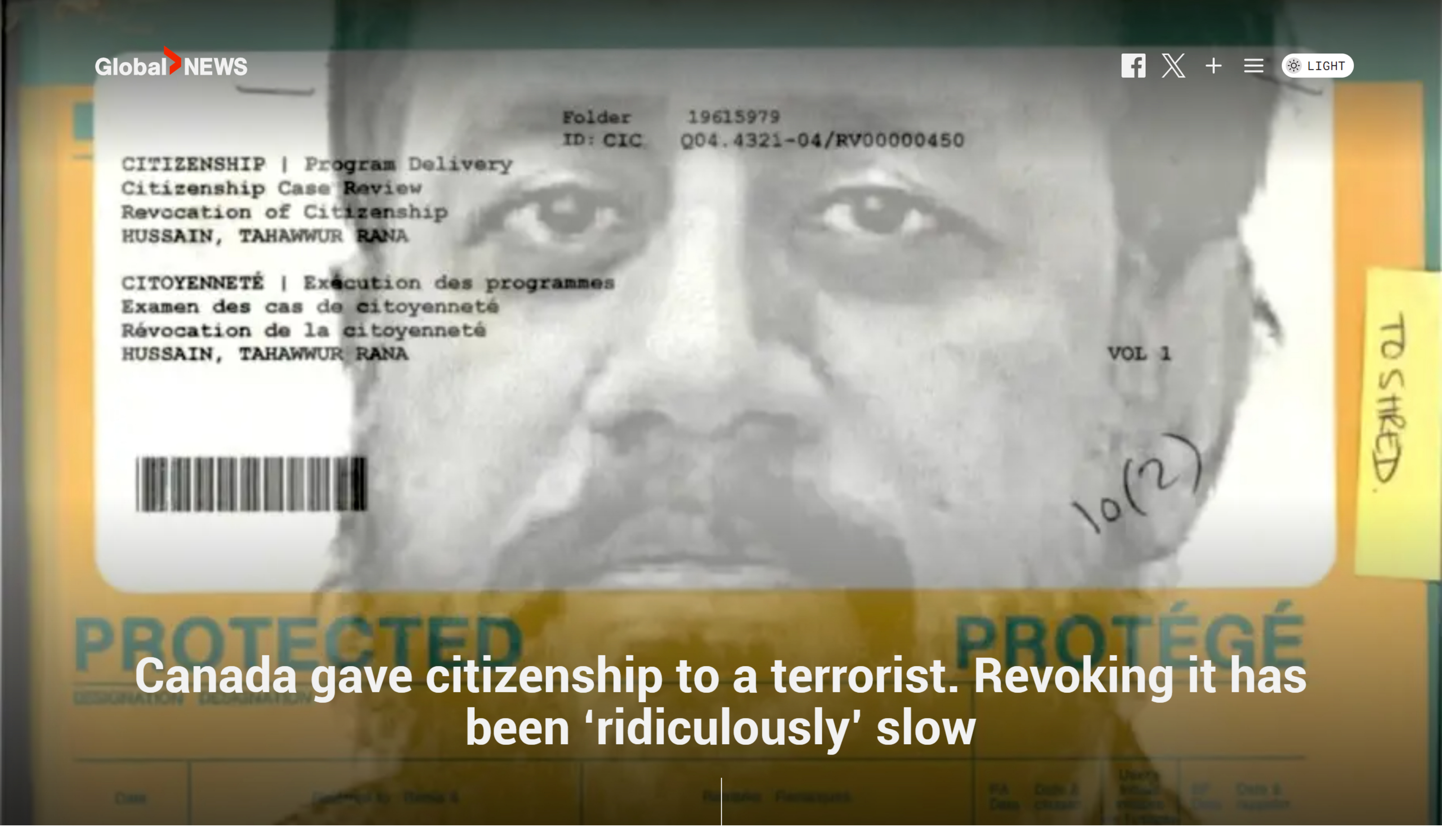

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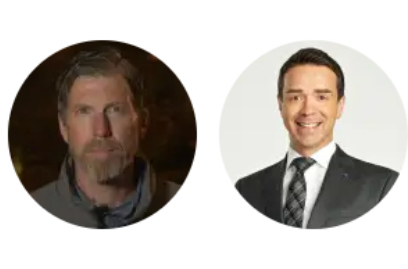
VOL 1

