either.

His squad, which draws from the RCMP, OPP, Peel, York and Toronto departments and is the only outfit actively investigating Eastern European crime gangs, was not aware the ethnic gangs were working together.

CRIMINAL PARTNERSHIPS

But not everyone was surprised by the emerging trend.

"This is a criminal partnership," organized crime expert Antonio Nicaso said.

Different ethnic-based crime groups working together is the natural evolution of the underworld in Canada. We have 18 different organized crime groups in Canada. The best way (to succeed) is to put together experience and expertise.

That's the trend in a couple of provinces, includ-

ing Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, he said.

"Their first target is their own community. Now they enlarge the spectrum of their activity and their actions, the next step is (to) go out and target the market at large. This is a natural evolution of crime," said Nicaso, who has written a book about organized crime in Canada.

"I predicted this scenario five years ago when people would not believe it."

COMMON LANGUAGE IS MONEY

There is an organization in Montreal called the Consortium, which has representation from the Sicilian Mafia, Hells Angels motorcycle gang, the Colombian Cartel and the West-End Gang. It fixes the price of drugs in the city, Nicaso said.

"This is a very scary trend," he said. "Before, you faced one organized crime group at a time. Now there is no language barrier any more."

He explained that all the gangs in Canada use English.

"They have a common language and a common goal, money."

Asian gangs and the Russian mob have been active in York Region for the past decade.

In March, police raided 16 homes and businesses in Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Newmarket and other GTA communities as part of an investigation of what investigators called leading figures in Eastern European organized crime.

Among the crimes linked to the Russian mob were a murder in Newmarket in 1993 and an arson in the exclusive Woodland Acres subdivision in Vaughan in 1994.

Last year, York Regional Police officers were warned to use "extreme caution" when investigating incidents that could be linked to Asian gangs.

At the time, police said the level of violence was increasing in gang-related incidents. These include large-scale brawls, home invasions and carjackings.

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