

Prosecutors say Idaho man hoped to carry out terror attack

By REBECCA BOONE, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Federal prosecutors told jurors Tuesday that an Uzbek refugee living in Boise, Idaho, was walking a "pathway to terror" when he was arrested two years ago.

Fazliddin Kurbanov, 32, has pleaded not guilty to five felony charges, including attempting to support a terrorist organization.

His trial began in U.S. District Court on Monday.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Aaron Lucoff told jurors during opening statements that Kurbanov talked regularly with an overseas terrorist organization, bought bags of fertilizer and other bomb-making materials and discussed attacking a military base or mass transit in a suicide bombing.

Defense attorney Charles Peterson said Kurbanov was curious after a friend shared his fireworks-building hobby and that confidential informants for the FBI encouraged Kurbanov to view videos and other content on a terrorist organization's website. He said Kurbanov did nothing illegal.

Peterson described Kurbanov as a young refugee who was struggling to learn English and find a decent job. Kurbanov supported not only his wife and young child, but also his two ailing parents and a sister, Peterson noted.

"This is a case about refugees," Peterson told the jury. "It's a case that starts interestingly ... in Uzbekistan, with a prayer."

Kurbanov's family came to the U.S. as refugees after they were persecuted in Uzbekistan for converting to Christianity, Peterson said. The family had converted to a Pentecostal denomination, but once they arrived in the U.S. Kurbanov became disillusioned with the way he saw many Americans practice the religion only on Sundays, Peterson said.

Peterson framed some of the government's case as a misinterpretation of Kurbanov's curiosity. Kurbanov started looking up information about the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan — which the U.S. has designated a terrorist organization — after an acquaintance was charged with a terrorism-related crime in Denver.

He searched for information about explosives online after a friend in Boise showed Kurbanov a few small fireworks he had built as a hobby. That's when Kurbanov learned about exploding targets sold at sporting goods stores and about other components that can be used for explosives, his attorney told jurors.

Two confidential FBI informants prodded Kurbanov to spend more time on the IMU website, Peterson said, and when Kurbanov began communicating online with someone who said he was part of IMU, he was making things up.

"He starts telling great stories, like we have a group together and we're all ready to go out and blow up the military. But look — Kurbanov is all hat, no cattle. That's all that's going on here — it's just big talk," Peterson said.

Prosecutors painted a starkly different picture, one of a man who was determined to carry out an attack on U.S. soil, who watched anti-U.S. propaganda videos, researched his options and sought help from radicals overseas on how to build a bomb.

"From his Boise apartment to his work locations, the Internet ensured that the defendant was never far from the IMU or its ideologies," Lucoff said.

The prosecutor quoted from emails and online chats that the FBI said came from Kurbanov.

"We are the closest ones to infidels. We have almost everything," Lucoff read from one of the communications. "What would you say if, with the help of God, we implement a martyrdom act? ... There are military installations right here, targets, and vehicles are available as well."

Lucoff said that thorough preparation is needed to conduct a terror attack, and though Kurbanov had the materials and the interest, his planning time ran out when he was arrested.

"The defendants' digital pathway became a trail of evidence," that will support the charges, Lucoff said. "All stem from his travels on the pathway to terror."