

Venezuela Arrests 18 for Organizing Violent Actions



Caracas, April 3 (RHC-Xinhua) -- Venezuelan authorities have arrested 18 suspects believed to be behind the recent wave of violent actions in the South American country, an official said on Wednesday.

The arrests were the result of an operation launched to determine "who were the alleged heads of the 'guarimbas' (violent protesters) and who was financing them," said Jose Gregorio Vielma, governor of the western Tachira state.

"These terrorists were the ones making the Molotov cocktails and threatening the population of Tachira, and that's why we will continue going door to door to find them," he told a press conference.

Vielma said the detained confessed to authorities that they came to the state with the express purpose of taking part in the violence.

He said the perpetrators were mercenaries who received between 3,000 and 5,000 bolivars (105 U.S. dollars) a week to organize violent protesters and fuel the protests in the state, which borders neighboring Colombia.

The state capital San Cristobal is where violent anti-government protests first broke out on February 4th and one of the cities with most entrenched violent protesters behind roadblocks.

"We have evidence that behind the 'guarimba' in Tachira is money from drug trafficking and paramilitary groups," Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said arlier this week.

After violent groups attacked the offices of state VTV in San Cristobal, the federal government ordered the arrest of city Mayor Daniel Ceballos as he refused to go after the assailants. He has been sentenced to 12 months in jail.

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