

EL OBSERVADOR

Venezuela to Punish Protesters



Ear-splitting protests against President Hugo Chavez and his supporters have become so obnoxious that the Venezuela Congress is considering legislation making them punishable by up to five years in prison. (AP photo)

(AP) — Depending on how you do it, banging on pots and pans - a traditional Latin American protest against unpopular governments and tough times - could soon land you in prison in Venezuela.

Earlier this year, opponents of President Hugo Chavez staged nightly protests, called "cacerolazos," during an unsuccessful two-month strike to oust the president. The protests didn't seem to faze Chavez.

Recently, opponents have targeted the homes of perceived government supporters, frightening families and prompting Chavez to denounce what he calls a new form of "terrorism."

Ruling party legislators say the demonstrations have become so pervasive and threatening they want them outlawed and have introduced legislation making them punishable by up to five years in prison.

The proposed law, according to ruling party lawmakers, would ban pot-banging protests outside the homes of public officials and those that take place on planes or lead to physical confrontations.

"It would violate freedom of expression," said Geraldo Blyde of the First Justice opposition party. His party is insisting on a two-thirds vote to pass the measure. Chavez backers are insisting on a simple majority.

American in Peru Prison Finds Love



After nearly eight years of hard living in Peruvian prisons on terrorism charges, former New Yorker Lori Berenson hopes to marry a Peruvian man in a behind-bars ceremony. (AP photo)

(AP) — After nearly eight years in Peruvian prison on charges of terrorism, American inmate Lori Berenson hopes to marry a Peruvian man in a behind-bars ceremony, her mother said.

The prospective groom is not a fellow prisoner.

A spokeswoman from Peru's National Penitentiary Institute Prison said prison weddings were allowed, but Berenson had not yet filed the necessary paperwork.

Berenson, 33, was convicted by a secret military court in 1996 and sentenced to life in prison for being a Tupac Amaru leader and plotting the thwarted attack.

That decision was overturned in 2000 and the following year she was found guilty in a civilian court on the lesser charges of "terrorist collaboration" and sentenced to 20 years in prison, including time served. Berenson denies the charges.

The wedding would be Berenson's second. She was briefly married to a former Salvadoran rebel when she lived in El Salvador.

Grammy Winner Sings at Cruz Tribute

(AP) — Latin Grammy nominee Victor Manuelle sang while hundreds danced in a tribute to "Queen of Salsa" Celia Cruz during halftime of an NFL game between Miami and Buffalo.

Cruz's husband, Pedro Knight, also received a Dolphins jersey during the ceremony.

Cruz, 77, died of a brain tumor on July 16. The Cuban exile was immensely popular in Miami, so much so that Calle Ocho - the main street running through the city's Cuban community - has the honorary name of Celia Cruz Way.

The tribute was part of a Latin-themed night at Pro Player Stadium in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month. Marty Cintron, lead singer of the Latin pop group No Mercy, performed "The Star-Spangled Banner" before the game on acoustic guitar.

Cruz came to the United States in 1960, a year after the Cuban revolution.



Pedro Knight, husband of the late salsa legend Celia Cruz, waves to the crowd as Latin Grammy nominee Victor Manuelle, left, looks on. (AP photo)

Benefit for Cuban Musicians

Rhythm Traders has arranged for mega-talented performers at a benefit for Cuban musicians.

Fiesta del Tambor features Grammy Award winning Cuban drumset artist Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, with special musical guests Ormo Ire and Agua Miel. All proceeds from the event will be used to purchase badly needed instruments and accessories for musicians in Cuba.

The show is from 6 to 9:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 16 at the North Star Ballroom, 635 N. Killingsworth Ct. Tickets are \$10. For more information, visit www.rhythmtraders.com or call 503-288-6950.

Colombia Confronted



Lloyd Axworthy (from left) and Jose Miguel Vivanco of Human Rights Watch, and Jorge Castaneda, former Mexican foreign affairs minister, charge Colombia with human rights violations. (AP photo)

Thousands of children currently fight for Colombia's illegal armed groups and some are forced to watch prisoners being tortured, Human Rights Watch said in a report.

The New York-based advocacy group warned the widespread recruitment of child fighters is undermining the fabric of Colombian society. "These children will bear the scars of their experience for decades to come," said the report, titled "You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia."


Jose Miguel Vivanco, head of the group's Americas Division, said about 11,000 children are under arms. He said at least one in every four illegal combatants in Colombia is under the age of 18.



At home with Family.

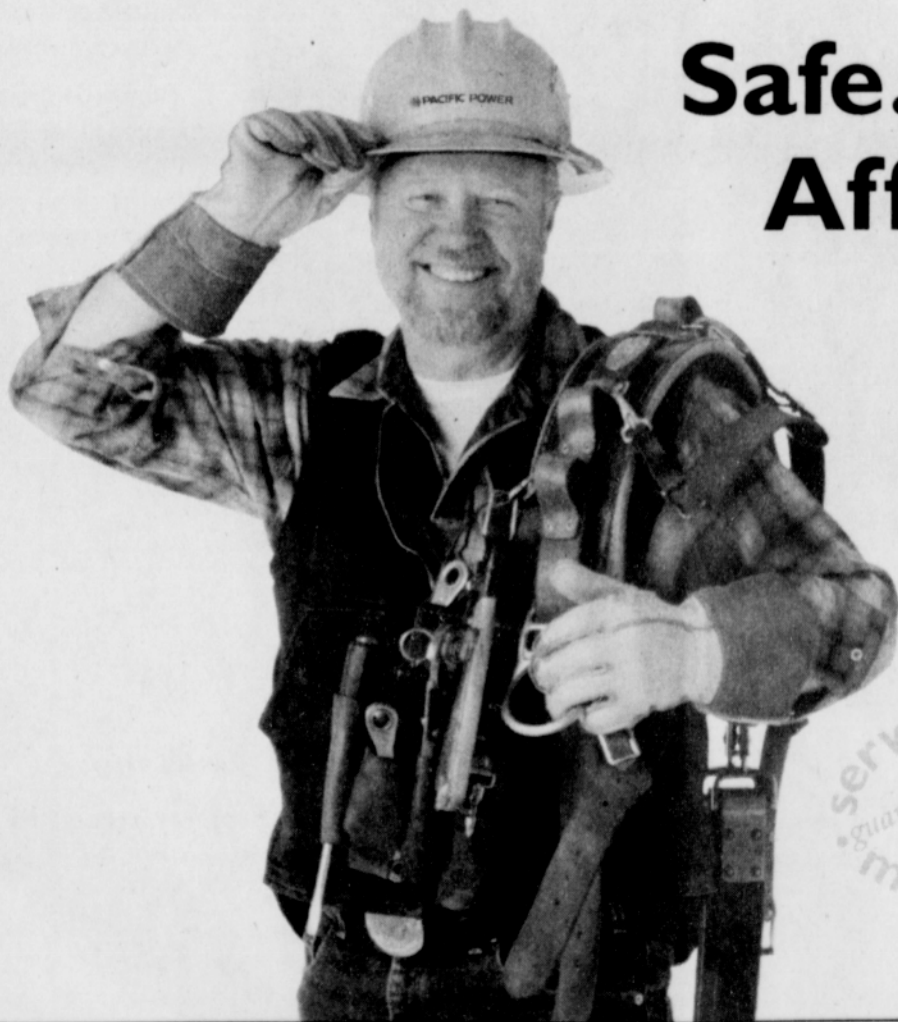
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