Canada gave citizenship to a terrorist. Revoking it has been 'ridiculously' slow



By **Stewart Bell** & **Jeff Semple** • **Global News**
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On May 31, 2001, a former Pakistan army captain named Tahawwur Hussain Rana swore the oath of citizenship in front of an Ottawa judge, who anointed him a Canadian.

But he is a fraudulent Canadian, according to hundreds of pages of government documents obtained by Global News that allege he obtained his citizenship through "deception."

The documents show that an RCMP investigation uncovered considerable evidence that Rana lied on his citizen application form by claiming he resided in Canada, when he did not.

Nonetheless, immigration officials gave him not just citizenship but also a passport — which he used to fly to Mumbai, India to allegedly **mastermind** a terrorist attack that killed 166 people.

Twenty-five years after Rana swore at his citizenship ceremony to "fulfill my duties as a Canadian," the federal government is still trying to undo the supposed mistake.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has asked the Federal Court to revoke his citizenship on the grounds that he became a Canadian through "misrepresentation."

The case, however, is still unresolved.

Now awaiting trial in India for what police describe as his key role in the group behind one of the world's deadliest terrorist plots, Rana remains a citizen of Canada.

Acquiring Canadian citizenship is a relatively straightforward process familiar to millions. Revoking it from those who never should have received it takes considerably longer.

A Global News review of cases that have come before the court over the past two years reveals that it routinely takes more than a decade to rescind citizenship from those who obtained it through fraud.

Even when immigration officials appear to have substantial evidence that foreign nationals obtained citizenship by submitting false information, the process is plodding.

Canada's immigration department declined to disclose its "processing timelines" or discuss individual cases, but a Global News review identified 11 handled by the Federal Court since Jan. 1, 2024.

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In almost every instance, the time between the start of an investigation and revocation was at least 10 years — and some are still ongoing.

The only one that took less time involved a Filipino man who became a Canadian using a fake name. Revoking his citizenship was an eight-year exercise. A court challenge that was denied in 2024 lasted another year.

Canada is trying to revoke the citizenship it granted to Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a convicted terrorist. **Federal Court**

The most common reason cited by the government for rescinding citizenship was that it was obtained under a false identity, according to the Global News review.

For example, when a Sri Lankan became a citizen in 2000 using the persona of a dead relative, and then married his cousin, it took 11 years to fix, plus two more for a court appeal.

In another case, a Canadian admitted in 2011 that he was paid to marry a Chinese woman and sponsor her for citizenship. Her appeals were only exhausted in 2026.

The cases also involved citizenship that officials said was wrongly granted to those who had concealed their involvement in crimes and war crimes.

The slowest and perhaps most harrowing recent case involved a former Guatemalan army officer who became a citizen in 1992 after hiding his role in a massacre.

Jorge Vinicio Sosa Orantes was a commander of a 1982 military operation that executed the entire population of Las Dos Erres, Guatemala.

