



DRUGNET IN PURSUIT OF CYBERSPACE DRUG DEALERS

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Read excerpts from grand jury testimony.

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... partners tune out Bansals

WIRETAPS from A14

Aaron Carp, the eager, 25-year-old IRS agent. Carp opened a thin file — spreadsheets of Akhil's bank records.

The numbers, grouped by account, showed tens of thousands of dollars moving every few days. It was good work, Pavlock told Carp, but just a beginning. There was no pattern. Or apparent motive, or hard evidence of a crime.

Carp was stumped. What should he do?

Pavlock lived for such moments — an agent who wanted to talk spreadsheets. They spoke for two hours. "OK, now what?" Carp said.

They would subpoena U.S. banks and begin using diplomatic channels to seek foreign bank records. This meant getting cooperation from as many 10 countries. That might take months.

Pavlock didn't have months. Given the public-health threat — addictive pills sold willy-nilly to anyone with a credit card — prosecutors wanted a speedy indictment, maybe by late March.

Finding the money was vital: First, bank records would help prove that the Bansals were drug dealers on a wide scale. Second, the records could prove money-laundering, a charge that would increase any prison sentence. Third, money found could be seized, stripping the Bansals of all profits. Fourth, and not least, agencies seizing the money — millions — would get to keep it.

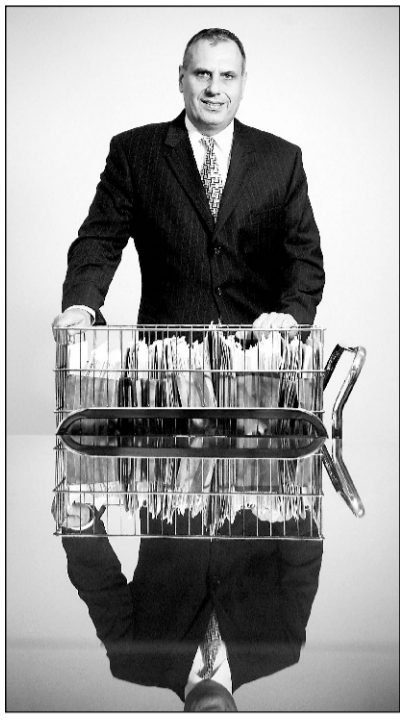
ROXBOROUGH

Akhil scanned his latest e-mail and fumed.

It came from his best client, Corrina Meherer in Costa Rica.

"There is a leak within your organization," she warned.

She was getting spam, she explained, from a new Web site, one that shipped pills from a familiar address in Queens, N.Y. — 5028 Uto-



MICHAEL BRYANT / Inquirer Staff Photographer
James Pavlock, a money-laundering expert and prosecutor, guided the agents unraveling Bansal finances.

pia Parkway.

David Armstrong's house! Armstrong was a thief! Akhil's shipper was stealing his pills, selling them through his own Web site.

Akhil resisted the urge to confront Armstrong. He needed more than suspicion. He needed irrefutable proof.

There was only one way to get that.

QUEENS

Akhil waited a week, until Armstrong traveled to India.

Akhil used his key to enter the pill depot — the one he paid Armstrong to supervise. It was night. The place was empty.

Akhil walked past the packaging tables, the empty boxes and the pill shelves. He stopped to pour himself a Coke, then entered Armstrong's of-

ice and flipped on the computer.

When the Windows password screen appeared, he moved the cursor over a green icon. After a second, the computer displayed a password hint.

"Sequence," it said.

Akhil stared at the screen, sipping his Coke. Sequence? He tried a series of dates, birthdays, numbers he could associate with Armstrong. Nothing. After a while, he figured, what the hell, and typed "12345."

It worked.

Inside, Armstrong had password-protected his e-mail, but Akhil was ready.

He took a thumb drive he had brought from Philadelphia and plugged it into the back of the computer. The thumb drive automatically began a program called Password Recovery 123.

Within seconds — almost magically — the asterisks hiding the Armstrongs' password fell away. Akhil was in.

He copied the files, then took a quarter-size device called a Key Catcher and connected it between the computer and the cord running to the keyboard. This tiny spy machine would record every stroke Armstrong typed.

