

## WAR FOR SINALOA CARTEL LEAVES TRAIL OF BODIES IN MEXICO

**MEXICO CITY:** Since the infamous Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was extradited to the United States, a war has broken out for control of his Sinaloa cartel, leaving a growing trail of bodies. At least three sides have been fighting each other for control of the multi-billion-dollar drug trafficking operation, experts say. One group is led by Guzman's right-hand man, Damaso Lopez Nunez, who knows the cartel's operations inside-out and helped his extradited boss escape prison twice.

Another is led by two of the extradited kingpin's sons, Jesus Alfredo and Ivan Archivaldo, who say they are the rightful heirs to his drug-running empire. The third is led by Guzman's brother Aureliano "El Guano" Guzman, who controls the area around their hometown, Badiraguato. Since Guzman's extradition in January, a bloodbath has engulfed Sinaloa, the western state where the cartel is based. There have been 764 homicides in Sinaloa so far this year, the highest rate in six years, according to the security secretariat for the state of three million people.

### 'Generalized terror'

"It's terror. The word for what is happening in Sinaloa is generalized terror," said Alejandro Sicairos, editor of local magazine Espejo. "This hasn't been the usual kind of shootout. They're

coming with everything they've got: High-caliber weapons, full arsenals, vehicle-mounted artillery." The trigger for the conflict appears to have been an armed raid on Guzman's mother's house in June 2016, according to another drug trafficking expert, Jose Reveles.

That incident - unconfirmed by authorities, but reported by Guzman's lawyers - happened five months after "El Chapo" was re-arrested following a brazen escape from a maximum security prison in July 2015. It was the first sign that war was brewing in Sinaloa. Two months later, Guzman's son Jesus Alfredo was kidnapped in the resort town of Puerto Vallarta. Authorities blamed the abduction on a rival cartel, Jalisco New Generation. But questions linger about whether the kidnapers got an inside tip. Things escalated after "El Chapo" was extradited on January 19, effectively eliminating any possibility he would escape again or manage to maintain control from inside jail. In February, Guzman's sons penned an open letter accusing Damaso Lopez Nunez of trying to kill them in an ambush. Then, last month, Lopez Nunez himself was arrested. But the killing continues unabated. "It's a real battle. The 'Damosos' even have their own uniformed army, the 'Damoso Special Forces,'" said Reveles. — AFP



**NAVOLATO, Mexico:** This photo taken on Feb 07, 2017 shows members of the Mexican army and federal police patrol at a crime scene after an organized crime shooting in the Villa Juarez neighborhood in this city in Sinaloa. — AFP



**BOGOTA:** Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos speaks inside a shopping center following an explosion on Saturday. — AFP

## THREE KILLED IN BLAST AT UPSCALE BOGOTA MALL

### FRENCHWOMAN AMONG THE DEAD

**BOGOTA:** Three people including a young Frenchwoman were killed and nine wounded Saturday when an explosion rocked an upscale mall in Bogota, as Colombia's only active guerrilla group condemned the blast. President Juan Manuel Santos said there were "no clear indications" who was behind the explosion, emphasizing that those responsible would be captured and held accountable. "Terrorists are not going to change our ways," he said at the scene of the attack, urging Colombians to continue "normal life" and enjoy the Father's Day holiday on Sunday.

One Frenchwoman, 23, died in the attack, according to the city's mayor. Two Colombians also died, the Clinic of the Country said in a statement. Another 48-year-old Frenchwoman was among the injured, according to the clinic. Bogota Mayor Enrique Penalosa also said authorities could not confirm "which group could be responsible" for the blast, but it was "clearly a cowardly terrorist attack". The Frenchwoman who died had spent six months working in a school in a poor neighborhood, Penalosa said.

Police said that at about 5:00 pm (2200 GMT) the explosion tore through a restroom in the Centro Andino Mall, crowded with shoppers ahead of Father's Day and located in an affluent area of the Colombian capital that is popular with foreigners. National police chief General

Jorge Nieto told reporters "a device" was placed "behind one of the toilets in the women's bathroom" in the shopping centre.

### 'Miracle I'm alive'

Michael Montoya, who works in a pastry shop on the third floor, told AFP that "we were tending to customers and we heard an explosion on the second floor". After heading to the scene he said he and his colleague saw people crying and bloodstained. "It was in the bathrooms because some women came out crying," he said. "There was a lot of smoke and security people told us to evacuate."

Andres Bermudez, his hands still trembling in the aftermath of the attack, described "people crying in panic". "It's a miracle I'm alive," he told AFP, explaining that he had been in the mall to pay some bills. Police, ambulances and firefighters swiftly arrived at the shopping centre, popular for its bars, restaurants and nightclubs. President Santos said the mall would open normally on Sunday.

Late Saturday, clubs in the area still opened their doors to revellers, though fewer people than usual walked the streets. John Herrera said he had decided to go out to take advantage of a friend's visit. "If it already happened once, I do not think that it will happen twice in the same place," he said.

### Guerrillas condemn attack

Colombia is still grappling with a civil conflict that has lasted more than half a century between guerrilla fighters, paramilitary groups and state forces - leaving at least 260,000 dead, 60,000 missing and 7.1 million displaced. The government is seeking a "complete peace" after reaching a peace accord last year with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC.

The ELN, with 1,500 fighters, is the last guerrilla group still active in the country, but was quick to condemn the attack. "ELN Paz condemns this deplorable incident," the group wrote on its Twitter account, noting that the attack was "against civilians". "We share the pain and stand in solidarity with the victims," the group wrote. "The state should investigate thoroughly to identify those responsible."