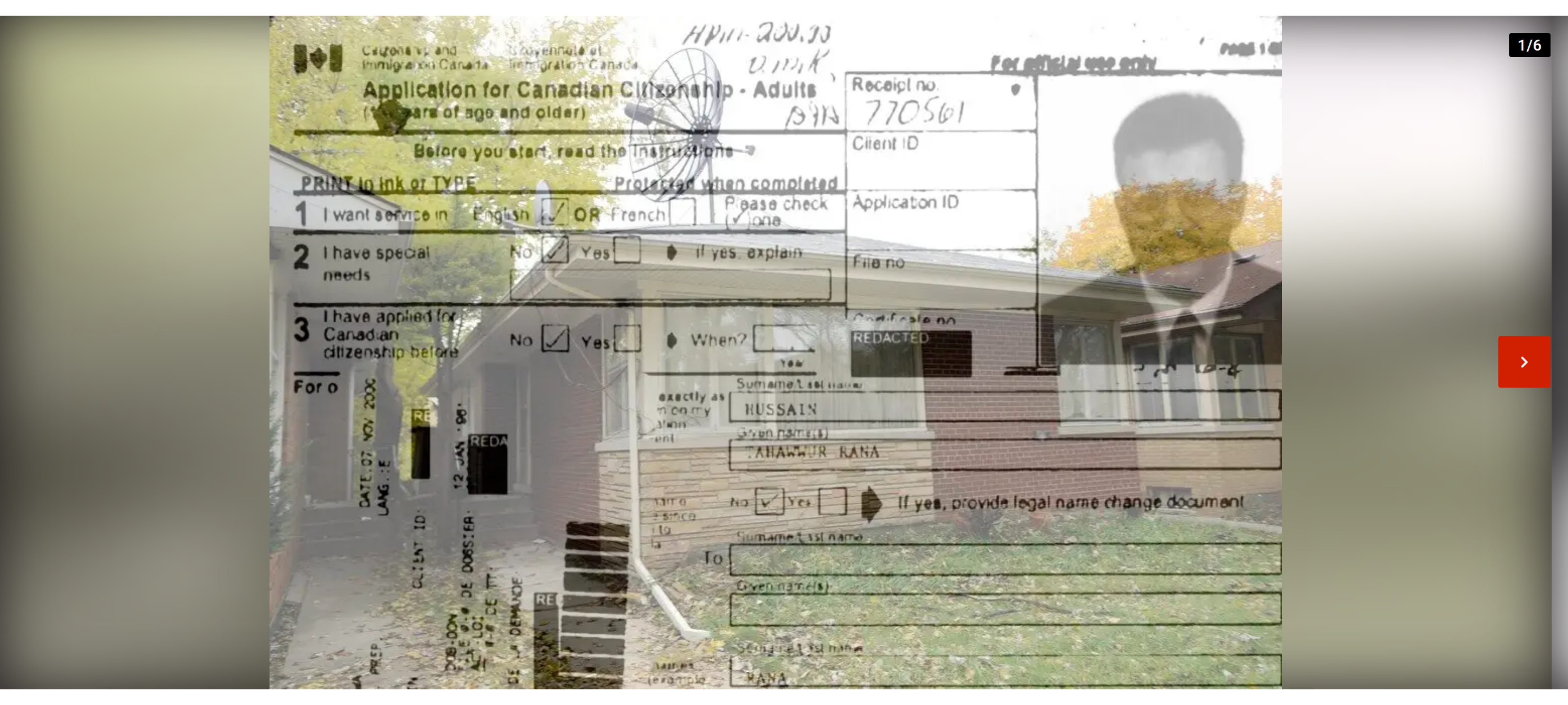
The soldiers bashed infants against trees; others were killed with sledgehammers. Girls were raped and executed. Men and boys were hanged from trees, according to the Federal Court.

To finish off any survivors, Sosa fired his gun into the well where the bodies had been dumped and also tossed in a grenade, the Federal Court ruled. The death toll was 350.

"When the patrol unit left Las Dos Erres, the village was effectively wiped off the face of the earth," wrote the Canadian judge who ruled on Sosa's role.

Although Sosa was identified as a suspect in the massacre in 2000, his citizenship was only revoked in February of this year.

Why so long to undo citizenship?



TIMELINE: 2000 — Rana applies for citizenship, claiming he lives in Ottawa. RCMP says he was actually living in this Chicago home. Click on right to advance slideshow.

