

Man accused of vandalizing Fresno’s Islamic Cultural Center posts bond, leaves jail

By Pablo Lopez

Glass doors were shattered by a rock-wielding suspect during a vandalism incident at the Islamic Cultural Center in northeast Fresno. SPECIAL TO THE BEE/FRESNO POLICE DEPARTMENT

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The man accused of vandalizing the Islamic Cultural Center and a nearby northeast Fresno business on Christmas Day posted bond and left jail early Wednesday, hours after he pleaded not guilty and asked a judge if he could be released.

“Absolutely denied,” Judge John Gallagher told Asif Mohammad Khan and his lawyer, Vishad Dewan, of the Public Defender’s Office at a Tuesday hearing.

The charges, Gallagher said, “are extremely bothersome to this court.”

The judge ordered Khan to remain in Fresno County Jail in lieu of \$35,000 bail. Later, Khan posted bond and was released from jail about 3 a.m. Wednesday.

Khan had been in jail since Christmas. Court records say he has no criminal history.

In his first court appearance, a shackled Khan, 28, pleaded not guilty to six felony charges of burglarizing and vandalizing the Islamic Cultural Center near Nees and Maple avenues and the nearby California Digestive Disease Center at 7405 N. Fresno St.

He made his plea in front of a half-dozen family and friends who came to court to support him.

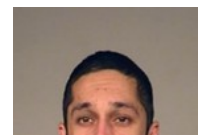
His next court hearing is Jan. 6.

Initially police said they believed Khan, who is Muslim, had committed a hate crime. But police later learned that Khan thought he was getting back at the family of a girl who he believed had disrespected and bullied him.

A criminal complaint does not charge him with a hate crime.

Khan’s older sister has described him as having schizophrenia.

Police arrested Khan at the California Fresno Digestive Disease Center on Christmas afternoon as he tried to run from officers. Detectives then went to his home in Clovis, where they recovered a Philadelphia Eagles jacket and



baseball cap that police said matched the clothing worn by the man who was seen on the Islamic Cultural Center's video surveillance.

In a police interview, Khan told detectives that the crime was not meant as hateful to the Islamic Cultural Center, where he had at one time attended mosque programs. Instead, he said his crimes were targeted at a young woman who had bullied him and her family, Police Chief Jerry Dyer said at a news conference after Khan's arrest.

"He did say this is not a hate crime, although he was angry and perhaps had some hatred toward individuals," the chief said. "It was not geared towards the Islamic community. It was not geared to the Islamic faith or any of those things and was simply to get back at a few people at the center who had belittled him and in his eyes bullied him."

According to police, Khan went to the Islamic Cultural Center about 10 a.m. Dec. 25 and threw river rock into the glass doors to get inside before vandalizing the interior of the fellowship hall. He never went inside the prayer rooms or took money from locked donation boxes, police said.

A few minutes later he drove to the Fresno Digestive Center and used river rock to bust the glass doors. Once inside, he vandalized two 42-inch televisions, spread motor oil on couches and chairs and poured water on a copier, scanner and other electronic equipment, police said.

Afterward, he returned home before going back to the Islamic Cultural Center a couple of hours later to retrieve his jacket and cap. While there, he destroyed a podium, pulled down speakers and poured bleach on them and then did the same to an American flag. He then returned to the Fresno Digestive Center, where police arrested him about 1:30 p.m.

Dyer said Khan told detectives the speakers were targeted because he didn't like the messages expressed by the mosque. He also damaged the American flag because he believed the flag was "not being portrayed in the proper way at the Islamic Cultural Center," the chief said.

And days before the vandalism, Dyer said, Khan had posted on social media that Osama bin Laden was the "most inspirational person in his life." The chief said Khan also made references to Adolf Hitler, but it was unclear what the references were about.

After Khan's arrest, his sister, Samia Khan, told reporters that her brother was mentally ill. She also said her family is "deeply sorry" for the damage.

"We hope you can find it in your hearts to forgive his mistake and understand the health issue that has brought us here today," she said.

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