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'Let him come back home'

Local Muslims call for return of detainee

JOEL KOM
AND DEBORAH TETLEY
CALGARY HERALD

Members of Calgary's Muslim community are questioning Ottawa's silence surrounding the case of a Canadian man being held in Afghanistan.

It was a little more than a week ago that Sohail Qureshi, a 24-year-old University of Calgary computer science grad, stepped off a bus in Kabul and, within hours, became the first Canadian in almost five years to be detained for alleged ties to the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Since then, diplomats and Canadian politicians — amid charges of detainees being mistreated after Canadian forces handed them over to Afghan authorities — have said very little about the case, even though Qureshi has not been charged with any crime.

"He's sitting in a jail and he hasn't been charged," said Nagah Hage, chair of the Muslim Council of Calgary. "Put pressure on the Afghan government to release him to the Canadian government. Let him come back home."

Hage said his community was stunned by the arrest, but many are still waiting for more details to come out. Qureshi's

family are strong community members, he added. "He's one of ours, he's a Canadian. Unless he's charged, he's got no business sitting in a cell."

NAGAH HAGE,
MUSLIM COUNCIL
OF CALGARY

Qureshi's fate could take months, even years, to be determined, say experts. Meanwhile, the matter has yet to garner a mention in the House of Commons and government MPs declined to return calls from the Herald this week.

Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay did bring up the case of two other imprisoned Canadians in the House on Friday, saying he was "very concerned" about allegations of mistreatment in Saudi Arabia, where the two brothers from Quebec are being held on murder charges.

MacKay was the only politician to comment after Qureshi's arrest.

"At this point in time, for privacy reasons, we're not at liberty to say a lot about this case, but it is somewhat unusual," he said last week in Halifax.

He was alluding to the fact that it's a Canadian citizen suspected of forging links to terrorism, allegedly travelling abroad to do so. According to reports, Qureshi was acting strangely after getting off a bus in Kabul. He was then arrested on suspicions of plotting to support the insurgency, reports said, though details on what was planned have varied.

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Hit-and-run jail time doesn't satisfy family

DARYL SLADE
CALGARY HERALD

Red Bray can't help but become emotional when he considers how the courts are sentencing hit-and-run drivers.

Bray, 89, lost his wife Lillian when she was struck in a crosswalk near the couple's Varsity home on Aug. 30, 1995. The man who struck his wife and then fled the scene was sentenced to one year behind bars and a one-year driving prohibition.

"The situation with the justice system is one you have little control over," he says. "Hit and run happened so often over the last five or six years and it's upsetting to everybody. In a case where it has hit so close to home, it's even more upsetting."

Bray is speaking about the case

of Colin Jones, who was sentenced last week to an unprecedented 30 months in a federal prison for fleeing the accident that killed Lindsay Giacomelli two years ago.

"I've had discussions about the two and a half years (Jones) got," Bray said. "It used to be a year. It never was enough and still isn't enough."

Lindsay Giacomelli was on her way to buy a birthday present for her boyfriend across the street at Southcentre when she stepped off the curb onto Bonaventure Drive just after 8 p.m. on March 17, 2005.

Seconds later, the 20-year-old University of Calgary student's body lay in a crumpled heap on the pavement.

It's what happened next that disgusts her family.

The driver of the red Dodge

Durango SUV, identified as Jones following an extensive police investigation, stopped momentarily before manoeuvring around the body and driving off into the night, according to witnesses.

Had Jones stopped, the family could better cope with their loss and make sense of the accident, said Gerry Giacomelli, Lindsay's father.

Jones, 50, whom his lawyer, Balfour Der, described in court as "a productive and good citizen," had been drinking that St. Patrick's Day at a downtown pub. After the crash, he went home, ate pizza and watched movies with his stepchildren before setting in motion what Court of Queen's Bench Justice Allen Sulatycky described as a "complex scheme" to evade police.

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Courtesy,
Giacomelli family

Lindsay Giacomelli, 20, was killed by a hit-and-run driver who later tried to flee the country.