"It's utterly ridiculous," said Toronto immigration lawyer Sergio Karas, who wrote an analysis of the Sosa case for the **International Bar Association** website.

"The general problem with all these cases is they are very time-intensive, and the government resources are finite," he said.

"I don't think the government has the capacity to allocate enough resources to these types of cases to make them move faster."

But Canadian law has also been through significant changes, starting in 2015, when the Conservatives made it easier to revoke citizenship.

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government brought in what it called a "more streamlined" process that moved more quickly.

Under the new rules, citizenship could be revoked for terrorism, treason, espionage and taking up arms against Canada's military.

During the 2015 federal election, the Liberals made that into a campaign issue, using the slogan "a Canadian is a Canadian."

In 2017, the courts struck down parts of the new law, and the Liberal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau changed the rules again in 2018.

Citizenship can now be taken away only for fraud or misrepresentation, and only the immigration minister or Federal Court can do so.

"They went to one extreme, and they had to bounce back and finally come up with something which I think is workable," said Amandeep Hayer, vice-chair of the Canadian Bar Association of B.C.'s immigration law section.

But the shifts in legislation meant that cases that were underway before the various amendments had to be stopped and restarted, adding more time to the process.

"The biggest issue would be just the constant changing legislation, going from a process where there was very limited due process rights … to what we have now, which is a fully laid out process at the Federal Court," Hayer said.

"The government has to present their case if the individual chooses, they have to provide evidence via the Canada Evidence Act," he said.

"It goes a long way to protect people's rights, but getting to this stage took so long and that's just delayed a lot of these cases."

The United Kingdom says it has **annulled the citizenship of more than 1,500 Britons** since 2010,mostly for terrorism and fraud.

The U.S. filed **de-naturalization cases against 12 people** on Friday they accused of hiding their involvement in terrorism and other crimes when they acquired American citizenship.

In Canada, revocation cases are "very rare," Hayer said.

Government data released to Global News shows that two dozen have occurred since the start of 2024. An additional seven cases remain before the Federal Court.

Officials reviewed another 92 cases during that time period but decided not to take away citizenship due to "personal circumstances," according to the data.

An immigration department spokesperson called them an "important tool for maintaining the integrity of Canadian citizenship."

"The government is committed to procedural fairness and does not take the revocation of citizenship or the decision to remove someone from Canada lightly," she said.

"The Citizenship Act provides numerous steps to ensure fairness has been integrated into the process."

Rana's lawyer declined to comment.

Citizen 7506723

Anti-terrorist squad takes cover during the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai, India, that killed 166. (AP Photo/Rajanish Kakade).

A trove of documents obtained by Global News detail the RCMP's investigation into how Tahawwur Hussain Rana obtained citizenship in 2001.

When he applied for citizenship in 2000, Rana claimed to be a resident of Ottawa, and swore he had only left Canada once, for a six-day trip to London.

Upon becoming a citizen in 2001, he even requested a letter from his Member of Parliament congratulating him on becoming a Canadian, the documents show.

But his story began to unravel in 2009, when he was identified as a suspect in the attack in Mumbai, India, the previous year by the Pakistani terror group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba.

Two Canadians died in the assault: Elizabeth Russell, a former Montreal nurse, and her travelling companion, Michael Moss, a Montreal physician.

