

Wrong-headed investigation

Written By TOM CLARIDGE

OFFICIALLY, AT LEAST, the investigation into the mass shooting on Toronto's Danforth Avenue, is being headed by Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (SIU), the civilian oversight agency appointed in 1990 that's responsible for investigating circumstances involving police that have resulted in a death, serious injury, or allegations of sexual assault of a civilian.

The product of widespread criticism of some Toronto police shootings of mentally ill persons, the SIU is obviously the appropriate agency to investigate most such incidents. But the actions of 29-year-old Faisal Hussain in killing two girls and wounding 13 others in the Greektown district on the night of July 22 did not fit the stereotypical interreaction between police and a civilian that required the SIU's intervention.

For one thing, an autopsy has confirmed that the shooter committed suicide when confronted by two Toronto Police officers. But far more important was the (to us, at least) obvious fact that the shooting incident was a terrorist act that required the investigation to be headed by terrorism experts, be they police or members of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS).

As we see it, the shooting that took the lives of Reese Fallon, 18, and Julianna Kozis, 10, and April's van rampage on Yonge Street that took 10 lives were both acts of terrorism that differed only in the apparent sources of the enagement that led to the 12 deaths in a city that had never before experienced anything of the sort.

At present, little has been officially disclosed concerning the shooter, with no mention being made at the outset that his family was Muslim.

What is known is that Faisal Hussain was born to Canadian parents of Pakistani origin and that a statement issued on behalf of the family said he was psychotic and depressed throughout his life, and that the family had been struggling through the death of his sister in a car accident and his brother's ongoing coma caused by a drug overdose. A neighbour said the shooter was not religious and had not participated in Friday prayers.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Public Safety has said there was no known connection between the shooting and national security and that the killer was not on any federal watchlist.

On Monday, Toronto Police Chief Mark Saunders said his investigators were "aggressively" trying to understand what sparked the rampage. "What was done was incredibly brutal - the loss of life, the amount of people that were shot and the impact it has on the city is tremendous - regardless of motive," he told CBC Radio's Metro Morning.

Chief Saunders said there wasn't an easy answer and it would take investigators a "tremendous amount of time" to determine one. Officers were probing the gunman's background and where he might have obtained his weapon.

Meanwhile, the Toronto Sun has been publishing a lot from anonymous police sources, including an assertion that the gun and perhaps the many rounds of ammunition the shooter carried had been stolen from a gun store in Saskatoon at a time when the now-comatose brother was living there.

The bits of information would seem to confirm the need for expertise in several areas, expertise that should be found at CSIS or perhaps the RCMP.

For one thing, even if the shooter wasn't on a watchlist, what about his associates? And what might computer experts determine by probing any computers he may have been using?

Thus far, all we've learned (unofficially) is that a police search of the Hussain family's apartment turned up another firearm and led

to seizure of one computer. That leads us to wonder whether the parents were aware of their sons' activities, and if so whether they had tried to intervene.

In the circumstances, we think the SIU should immediately yield its leadership role in the investigation to the experts capable of determining the root causes of this terrorist act.