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**MASPETH MAN INDICTED ON UPGRADED CHARGES OF FIRST-DEGREE MURDER FOR
SETTING FIRE AT FLUSHING BUILDING THAT KILLED FOUR AND INJURED OTHERS,
INCLUDING TWO FDNY MEMBERS**

*Defendant Attempted to Enter Building Before Fire; Went to Nearby Gas Station, Asked for Matches and Set Combustible
Trash on Fire at Bottom of Stairway
Defendant Continues to Be Held Without Bail
Faces up to Life in Prison, if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Roman Amatitla was indicted on upgraded charges of murder in the first degree along with murder in the second degree, arson in the first degree and related charges for setting a fire that killed four occupants of a Flushing building in March and injured seven others, including two firefighters. The defendant allegedly used matches from a nearby gas station to start the blaze and then watched as the building burned.

Supreme Court Justice Michael Yavinsky remanded the defendant and ordered him to court on July 14.

DA Katz said: "As alleged, Roman Amatitla killed four people, including a 3-year-old girl, when he torched the building where they lived. He continues to be held in custody to assure accountability. This was a horrific crime that shocked the city. A grand jury has now indicted the defendant on upgraded charges of murder in the first degree, which carries a penalty upon conviction of life in prison without the possibility of parole."

Amatitla, 38, of Maspeth, was arraigned today on a 37-count indictment charging him with four counts of murder in the first degree; 12 counts of murder in the second degree; five counts of arson in the first degree; two counts of assault in the first degree; 10 counts of arson in the second degree; three counts of assault in the second degree; and petit larceny. He faces up to life in prison without the possibility of parole, if convicted.

DA Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, on March 16, at approximately 11:43 a.m., Roman Amatitla followed a woman into the ground floor of a three-story building at 132-05 Avery Avenue in Flushing and left the premises approximately a minute later. The defendant remained in the vicinity of the property for another 15 minutes and then urinated in front of the location. Amatitla entered and exited the premises two more times in the following seven minutes.

The defendant then crossed the street and went into a nearby gas station, where he purchased a beer, stole another beer and asked the clerk for a lighter. When the clerk informed Amatitla that lighters were not free, the defendant took a pack of matches.

Amatitla then entered the building at approximately 12:16 p.m., lit a piece of paper on fire and placed it on top of garbage at the base of the only stairwell exit from the upper floors.

Shortly afterward, smoke began to fill the street. The defendant stayed in the immediate area and drank beer as he watched the fire consume the building. He then walked to a bodega on Main Street and asked the clerk to charge his phone for him.

Responding firefighters discovered a 3-year-old girl, Sihan Yang, on a third-floor bed and she was pronounced deceased on the scene. A 49-year-old male, Chengri Cui, and a 61-year-old female, Chie Shin Ming, were also both discovered in the building and pronounced deceased on the scene. All three succumbed to smoke inhalation.

Hong Zhao, a 64-year-old male, leaped from a building window and sustained multiple broken bones and brain trauma. He was pronounced deceased at a nearby hospital at 2:30 p.m.

Two members of the FDNY, a lieutenant and a firefighter, entered the burning building to conduct rescues.

The firefighter fell to the basement when the second-floor landing collapsed beneath him and the lieutenant fell to the basement while trying to rescue the firefighter. They were transported to Jacobi Hospital for smoke inhalation and thermal burns.

Four building occupants were injured when they jumped from the building to escape the blaze, and one remains hospitalized. A fifth occupant was rescued from a second-floor window by the FDNY and was treated for smoke inhalation.

Assistant District Attorney Gabriel J. Reale of the District Attorney's Homicide Bureau is prosecuting the case, with the assistance of Assistant District Attorney Jennie Evangelista, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys John Kosinski, Bureau Chief, Karen Ross and Jonathan Selkove, Deputy Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Shawn Clark.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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