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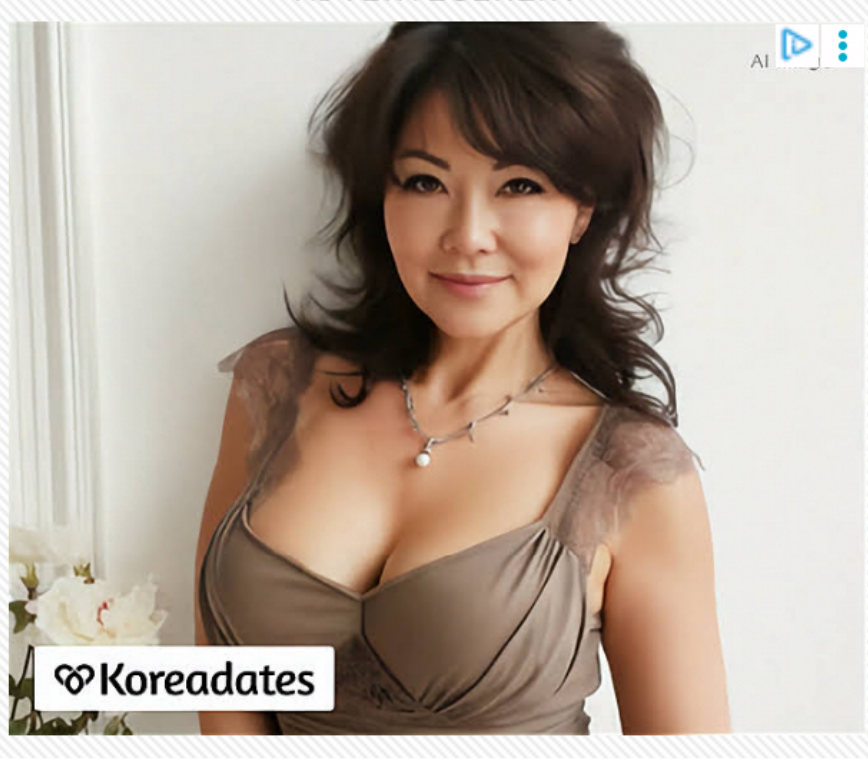

At least two other Canadians were wounded, including Michael Rudder, a Montreal actor who was dining at the Oberoi Hotel when gunmen stormed in.

"Two of my friends died at the table," said Rudder, who was shot four times.

He survived but the injuries ended his career. His body can no longer withstand the demands of a workday.

"My life went from working to non-working overnight. And it's been, what is it, 16 years now. And I live in poverty," he said. "It's been a really rough go."

Nine of the 10 terrorists were killed during the attack, but a year later, the FBI arrested Rana in Chicago for allegedly providing support to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba.

Using his Canadian passport, Rana had visited Mumbai days before the attack to help gather information on targets, according to Indian police.

He was also accused of plotting to kill the staff of a Danish newspaper that had printed cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet Mohamed.

As the arrest put a spotlight on Rana, officials in Ottawa began asking how he had acquired Canadian citizenship, when he appeared to live in the U.S.

"It may be a possible revocation case," an immigration official wrote in an Oct. 29, 2009, email, after doing a rough calculation that suggested he had only spent a few months in Canada.

Canadian officials wrote to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to ask for details of Rana's immigration and travel history. The documents the U.S. shared indicated he was a longtime resident of Chicago.

"U.S. immigration documents show that Mr. Hussain was in the U.S. before he immigrated to Canada and after he became a Canadian citizen," an official wrote.

"In many of the media reports, the reports keep stating that Mr. Hussain has resided in the U.S. for the last 10 years. Recommend file to be sent to the RCMP."

The RCMP launched an investigation into "citizen 7506723" on Dec. 11, 2009, and soon amassed evidence suggesting Rana had lied about living in Canada.

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Grocery store owned by Tahawwur Hussain Rana on Chicago's Devon Ave. (AP Photo/Paul Beaty).

The Ottawa apartment he gave as his home address when he applied for citizenship was leased to someone else, who said Rana had never lived there.

Shown photos of Rana, eight neighbours of a Kanata, Ont., address he had claimed as his previous home, also said he had not lived there.

The RCMP officers then travelled to Chicago, where six neighbours said Rana had resided on their street during the time he was supposedly a resident of Ottawa.

Sixty-one documents provided by the FBI showed Rana owned both residential and commercial properties in Chicago, the RCMP wrote in its report.

