

Inmate severely beaten in B.C. jail; Victim linked to Red Scorpion gang

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VANCOUVER - A man linked to the Red Scorpion gang was severely beaten in a B.C. jail and piggybacked from cell to cell by other prisoners to avoid detection by guards, the Vancouver Sun has learned.

Hanif Emambakhsh, 21, suffered a broken neck in the attack at the Port Coquitlam, B.C., North Fraser institution for inmates awaiting trial.

The Sun also has learned that someone linked to another gang has been depositing money in inmates' jail accounts to arrange to get people beaten. However, it's unclear whether that was the motive in this case.

Coquitlam RCMP Sergeant Barb Thornborough said police were called in Sept. 6 as soon as jail staff realized what had happened to Emambakhsh. There are no closed-circuit camera views of the cells, though they are set up in public areas in the jail.

"There was an incident that happened on the sixth. It did involve gangsters," Sgt. Thornborough said. "We are still investigating."

She said Emambakhsh had surgery and remains in hospital, but is expected to recover.

Other inmates in the jail are not co-operating with police, Sgt. Thornborough said.

Emambakhsh was in jail awaiting trial on charges of break and enter, and assault with a weapon related to an April 2009 home invasion in Surrey, B.C.

He was sentenced last May to three months in jail for break and entering and possessing a weapon for a dangerous purpose in connection with a July 2010 botched home invasion.

Since the August shooting in Kelowna, B.C., of Red Scorpion Jonathan Bacon, Hells Angel Larry Amero and Independent Soldier James Riach, tensions among rival gangs have increased both on the street and inside provincial and federal jails. The assault is another example of escalating gang violence within B.C. jails, says the union representing guards at the institution.

Dean Purdy of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union said he couldn't comment specifically on last week's attack. But he said his members are concerned about the conflicts between gangs in jails creating a "tinderbox" environment. "Gang violence within our jails is on the increase and is of real concern to us."

Jess Gunnarson of B.C. Corrections confirmed in an email Tuesday that the assault is under review and that police were called.

He said there have been 106 prisoner-against-prisoner assaults at North Fraser this year alone.

"During this same time period, there have been a total of 387 inmate-against-inmate assaults in our nine correctional centres," Mr. Gunnarson said.

Yet, B.C. Corrections does not track the number of jail beatings "where gang affiliations are suspected or known to be at play."

Mr. Gunnarson also said anyone can deposit money into a prisoner's jail account as long as they have identification and regardless of whether the funder has a criminal record or gang affiliation.

Last week, Superintendent Tom McCluskie, head of the Gang Task Force, warned of escalating gang tensions on the streets and the likelihood of retaliation for the brazen daytime shooting in Kelowna that left Bacon dead.

Supt. McCluskie said his officers were on high alert and doing everything in their power to head off further violence.

He said the attack in North Fraser "clearly demonstrates that tensions still exist between gangs," whether they are in jail or in the community.

"When these guys are incarcerated, it actually puts them into an isolation where they can't get away and everybody knows where they are. Most of the time outside jail, they run around and hide," Supt. McCluskie said.