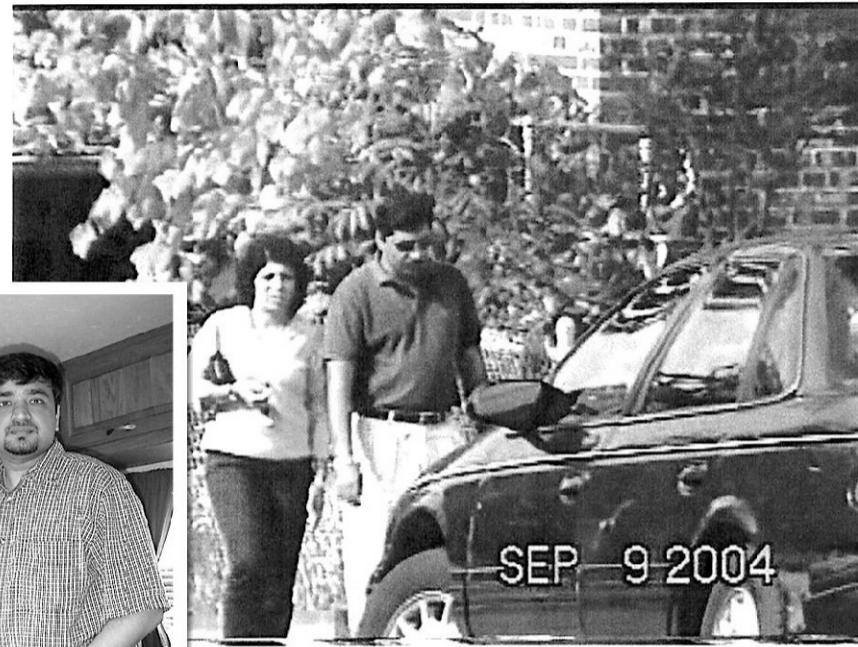
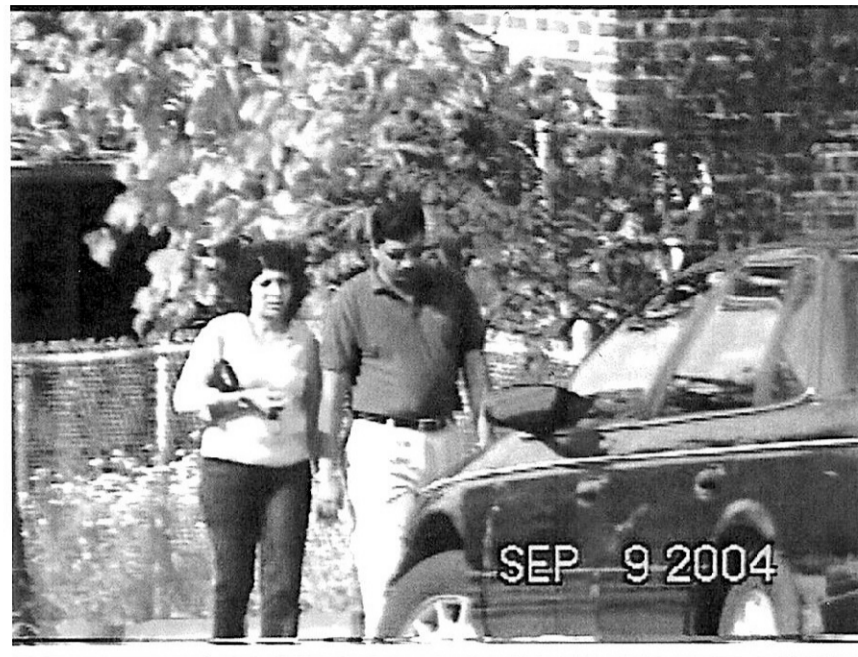
It was as good as a wiretap.

What had taken federal agents weeks — and money and court orders and software headaches — to accomplish, Akhil pulled off in an hour.

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TOMORROW: FAMILY FEUDS

Arguing over money and power; finding a smoking gun.

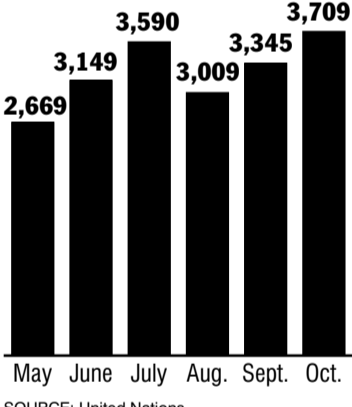


Warned of a leak in his operation, Akhil Bansal, left, raided and tapped the computer of David Armstrong, above with wife Elizabeth. The Armstrongs were Akhil's shippers in Queens, N.Y., and he suspected David of stealing from him.



Rising Civilian Toll

Civilians killed since May by violence in Iraq.



A woman holds her 2-year-old grandson, Jafer Mohammed, one of last month's fatalities.



MOHAMMED ADNAN / Associated Press

U.N.: Civilian death toll in Iraq hit a high in Oct.

IRAQ from A1

and the Medico-Legal Institute in Baghdad. The previous monthly record was 3,590 for July.

Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh called the U.N. report "inaccurate and exaggerated" because it was not based on official government reports.

Asked in a telephone interview if any such report existed, Dabbagh said that one "was not available yet, but it would be published later."

The U.N. report said that Iraq's heavily armed and increasingly brutal Shiite militias were gaining strength and influence and that torture was rampant, despite the Iraqi government's vow to reduce human-rights abuses.

"Hundreds of bodies continued to appear in different areas of Baghdad — handcuffed, blindfolded and bearing signs of torture and execution-style killing," said the report by the U.N. Assistance Mission for Iraq, or UNAMI. "Many witnesses reported that perpetrators wear militia attire and even police or army uniforms."

