

# EXHIBIT 7

# A man assumed a store's Indian owners were Muslim. So he tried to burn it down, police say.

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By **Amy B Wang** March 12

A Florida man who attempted to set fire to a convenience store told deputies that he assumed the owner was Muslim and that he wanted to “run the Arabs out of our country,” according to the St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office.

The sheriff later said the store owners are actually Indian, appearing to make this the latest in a string of incidents targeting South Asians mistaken for people of Arab descent.

Around 7:40 a.m. Friday, police received calls that a white male was acting suspiciously in front of the Met Mart convenience store in Port St. Lucie, officials said.

Deputies arrived to find the store closed, with its security shutters intact — as well as a 64-year-old man named Richard Leslie Lloyd near a flaming dumpster.

“When the deputies arrived, they noticed the dumpster had been rolled in front of the doors and the contents were lit on fire,” St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara said in a [statement posted on Facebook](#). “Upon seeing our deputies, the man put his hands behind his back and said ‘take me away.’”

Lloyd “told deputies that he pushed the dumpster to the front of the building, tore down signs posted to the outside of the store and lit the contents of the dumpster on fire to ‘run the Arabs out of our country,’” Mascara said.

An arrest report said Lloyd had been in the store a few days ago but got upset when it didn’t carry his favorite orange juice, according to [WPTV News](#).

Lloyd also stated that he assumed the Met Mart owner was Muslim and that it angered him “due to what they are doing in the Middle East,” the sheriff said.

Firefighters were able to extinguish the blaze, authorities said.

Lloyd was arrested Friday and booked into the St. Lucie County Jail in lieu of a \$30,000 bond. His mental health will be evaluated, and the state attorney's office will decide whether the incident was a hate crime, according to the sheriff.

"It's unfortunate that Mr. Lloyd made the assumption that the store owners were Arabic when, in fact, they are of Indian descent," Mascara said. "Regardless, we will not tolerate violence based on age, race, color, ancestry, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, homeless status, mental or physical disability."

The sheriff also thanked those who called 911 when they noticed Lloyd in front of the store.

A message left with Met Mart on Sunday morning did not receive a response.

The incident appears to be the latest crime targeting people of South Asian descent. In its most recent report, the nonprofit group South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) noted there were 207 documented "incidents of hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric aimed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities" from late December 2015 through Nov. 15, 2016, one week after the presidential election. That represented a 34 percent increase in incidents in less than a third of the period covered in SAALT's 2014 report.

An "astounding" 95 percent of incidents were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment, according to the group. "Notably President Trump was responsible for 21% of the xenophobic political rhetoric we tracked," it said.

The group held a vigil on the steps of Congress on Friday.

"At a time when South Asian, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and Arab community members are facing hate violence and harassment on nearly a daily basis, we need real leadership from Washington to stem the tide of injustice," Suman Raghunathan, the group's executive director, said in a statement. "Waiting nearly a week before commenting on a deadly shooting in Kansas won't do it. Issuing a second toxic Muslim Ban won't do it. We need direct action from this administration to forge inclusion, justice, and hope in this quintessential nation of immigrants."

Last week, a 39-year-old Sikh man was shot while working on his car in his driveway in Washington state. The gunman reportedly told him to "Go back to your own country" before pulling the trigger, according to the Seattle Times.

Last month, a man reportedly yelled at two Indian men to "get out of my country" before opening fire at a bar in Kansas. One of those men, 32-year-old Srinivas Kuchibhotla, was killed, while another, 32-year-old Alok Madasani, was injured. A man who tried to intervene, 24-year-old Ian Grillot, was injured.

Adam W. Purinton, 51, a Navy veteran, was later arrested at a bar in Missouri, where he reportedly bragged about killing two Middle Eastern men, according to the Kansas City Star. Purinton has since been charged with first-degree murder and attempted first-degree murder. The FBI has said it is investigating the shooting as a hate crime.

Kuchibhotla and Madasani were from India but living in the United States and working as engineers for Garmin, the technology company. After the shooting, their relatives said they worried that the United States was no longer safe for Indians, citing what they called an increasingly xenophobic atmosphere.

“There is a kind of hysteria spreading that is not good because so many of our beloved children live there,” Venu Madhav, a relative of Kuchibhotla, told [The Washington Post](#) then. “Such hatred is not good for people.”

Kuchibhotla's widow told reporters two days after her husband's death that she had told him many times that they should go back to India but that Kuchibhotla was not afraid of staying.

“He always assured me good things will happen to good people,” Sunayana Dumala said then.

Madasani's father [told the Hindustan Times](#) that there was an increasingly hate-filled atmosphere in the United States and that it was linked to the election.

“The situation seems to be pretty bad after Trump took over as the U.S. president,” the father said, according to the newspaper. “I appeal to all the parents in India not to send their children to the United States in the present circumstances.”

The White House said linking the crimes to Trump's rhetoric was absurd, according to [Reuters](#).

After being roundly criticized for not speaking out forcefully about the issue, [Trump addressed the Kansas shooting in his speech to Congress](#) a week later.

As Sangay K. Mishra, author of “Desis Divided: The Political Lives of South Asian Americans,” [wrote for The Post](#) last week, the South Asian community has suffered from “security racializing” since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, in which all immigrants from across a broad region are treated as potential terrorists.

“The people I spoke with came from different religions, nationalities and cultures — but found themselves treated as similarly foreign and dangerous,” Mishra wrote. “In public spaces like bars and airports, strangers and law enforcement officials were suspicious of their brown bodies. A number of young South Asians in Los Angeles and New York told me that in the months and years after 9/11, they were uncomfortable going to a bar alone. They feared being yelled at, called racial slurs or even physically attacked — which, in some cases, had indeed happened.”

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