

8 suspects seek bail in passport forgery case

By Dale Brazao
TORONTO STAR

A bail hearing was to continue today for seven men and a woman charged in connection with an international forgery ring that allegedly made and sold fake Canadian passports by the hundreds.

The ring sold the phony passports in the Sri Lankan, Chinese and Guyanese communities for between \$2,500 and \$5,000 each, police say.

The forgery charges were laid after officers from Canada and the United States raided several Scarborough premises at dawn Wednesday.

Undercover officers had earlier bought forged passports during the eight-month investigation codenamed Operation Ostrich.

"The quality (of passport forgery) was so good, it was hard to tell it from the real stuff," a source said.

The gang had the means to produce everything from passports to drivers' licences, Ontario health cards and credit cards, the source added.

The counterfeiters apparently worked on demand, opening up shop when necessary, a source said.

The Metro-based gang recruited people to buy genuine Canadian passports. In one case, a woman obtained a passport for her 4-month-old baby then sold it to the gang.

These passports were then supplied to higher levels of the organization, said RCMP Corporal John Leontowicz, co-ordinator of the joint-forces group.

Legal passport for baby sold to counterfeiters

Wednesday's raids followed an eight-month investigation by the RCMP, Ontario and Metro police forces and agents from the Buffalo office of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The genuine passports bought on the street were handed over to a forger/printer who used them to produce counterfeiters.

"Persons buying the forged Canadian passports would utilize (them) for the purpose of smuggling persons into Canada," Leontowicz said, adding the Metro-based gang had a worldwide distribution network.

All eight arrested face charges of conspiracy to utter forged documents. Seven face charges relating to forged passports; the other is charged in connection with forged credit cards.

Scarborough-residents charged are Vigneswaran Chelliah, 37, of Mornelle Crt.; Baskaran Visvalingam, 30, of Berner Trail; Kumar Pialli, 29, of Rensburg Dr.; and Rubavathy Shelliah, 33, and Thavendran Nadarasa, 34, of Glenstroke Ave.

Also charged are Andy Persaud, also known as Andy Chetram, 36, of Dellbrook Ave., Pickering, and Wei-Liang (Tony) Tu, 30, of Raphael Ave., Mississauga.

Nasim Kazmi, 32, of Adanac Dr. and Persaud are also charged with conspiracy to utter forged credit cards.

A warrant has been issued for Gnanamanogran Satkunasingam, 33, of Glenstroke Ave.