



News Releases

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BUFFALO, NY

4 hotel operators arrested for filing false DHS documents

Buffalo, NY – Four non-citizens were charged in two separate criminal complaints today in connection with the filing of false and fraudulent documents with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The filings related to the defendants' ability to enter and remain in the United States. The investigation is being conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

"Document fraud and other forms of immigration benefit fraud undermine the integrity of our nation's legal immigration system, often enabling criminals and illegal aliens to gain entry to and remain in the United States," said James C. Spero, special agent in charge of HSI in Buffalo. "HSI will continue to aggressively target those participating in or facilitating these types of crimes."

Pankajkumar Patel, 38, a native and citizen of India, currently residing in Geneva, N.Y., who operates the Americas Best Value Inn in Geneva; and Hareshkumar Patel, 41, a native of India with Canadian citizenship, currently living in Tonawanda, N.Y., who operates the Red Carpet Inn in Tonawanda, were charged with making false oral and written statements to DHS, aggravated identity theft and making false statements under oath in proceedings related to immigration status. The false statement charges carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The aggravated identity theft charge carries a mandatory penalty of two years in prison consecutive to another prison term and a fine of \$250,000.

Mahesh Ambu, 51, and his wife, Joytiben Ambu, 50, both natives of Tanzania with British citizenship, currently living in West Seneca, N.Y., and who own and operate the Orchard Park Inn, located in West Seneca, together were charged in a separate criminal complaint with conspiring to unlawfully obtain their naturalization, making false oral and written statements to DHS and making false statements under oath in proceedings related to immigration status. The charges carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

According to the criminal complaint, the Patels filed applications under company names with the U.S. Department of Labor, using the identity of an unwitting third party. They attempted to have a fictitious job classified as a "specialty occupation." They each then filed visa applications to enter the United States claiming that they would perform the "specialty occupations" while in fact they worked at motels.

According to the criminal complaint against the Ambu's, each filed applications for naturalization in which they claimed to have resided in the United States beginning in 2003 when, in fact, they had illegally resided in Florida, Oklahoma and New York, beginning in at least 1995.

Assistant U.S. Attorney John E. Rogowski, Western District of New York, is in charge of the prosecution.