He was also involved in a grocery store, immigration firm and physical therapy service, all in Chicago, as well as a slaughterhouse in nearby Kinsman, Ill.

The RCMP wound up its investigation in October 2012 and sent its report to immigration officials.

Three months later, a U.S. court sentenced Rana to 14 years for providing support to the terror group behind the Mumbai attack. While Rana was acquitted of supporting the attack itself, his associate David Coleman Headley was convicted over the plot.

On June 13, 2013, Canada's Citizenship Investigations and Revocations section recommended revoking Rana's citizenship. Rana was notified of the decision in January 2014.

But the documents show little further progress until 2020, when officials informed Rana they were restarting his citizenship revocation.

It wasn't until 2024 that IRCC notified Rana they were asking the Federal Court to make the final decision. The case remains before a judge in Ottawa.

On April 10, 2025, the U.S. extradited Rana to India, where police accuse him of masterminding the Mumbai attack.

Rudder said friends who survived the mass shooting "had trajectories that evolved from that moment, a lot of pain, a lot of operations, a lot of disability."

He was "all for" revoking Rana's citizenship, he said.

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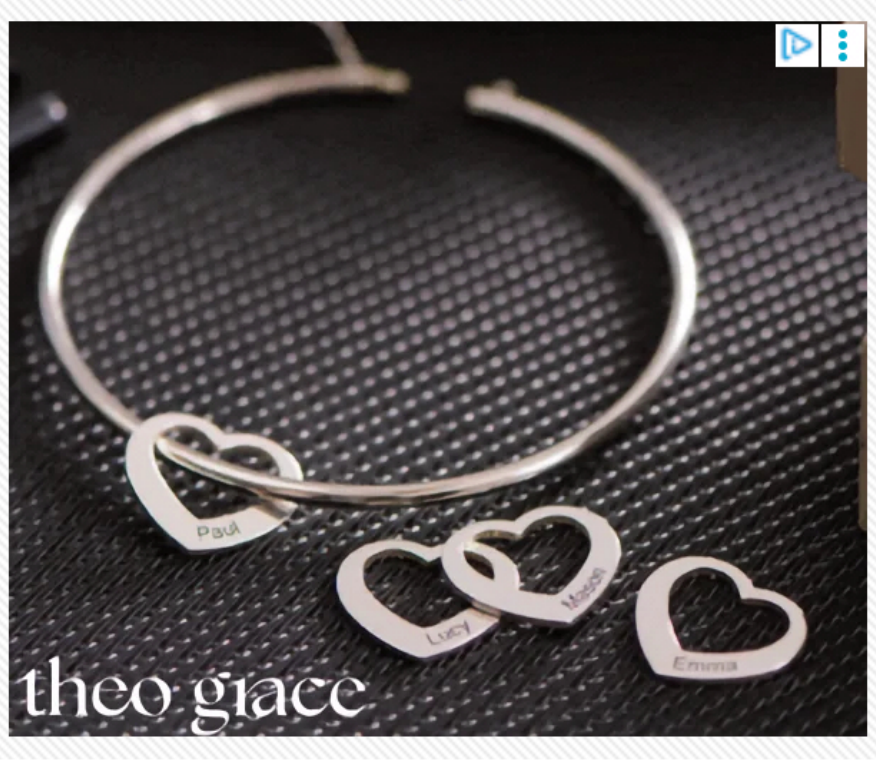

Canadian citizen Tahawwur Hussain Rana is escorted to court, New Delhi, India, April 28, 2025, after his extradition from the US. (AP Photo/Dinesh Joshi).

The "Canadian" accused of helping orchestrate the killing spree that turned Rudder's life around has pushed back against the allegations that he defrauded the citizenship system, and questioned the delays in his case.

Revoking his citizenship has taken so long that he has raised the time lag as a defence, claiming he can no longer recall events from so many years ago.

The immigration department responded in its report on Rana that citizenship revocations were "an inherently lengthy process" with no time limit.

