

International

Savage battle for power between rival gangs

29 inmates hacked, stabbed to death in Venezuelan jail

EL DORADO, Venezuela, Aug 29: Twenty-nine inmates were hacked and stabbed to death on Thursday at a remote Venezuelan maximum-security jail in a savage battle for power between rival gangs, authorities said, reports Reuter.

"There are 29 dead and 13 injured, the scene inside is hellish," said Rodriguez, secretary general of Bolivar state, told Reuters outside the El Dorado Jail, 440 miles (700 km) southeast of Caracas.

Justice Ministry officials has earlier put the number of dead at 42, but local authorities explained that early reports were confused by scarce information from the rain forest region, in the heart of Venezuela's gold-rush territories.

The killers used machetes and primitive knives, decapitating several of the victims. Others were badly burned when the attackers set fire to their mattresses, officials said.

"There are seven headless corpses and several with stab wounds and mutilated limbs," said Jose Alberto Zulita, a top official at the state governor's office.

At least two of the dead had their throats cut. Blood was splattered on the walls and heads and limbs lay scattered on the floor, prison officials said.

The carefully planned surprise attack started shortly after dawn when many of the prisoners were asleep and lasted for less than 20 minutes.

Seeking revenge for the recent murder of one of their gang leaders, a group of inmates broke the locks on their cell and launched the violent raid on a rival gang transferred from another jail.

As they approached, the attackers shouted a coded warning that guards were carrying out a weapons search, meaning that their victims were defenseless when they burst into the cell.

The savage raid was sparked by fierce rivalries between local inmates and a group of prisoners moved from the La Sabaneta Jail in western Venezuela far from their families as a punishment, officials said. All of the dead were from La Sabaneta, they added.

"It was a lynching. The aim was to massacre them," Justice Minister Hilario Cardozo told a news conference.

Built in 1958, the El Dorado Jail lies across the river Cuyuni from the scrubby mining town named after the mythical south American city of gold.

Surrounded by water reputably infested by piranhas and alligators, the jail once held famous French jail-breaker Henri Charrier, better known as Papillon who escaped.

"This place is the worst you could possibly imagine," a former El Dorado prison guard told Reuters. "They're the most dangerous criminals in the country, total animals, the scum of society."

Diet rich in soy reduces risk of uterine cancer

WASHINGTON, Aug 29: A diet rich in soy and other legumes appears to reduce the risk of uterine cancer, says a new study published in the latest edition of the American Journal of Epidemiology, reports AFP.

The study, conducted by the Cancer Research Center of Hawaii, concluded that women who consume generous amounts of soybean products have a 54 per cent lower risk of getting cancer of the uterus than women who do not.

"Our data support the notion that diets low in calories and rich in legumes (especially soybeans), whole grain foods, vegetables and fruits reduce the risk of endometrial cancer," said professor Marc Goodman, one of the study's authors.

"This is the first study to show an inverse association of soy consumption with the risk of endometrial cancer," he added.

Lankan opposition for fresh peace efforts with Tigers

COLOMBO, Aug 29: Sri Lanka's opposition, which holds the balance of power to make or break political reforms aimed at ending the country's drawn-out Tamil separatist war, is calling for a fresh peace bid with the rebels, reports AFP.

The opposition leader and former prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said peace talks between the government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could begin even while both sides were locked in combat.

Wickremesinghe told the Foreign Correspondents Association of Sri Lanka late Thursday that his party was not against a dialogue between the government and the LTTE but talks and fighting should be considered.

"This way there can be unconditional talks and if they succeed then it could lead to

something," Wickremesinghe said, adding the Tigers were still a force to reckon with despite recent setbacks at the hands of the army.

The LTTE is leading a drawn-out campaign for a separate state called Eelam and more than 50,000 people have been killed in fighting since 1972. Wickremesinghe said the economy was unable to sustain the war for too long.

The government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga came to power offering a "hand of friendship" to the LTTE in 1994 but their honeymoon ended with the rebels pulling out of talks and resuming their drawn-out war in April 1995.

Just three months after the latest round of fighting broke out, Kumaratunga unveiled a radical power-sharing plan what seeks to turn the country into a federal state in all but name in exchange for ethnic

peace.

The plan, in the form of a draft political package, is still before a parliamentary panel and requires the support of opposition leader Wickremesinghe's United Nation Party (UNP) to be implemented.

President Kumaratunga announced Monday that she will hold a referendum on the reforms but under the constitution such vote is non-binding unless constitutional changes first receive a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Wickremesinghe rejected the government's plan and said holding a referendum before finalising the new constitution could shut the door to possible talks with the LTTE.

His UNP held talks with the LTTE in 1989 but the rebels pulled out in June 1990 to go back to fighting. In 1987 too the Tigers pulled out of an Indian-backed peace deal.

Sharif turns to 'Mango diplomacy' with India

NEW DELHI, Aug 29: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appears to have turned to "Mango diplomacy" after several top Indian leaders confirmed here today they had received deliveries of the fruit from across the border, reports AFP.

Hindu nationalist and former Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee received a packet of mangoes from Sharif just before Indian celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence on August 15, an aide said today.

Communist leader Muqumuddin Farooqi, meanwhile, who also received a delivery, told AFP the Pakistani leader probably wanted to develop a rapport with Indian politicians.

"I got the mangoes about 20 or 25 days back," said Farooqi, a member of the Communist Party of India (CPI), which forms part of the coalition government headed by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral.

"Yes, I was surprised. I don't know Nawaz Sharif personally." May be he wants to develop some kind of personal

relationship with political parties and their leaders here."

The Times of India newspaper said mangoes were also sent to President KR Narayanan, Vice-President Krishan Kant, Gujral and other "top Indian politicians."

Germany may slash aid to developing countries

BONN, Aug 29: Germany is considering slashing aid to developing countries which refuse to take back their nationals expelled from Germany for violating immigration rules, or breaking the law. Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said in an interview published today, reports AFP.

Kinkel told the Hamburg daily Abendblatt that "The scale of the problem is such that it calls for a new method. Those who turn on the red light when they are asked to take back their own nationals who have been legally expelled, must not be surprised if we use the red pen to make savings on development aid."

The prince swung a leg over Dodi's shoulder as they larked around on a jet-ski trip in the med," said The Sun, which carried a series of photos showing how Diana, wearing a set of enormous flipper, got herself into the perilous position.

The pictures came just a day after the first anniversary of Diana's divorce from Prince Charles.

The princess, currently in the south of France with Al-Fayed on her fourth holiday this summer, sparked outrage among Britain's opposition Tories this week when she reportedly used the word "hopeless" to describe their attitude towards her campaign for an international ban on land mines.

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