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### **Lobbyist accused of stalking pleads guilty to trespassing Additional charges dropped as part of deal**

Author: *JIM O'NEILL; STAR-LEDGER STAFF*

Article Text:

A 22-year-old business whiz and lobbyist from Fanwood faces a probationary term after pleading guilty yesterday to a count of trespassing, admitting he was intoxicated when he entered a home where, police say, a young woman and her boyfriend were sleeping.

**Raj Mukherji** avoided a trial on charges of stalking two women under a plea agreement reached as jury selection was about to begin in Middlesex County.

The defendant, who was a business partner of former Morris County prosecutor and one-time gubernatorial candidate Michael Murphy, will be allowed to enter a pretrial probationary program known as "PTI," and could be released upon successful completion in six to 12 months.

In exchange for the guilty plea to the non-criminal disorderly persons charge, prosecutors agreed to drop two counts of stalking, as well as charges of breaking into the home where one woman was sleeping with her boyfriend, and trying to convince the other woman not to testify against him at trial.

A Middlesex County grand jury charged that he pursued the women, kept calling them, even after they changed their phone numbers and continued stalking one of the women after she obtained a court order to leave her alone. Mukherji said he never pursued the women, and was ready to prove in court in New Brunswick that one of them stalked him and filed the charges against him when a scheme to blackmail him failed.

"I am frustrated that it took them a year to figure it out, but I commend the (Middlesex County) Prosecutor's Office for dismissing the (five-count) indictment," Mukherji said in a written statement. "The stalking and related charges were baseless and could not have been successfully prosecuted."

Middlesex County Prosecutor Bruce Kaplan said the plea agreement was a reasonable way to resolve the case. "The objective of the prosecution was the protection of the victims and we satisfied that objective with the (guilty) plea," he said.

The plea agreement, reached between Assistant Prosecutor Manuel Sameiro and Mukherji's attorneys, Robert Gluck and his associate, Amy Criscuolo, permits the defendant to avoid the criminal charges, but warns that if he fails to complete the probationary term, he could be jailed for up to six months.

The agreement also includes a civil order banning him from having any contact with the two women.

Sameiro said the women were notified of the plea agreement and approved it.

If convicted of the criminal charges at trial, Mukherji could have been imprisoned for several years, but, in all likelihood, as a first-time offender, he would have been sentenced to probation, Sameiro said.

Mukherji still faces federal charges of impersonating an agent of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency and lying about it to an FBI agent. The case was forwarded to federal prosecutors by investigators from the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office during the stalking investigation, according to a federal indictment.

Mukherji denies wrongdoing, and said he expects to be cleared, contending he is a defense intelligence specialist and linguist for the U.S. Marine Reserve. No trial date has been set.

His former lobbying partner, Murphy, said he was pleased the stalking case was dropped. "I've been in his corner all along," Murphy said. "It took a lot of courage and heartache from him to get through the last year."

Murphy said he would welcome Mukherji back into his Trenton-based lobbying firm, ImpactNJ, once Mukherji has fulfilled his commitment to the Marines and the federal charges are resolved.

"Whatever Raj decides to do, he is going to excel at," Murphy said.

Mukherji has run his own Internet marketing firm and has been involved in several multimillion-dollar marketing ventures, according to his Web site.