

Visit to city reservoir raised alarm

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A Pakistani who wanted to have his photo taken in front of a pastoral reservoir set off a series of bureaucratic alarms that ended with his arrest for allegedly harboring a young immigrant couple whose visas had expired and also were charged, authorities said.

Ansar Mahmood, 24, a legal immigrant who works at a Hudson pizza shop, was at a city reservoir on Tuesday and had asked a worker there to snap a photo of him. But the worker became suspicious afterward and called police, who contacted the FBI as well as Immigration and Naturalization Service officers.

By early Wednesday, Mahmood was in custody on charges he helped two friends from Pakistan find a car, jobs and a place to live. Those two people, in turn, were charged with possessing fraudulent documents that could be used to get a job in the United States.

The charges are felonies that carry potential lengthy prison terms and are being prosecuted in U.S. District Court in Albany. But officials dismissed any connections to terrorism and insist they only have evidence that the three were engaged in immigration law violations.

"There's no indication of any tie to anything else than what we've charged them with," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Rob Storch, who is handling the case.

As a precaution, the water reservoir was tested for contamination but nothing was found. Authorities said the intensive law enforcement response was automatically triggered by the high alert under which all law enforcement agencies remain until further notice. Nuclear power plants, water reservoirs and airports are among facilities considered vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

Aisha Younes, 18, and her husband, Hafiz Mohammed Tauseef, 24, gave INS agents fake names when they were first questioned late Tuesday in Hudson near Mahmood's apartment, officials said. They were in the U.S. on visitors visas that had expired last spring, authorities said.

The couple allegedly gave sworn statements admitting they had stayed in the U.S. beyond the authorized date and that they had purchased fraudulent employment authorization cards on the black market, officials said.

The case underscores a gap in U.S. immigration regulations. Immigrants who enter the U.S. legally are registered with various government agencies. But when they leave the U.S., foreign visitors often do not report their departures to authorities and the whereabouts of thousands of immigrants is unknown, according to immigration officials.

Mahmood, Younes and Tauseef are being held at local jails while their cases are pending. Mahmood is due back in court Monday. Younes and Tauseef are due back in court on Oct. 24.