

Asians Fake White Racist Hate Attack

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Racist Attack Was Self-Inflicted

TWO Asian shopkeepers who claimed their premises had been set alight by racists in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks were yesterday accused of starting the fire themselves to claim insurance.

[Darshan Chand and his wife Malkit](#), both 35, pleaded not guilty at Swansea Crown Court to arson and deception.

Their shop, Hilltop Stores at Burry Port, Llanelli, was damaged by fire on New Year's Eve 2001.

Police found racist words scrawled on the building along with a Nazi swastika and a National Front symbol.



The jury heard that on the night of the fire the shop closed earlier than it had before and the store was also left empty by the Chands for the first time since it opened in 1999.

Geraint Walters, prosecuting, said just minutes after the shop's sophisticated alarm system was pressed on by Malkit Chand, smoke and burning were noticed by neighbours.

And he said witnesses would be called who saw the Chands loading goods from the shop into bin bags on the day of the fire.

Mr Walters told the jury yesterday the case was a "whodunit" in the classic sense of the word.

He said no-one would be giving evidence to say that they saw the Chands setting light to the premises. But he claimed that circumstantial evidence relating to the fire would amount to compelling evidence for the prosecution.

Mr Walters said that not only did the shop close earlier than ever before on the night of the fire, when investigators went in they found a mattress and bedclothes placed against windows.

The prosecutor said this was a sign that whoever started the blaze did not want it to be discovered until it was well alight.

Police and fire officials also found what amounted to a fire bomb in the upstairs living quarters of the building where the fire started.

This was in the form of a plastic can of petrol with a wick in it which was placed among children's soft toys and other combustible material spread out over the floor.

The jury was told that fortunately the petrol can did not ignite even though partially melted by heat.

Mr Walters said those trying to find out who started the fire discovered doors in the premises were secure. There was no doubt the fire was arson.

When police interviewed the Chands and asked who could be behind the attack the couple speculated that it could be linked to the swastika and other graffiti.

And they pointed to a step ladder which had been moved and which they said could have been used to gain entry to a low roof and into the house.

But Mr Walters said yesterday, "This was an attempt by the Chands to blame some racist for what was an act of arson by themselves."

Mr Walters said the emergency services were called to the premises by neighbours within 15 minutes of Mrs Chand setting the alarm and leaving the premises.

He said it would have been a physical impossibility for an arson-ist to have entered the perimeter of the premises, found the ladder, set the fires including the can of petrol, written the graffiti then made an escape all in 15 minutes.

He added that it must have been a tremendous coincidence that the arsonist struck the first time the Chands left the shop unoccupied. The shop opened daily at 6am and rarely, if ever, shut before 8pm.

The case continues today.