

Terror arrests deepen uneasiness among Muslims in New York

LACKAWANNA, N.Y. (AP) — Clutching a shortwave radio tuned to an Arabic music station in Kuwait, Hassan Muhsen talked at length about the lure of immigrant life in the United States before his mood suddenly darkened.

"Thank God we're in America, the system is good and fair, but there is ignorance also," said the 53-year-old retired steelworker. "Since yesterday I heard it three times: 'Go home!'"

Five men from Lackawanna's Yemeni community were arrested and accused of aiding the terrorists who planned the Sept. 11 attacks. The men — all U.S. born — were charged Saturday with providing support and resources to foreign terrorist organizations.

Now, the town's Yemeni-Americans must contend with suspicion and hostility from some of their non-Yemeni neighbors.

"I had no suspicion before, not even when 9/11 happened," said Anne Vertino, 34, as she sat outside her mother's house across the street from a shuttered grocery store where FBI agents arrested one of the suspects in raids Friday night and early Saturday.

"But knowing what happened and they're your neighbors in a small city, definitely you're going to treat them different

and wonder what's going on. It's not the women I worry about or the children, it's the men," she said.

Federal authorities say the five men trained at an al-Qaida camp in Afghanistan where Osama bin Laden spoke about his anti-American beliefs before returning home in June 2001 to Lackawanna, a suburb of Buffalo on the shore of Lake Erie. Officials said they had no information the alleged terror cell was planning an attack in the United States.

Charged Saturday were Shafal Mosed, 24; Faysal Galab, 26; Sahim Alwan, 29; Yasein Taher, 24; and Yahya Goba, 25. The men all lived within blocks of each other in Lackawanna.

Peter Ahearn, special agent in charge of the FBI's Buffalo field office, said he worries the Yemeni community will be ostracized, but said hate crimes would not be tolerated.

"The role of the FBI is twofold," he said. "One is that we're going to conduct investigations of any terrorists, Muslim or not. That's our job. The other side of the coin, and we dealt with this right after 9/11, is that we investigate civil rights."

About 1,000 Yemenis live in Lackawanna, working mostly in the fading steel industry at a galvanizing plant, a Ford

plant or an aluminum producer.

Crouching next to the Lackawanna Islamic Center mosque, a 30-year-old man who identified himself only as Abdullah said the neighborhood has been relatively free of ethnic tension since Yemenis first moved here in 1922.

"We have a good relationship around here — blacks, whites and a little Hispanic," he said. "We might not know each other personally but we know each other by our faces."

The atmosphere has become tense, he acknowledged.

"We're going to have stares here and there, maybe a couple of words," he said. "What are you going to do? Are you going to fight, argue with people? You've just got to be patient."

Jim Hardwick, 70, who is black and has lived among the Yemenis for a half-century, said he hasn't changed his view of his neighbors.

"That's five (men) out of thousands," he said. "I don't have any opinion on the ones that I don't know. If I don't know 'em, I don't know 'em. The ones that I know, they would never be involved in what happened."

"You can't talk about anybody as a group," he added. "You have to talk about individuals."

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Homeland security bill may pass soon

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate majority leader said Sunday that Congress will pass legislation before the November elections creating a Homeland Security Department despite a dispute over the president's power to hire and fire agency workers.

President Bush is threatening to veto the bill, which the GOP-led House passed and the Democratic-controlled Senate is considering, unless it gives him flexibility over the estimated 170,000 employees that would become part of the Cabinet agency.

"I can't believe he'd veto a bill over the issue of accountability," said Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D. "I can't believe he'd veto the bill over the issue of politicization of the federal work force."

Daschle has called Bush's proposal "a power grab of unprecedented magnitude" that would undermine the government's non-political civil service system and threaten labor union rights and protections for one-third of the workers.

The White House says the new department needs broader powers to hire, fire, promote or demote and pay employees, and to waive union rights in matters of national security, to meet emerging terrorist threats.

"We've put this in place for good reason. The politicization of the federal work force is not something we should have, and that's all we're saying now," Daschle said on ABC's "This Week."

Despite the apparent impasse, Daschle said: "It will get passed before the election. I am confident of that."

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