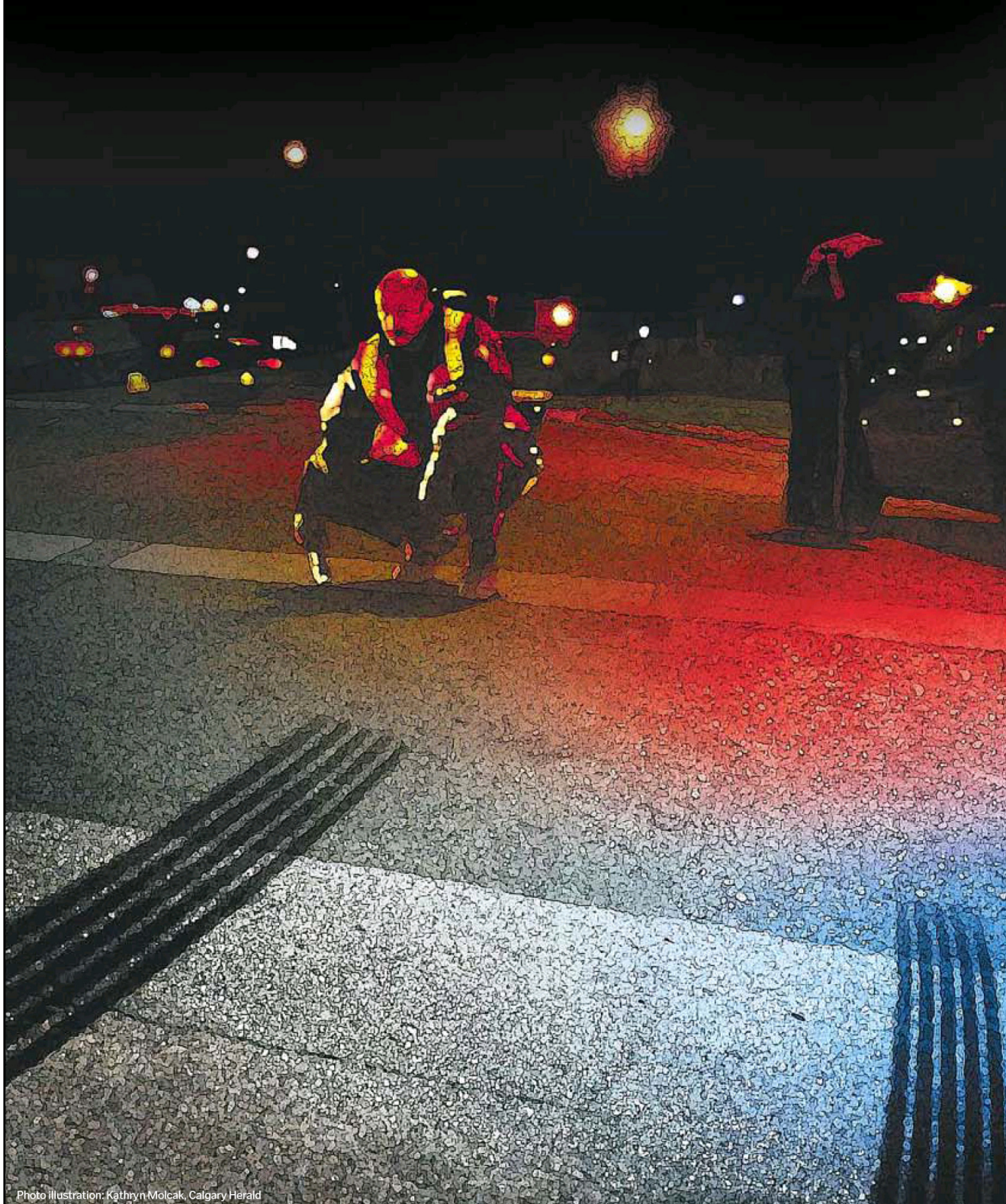


Photo illustration: Kathryn Molcak, Calgary Herald