

NEW CHARGES, DEFENDANTS THE SCOPE OF ALLEGED 14-YEAR U.S.- INDIA IMMIGRATION FRAUD SCHEME EXPANDS

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Byline: LISA FERNANDEZ AND MATTHAI CHAKKO KURUVILA, Mercury News

Body

On paper, the immigrants were given fake names and fake **new** families. They got false visas for high-tech work when in fact they waited tables in Berkeley and cleaned office buildings. Three girls were brought for sex.

These were some of the amended **charges** filed Wednesday in federal court against wealthy Berkeley landlord Lakireddy Bali Reddy and his family, painting a fuller picture of an **alleged immigration fraud scheme** that involved more people over more time than previously **alleged**. The **charges** involved three **new defendants**, 48 illegal immigrants from India and **fraud** stretching back to 1986 -- more than a decade longer than originally **charged**.

The **new charges** are also part of a plea agreement that could shave nearly 50 years off the maximum prison time for Reddy, in exchange for a guilty plea from him and four relatives.

The wording of the **new charges** is similar to the grand jury indictment handed up in February, but Reddy, 63, now faces a maximum of 23 years in prison instead of the 70 he could have faced if convicted by a jury. It's unlikely, though, that a judge will mete out maximum sentences for all five **defendants** -- three of whose names hadn't surfaced until last week.

After an unexpected announcement last week that the family was willing to forgo a trial, Reddy, his two sons, his youngest brother and his sister-in-law are expected to enter guilty pleas to the **new charges** Monday. The entire family faces at least one conspiracy count of illegally importing Indians into the country.

The Reddy family could face more than the federal criminal **charges**. They could also be slapped with a civil lawsuit and possibly state **charges**.

"These **allegations** are just the tip of the iceberg of the abusive and exploitative practices the **defendants** committed," said Lucas Guttentag, director of the American Civil Liberties Union National Immigrants Rights Project. The ACLU is representing two unnamed victims involved in the Reddy case.

Michael Rubin, a labor and human rights attorney, also said on Wednesday he soon plans to file a class-action civil suit with the ACLU against Reddy and more of his relatives. The civil suit will seek "complete relief" for his clients. Rubin declined to say how much money his clients were seeking.

However, Rubin said he was waiting to see if all five **defendants** indeed plead guilty Monday. Pleading guilty essentially establishes that everything stated in the criminal complaint is true.

Reddy, the key player in the **alleged scheme**, is believed to own a real estate empire worth at least \$50 million. Reddy is expected to be arraigned today.

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His 31-year-old son, Vijay Lakireddy, was arraigned Wednesday, accused of helping his father illegally import the foreigners, often handing them off to his father to have sex, and lying to immigration officials.

Reddy's other son, Prasad Lakireddy, 42, of Lafayette, Reddy's youngest brother, Jayaprakash Lakireddy, 47, and his wife, Annapurna Lakireddy, 46, both of Oakland, are expected to be arraigned as soon as Friday. The three each face one conspiracy charge of illegally importing foreigners, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

None of the defendants, their attorneys or prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's Office would comment on the new charges.

The court documents detail a pattern of alleged immigration violations. Prosecutors contend Reddy and his relatives brought over Indian nationals from his home village in the state of Andhra Pradesh, a pivotal region for the immigration of high-tech India workers to Silicon Valley. The Reddy family allegedly picked them up at the airport and took them to the many apartments, construction sites and restaurants they owned or managed, including the popular Pasand restaurants in the East and South bays. The immigrants worked for less than minimum wage.

For example, in October 1991, Reddy allegedly sought permission to bring over two 12- and 13-year-old girls, claiming their mothers were already in the United States. He arranged similar mother-daughter relationships in 1991 for two 16- and 17-year-old girls, according to the documents. And on April 19, 1992, Annapurna Lakireddy allegedly signed a petition on behalf of a man calling himself Veera Reddy Guduru, the name of Annapurna's dead brother-in-law.

Immigration and Naturalization Services spokeswoman Sharon Rummery said it is illegal for foreigners to come to the United States on fraudulent visas. If prosecuted and found guilty, they could face five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines.

Prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's Office would not comment if they were seeking charges against these foreigners, or if they would be deported.

Graphic

Photo;

PHOTO: Reddy

Berkeley landlord faces a maximum of 23 years in prison.

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