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ARTS LIFE

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Woody, Buzz and the rest of the toys are back in town.

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COMMENT

Shameful subplot for grim saga

No excuse for tragicomic CSIS, RCMP rivalry

JOHN IVISON
in Ottawa

The long-awaited report into the largest mass murder in Canadian history makes clear that far more victims than just the 329 passengers and crew were created by the bombing of Air India Flight 182 a quarter-century ago — namely, the families whose lives were devastated not only by the bombing but by the Canadian government's "callous" reaction.

Justice John Major blamed "a cascading series of errors" by the government and its agencies, both before and after the bombing, and suggested the families are owed an official apology and compensation. To his credit, Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister, said his government will "respond positively" to those recommendations.

Anyone who reads through Justice Major's report will quickly grasp why the RCMP and CSIS fought for years to put off a public inquiry into the bombing. If it were not so tragic, it would be comedic — as if Maxwell Smart was running CSIS surveillance of Sikh extremists and Inspector Clouseau was tracking terror threats for the RCMP.

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TRAGIC FAILURE
Incompetence
Cascading series of errors
TURF WARS
Excessive secrecy
Inattention
Lax security culture
INEFFECTIVE
Internal strife
ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTIONS
Inexcusable

How massive intelligence failure led to 331 deaths

BY ADRIAN HUMPHREYS

In the fall of 1984, three men secretly met to discuss a dark plot, placing a bomb aboard an Air India passenger jet in Montreal. A briefcase full of cash was shown as proof of funding and intent.

Not long afterward, two of those three men had independently snitched to police. "There's a plot to put a bomb on an airplane, right?" a Vancouver police officer asked one of the men during his interview with him.

"Yeah.... Maybe two," the man replied.

"What kind of airplane?" he was asked.

"Air India 747."

"Is this going to be leaving from Montreal?"

"Yes."

With such early warnings and potential inside access, perhaps the most astounding aspect of the Air India tragedy is that it happened at all. Alas, seven months later, on June 23, 1985, a conspiracy of failure unfolded: Air India Flight 182 departed Montreal and exploded mid-flight, killing all 329 passengers and crew. (Another bomb exploded as it was transferred through Narita Airport, killing two baggage handlers.)

Fumbling the early warnings from the two informants, however, was only the beginning. Many costly and humiliating mistakes — correcting any of which might have saved all on board — are documented in the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Air India bombing released yesterday.

"This remains the largest mass murder in Canadian history, and was the result of a cascading series of errors," the report says.

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