The report also cited "legislative amendments in recent years which have significantly impacted procedures and processes in order to ensure a higher level of procedural fairness to all individuals facing possible revocation."

The revocation of his citizenship has now spanned three prime ministers and nine immigration ministers.

The department that launched the case, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), no longer exists by that name. It was rebranded Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in 2015.

In an email to the government typed in imperfect English, Rana asked the question others may also be posing.

"Why did the CIC waited so long?"

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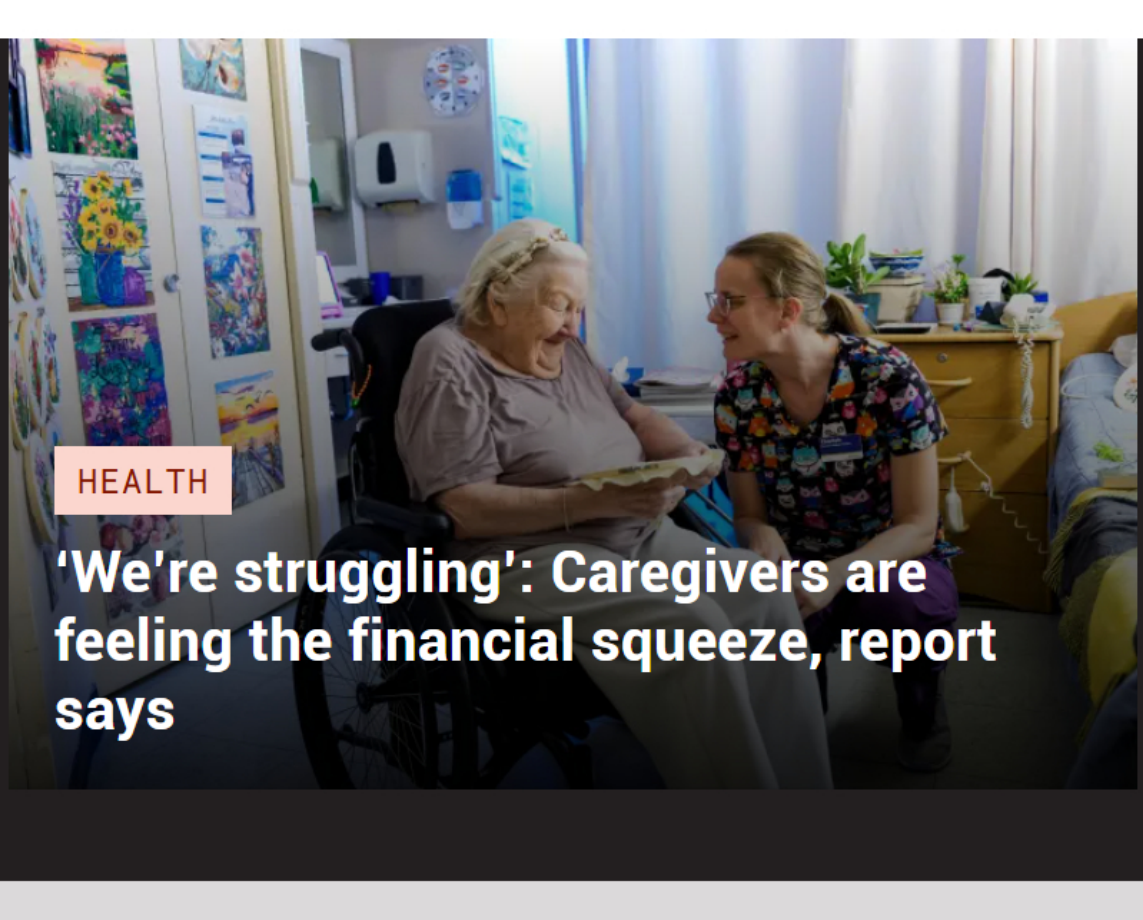

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