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The Associated Press

US hip-hop diplomacy hits speed bump in Pakistan

By SEBASTIAN ABBOT
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A U.S. attempt to smooth relations with Pakistan using a bit of hip-hop diplomacy hit a speed bump Wednesday when the Pakistani military briefly detained an American music group accused of taking photographs of sensitive installations.

The F.E.W. Collective, a hip-hop group from Chicago on a U.S.-sponsored tour of Pakistan, was traveling in embassy vehicles on a public road in Rawalpindi, a garrison town just outside the capital Islamabad, when the incident occurred, the U.S. Embassy said.

Rawalpindi hosts the headquarters of the Pakistani army, but the U.S. Embassy said no sensitive installations were visible from the vehicle when the group was pulled over. One of the band members may have been taking pictures, but the group was eventually released, it said.

"The performer was not aware of restrictions placed on photography in or near the cantonment, and had no intention of taking photographs of sensitive Pakistani government or military installations," the embassy said.

Local TV footage showed three large SUVs surrounded by Pakistani police and military personnel before they were allowed to pull away.

The F.E.W. Collective is one of several American music groups that the U.S. Embassy has brought to Pakistan this year as part of its cultural diplomacy efforts. Others have included a jazz quartet and a country rock band.

The U.S. has given Pakistan billions of dollars in military and civilian aid over the last decade, but the country is still highly unpopular among average Pakistanis.