

A NATION CHALLENGED: THE DETAINED; Immigrants Refuse Meals to Protest Treatment

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Seven **immigrants detained** at a county jail in New Jersey since the Sept. 11 terror attacks are staging a hunger strike to **protest** their **treatment** by federal immigration officials, county officials said yesterday.

But the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which pays the jail to house the detainees, said it was unaware of any hunger strikers. Nonetheless, the agency said it would take steps to address concerns of detainees at the jail, the Hudson County Correctional Center, including serving halal **meals**, which adhere to Islamic dietary rules, beginning today.

Jacob de Lemos, a county spokesman, said two of the seven detainees began **refusing** to take **meals** two weeks ago, and have been joined in a hunger strike by five others. He would not identify the detainees. The jail, in Kearny, N.J., about five miles west of Manhattan, was holding 303 immigration service detainees yesterday, most of them rounded up since the attacks, Mr. de Lemos said. "They feel that the I.N.S. does not visit them enough at the jail or let them know what's going on with their cases," he said.

Mr. de Lemos said the hunger strikers had been drinking fluids and were under medical observation in their cells, which are in a separate pod from the jail's criminal defendants and convicts. He said it was unclear whether the detainees had lost any weight. "They're not taking the food that we're giving them, but that doesn't mean they're not eating, either," he said.

An immigration service spokesman in Newark, Kerry Gill, said yesterday that he was unaware of anyone who had met the agency's definition of a hunger strike: a **refusal** to eat for 72 hours straight. He said 12 immigration service detainees at the Hudson County jail had sent a letter to the agency demanding halal **meals** and information about their cases. The detainees are mostly those who have overstayed temporary visas.

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