The two primary militias in Iraq are the military wings of the country's strongest Shiite political groups on which Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is heavily dependent. He has repeatedly rejected U.S. demands that he disband the heavily armed groups, especially the Mahdi Army of anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

"I think the type of violence is different in the past few months," Gianni Magazzeni, the UNAMI chief in Baghdad, told a news conference. "There was a great increase in sectarian violence in activities by terrorists and insurgents, but also by militias and criminal gangs."

He noted that religious clashes have been common since Sunni Arab insurgents bombed a major Shiite shrine Feb. 22 in Samarra, north of Baghdad.

UNAMI's Human Rights Office continued to receive reports that Iraqi police and security forces have either been infiltrated by or act in collusion with militias, the report said.

It said that while sectarian violence is the main cause of the civilian killings, Iraqis also continue to be the victims of terrorist acts, roadside bombs and drive-by shootings, while some have been caught in the cross fire between rival gangs.

Access to the U.N. news conference was blocked for many because the main entrance to the fortified Green Zone in central Baghdad was closed as U.S. forces checked for a bomb in the area, a U.S. military official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information.

Yesterday, assassins killed a bodyguard of Iraq's parliament speaker one day after a bomb exploded in the hot-tempered politician's motorcade as it drove into a parking lot inside the Green Zone.

The bomb attack on the motorcade of Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, a hard-line Sunni Arab nationalist reviled by many Shiites, was a major security breach in the heavily guarded compound that houses the U.S. and British Embassies and the Iraqi government.

Post-Taliban, life is still hard for Afghan women

A government minister fights for change in a land where tradition can be harsh for females.

By Alisa Tang
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan — Five years after the Taliban's fall, women are not beaten if they leave home without a male relative. Girls can go to school, and a quarter of Afghan parliamentarians are women — as mandated by law.

But life remains bleak: Many women and girls face domestic violence and forced marriage in this conservative, violence-plagued country. In many provinces where the government wields little power, life for women remains as it was during the Taliban's rule.

"We've had three decades of war in Afghanistan, which have had very bad consequences for women,"

Women's Affairs Minister Hussn Banu Ghazanfar said. "It takes time to solve these problems."

Ghazanfar, the fourth female minister since the fall of the Taliban, was appointed by President Hamid Karzai in August. But, like her predecessors, she is up against provincial warlords who continue to refuse women and girls the right to education and even to leave their homes.

While she enjoys Karzai's support and was approved for her post in a parliamentary vote, her ministry is regarded as having "minimal influence on government policy," according to a recent report from the international rights organization Womankind.

Ghazanfar did not comment directly on her prospects for success, focusing instead on the ways she is working to strengthen her ministry.

She said the most pressing issues facing women were vio-

lence and insufficient education, particularly in the rural areas that are home to most of Afghanistan's 30 million people. Only about 15 percent of Afghan women are literate.

According to the report by Womankind, domestic violence affects "an overwhelming majority" of Afghan women and girls.

Ghazanfar said she was trying to draft laws to make violence against women illegal, but the legislation must be approved by many former warlords who are now lawmakers in the Afghan parliament.

"The elimination of violence against women does not work if we just conduct seminars and workshops," Ghazanfar said. "If we create specific laws to protect women from violence, women will have more confidence."

Legislation is also in the works to eliminate forced marriages and to create safe shelters for homeless women.

And the ministry is working with international donors to provide vocational training for women in cooking, tailoring and handicraft-making.

Unlike most Afghan women, Ghazanfar is not married and has no children. But she, too, was sequestered to her home during the reign of the Taliban, which came to power in the late 1990s and was forced out by the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 for hosting Osama bin Laden.

The 49-year-old former linguistics and literature dean at Kabul University spent those years in her large library and translated four books from Russian into Dari, one of Afghanistan's main languages.

Ghazanfar says she hopes that all Afghan women one day will have access to education.

"It's not important which position I have, but it's more important that I'm working for women — the most needy women of the world," Ghazanfar said. "I'm really happy here, working for the women of Afghanistan."



Hussn Banu Ghazanfar is women's affairs minister.

On Other Fronts

The U.S. military yesterday reported the deaths of two American soldiers on Tuesday. One was killed by a roadside bomb, and the other died from noncombat causes. So far this month, 49 American service members have died in Iraq.

Iraqi police officials said at least 52 bodies were discovered throughout Baghdad yesterday. Among the dead was Raad Jaafar Hamadi, a reporter for the state-run al-Sabah newspaper, who was killed in a drive-by shooting. The death raised to at least 92 the number of journalists killed in Iraq since the war began.

Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett of Britain said her country's forces may hand over security responsibilities in Basra to Iraqi forces by the spring. It was the first time a government minister had set even a vague target for handing over security in Basra, but officials stressed this was a hope, not a timetable.

SOURCES: Associated Press, McClatchy Newspapers