The leader of the FARC, Rodrigo Londono - known as Timochenko - also denounced the explosion. "Solidarity with the victims of today in Bogota," he wrote on Twitter. "This act can only come from those who want to close the roads of peace and reconciliation." The blast was the second major attack this year in the Colombian capital. In February the ELN claimed responsibility for a bombing at a bullring in Bogota, which killed a police officer and wounded more than 20 people. — AFP

## AMERICANS LAMENT CUBA BECOMING 'FORBIDDEN ISLE'

**HAVANA:** American travelers who long to swill a cocktail at Havana's legendary Sloppy Joe's bar or dive into the rooftop pool of its newest luxury hotel had their dreams dashed when US President Donald Trump announced his new Cuba policy this week. In a setback to the US-Cuban detente negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama, Trump on Friday ordered tighter restrictions on Americans traveling to the Caribbean island and a clampdown on dealings with its military, which owns many of the capital city's top establishments.

"You could say, 'You could buy a drink anywhere,' but we want to come to a famous, very nice place," said Russell Francis, 35, a special education teacher from Houston, after visiting Sloppy Joe's, which won renown during the 1920s US Prohibition era when American tourists flocked to Havana to drink and gamble to their heart's content. The watering hole, with its 18-m bar immortalized in the 1959 movie "Our Man in Havana," was frequented by film stars such as John Wayne, Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable. Many Americans have headed there again since detente to soak up its historic atmosphere.

While there is a growing number of private sector joints in Old Havana, considered one of the jewels of colonial architecture in the Caribbean, virtually all the state hotels and eateries are owned by the military. "Part of the beauty of being in the city is the historic aspect," Matt Flynn, 30, an accountant from New Orleans, said as he wandered along popular Calle Obispo where live salsa music floats out from restaurants and bars. He said he was disappointed by Trump's move, although he understood the principle.

Lauren Sivan, 39, of Los Angeles said she was glad she slipped into Cuba before the policy shift and was still able to stay at the Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski, owned by the tourism wing of the military, Gaviota. The stunning property, in a renovated Belle Epoque mall, opened this month billing

itself as Cuba's first luxury hotel, with a vast spa, rooftop terrace and cigar lounge. "We're just so glad we came now," said Sivan, who was visiting Cuba for a long weekend with a group of friends.

### Devil in details

US visitors tripled in number in the wake of 2014 detente, emboldened by Obama's easing of the travel ban. Many came in under the self-directed "people to people" category, which Trump is eliminating. Americans like Flynn and Sivan said they would not have undertaken the trip under the new rules, which make Communist-run Cuba more like the "forbidden island", just 145 km from Florida. Confusion remains about what will be allowed and whether individual visitors could simply come in under the "support for the Cuban people" category now. Experts say the devil will be in the details of the regulations to be drafted over coming months. Similarly, it is not yet clear how the ban on dealings with companies affiliated to the military will work.

GAESA, the Armed Forces Business Enterprises Group, is involved in all sectors of the economy. That means when you enter a shop in Cuba to purchase a bottle of water, soda or beer, you probably are patronizing a military establishment. "They are not marked so you would have to do your research," Flynn said. "It's very hard to police because if you come without tour guide, it's cash and there aren't receipts."

Forcing would-be visitors into organized trips, issuing lists of which establishments they could not visit and auditing those tours would go some way to solving that issue. But it also would give the Cuban government, which sanctions tours, more control over what visitors see and likely reduce Americans' contact with ordinary Cubans. "You would probably have to go through a tour group which has its advantages but it would be considerably more expensive and very structured," said Christian Walther, 26, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. — Reuters



**HAVANA:** A Cuban follows the speech of US President Donald Trump on TV on June 16, 2017 as he vows to roll back his predecessor Barack Obama's deal re-opening trade ties with the island nation. — AFP

## WARMBIER'S STRANGE, SAD N KOREA TRIP

**WYOMING, Ohio:** Over and over, Otto Warmbier apologized and begged - at first calmly, then choking up and finally in tears - to be reunited with his family. North Korean officials seated at long tables watched impassively, with cameras rolling and journalists taking notes, as the adventuresome, accomplished 21-year-old college student from suburban Cincinnati talked animatedly about the "severe crime" that had put him there: Trying to take a propaganda banner for someone back home, supposedly in return for a used car and to impress a semi-secret society he wanted to join, and all under the supposed direction of the US government.

"I have made the worst mistake of my life!" he exclaimed as his formally staged Feb 29, 2016, "confession" to anti-state activities ended in Pyongyang. More than 15 months later, he has finally been reunited with his parents and two younger siblings. Whether he is even aware of that is uncertain. "His neurological condition can be best described as a state of unresponsive wakefulness," said Dr Daniel Kanter, director of neurocritical care for the University of Cincinnati Health system. Doctors say he has suffered "severe neurological injury", with extensive loss of brain tissue and "profound weakness and contraction" of his muscles, arms and legs. His eyes will open and blink, but without signs of understanding verbal commands or his surroundings.

Warmbier, now 22, remains hospitalized at the UC Medical Center immediately after his arrival late Tuesday aboard a medevac flight following North Korea's decision to release him for what it called humanitarian reasons - and under strong pressure after the Trump administration learned of his condition in a special US envoy's June 6 meeting in New York with North Korea's ambassador to the United Nations.

His parents, Fred and Cindy Warmbier, were told he had been in a coma since shortly after being

sentenced March 16, 2016, to 15 years of prison with hard labor. If life had gone to plan, he today would be in his first month as a new graduate of the University of Virginia. He had planned to study abroad in his third year of college in China and heard about Chinese travel companies offering trips to North Korea. His parents were OK with it. "Otto's a young, thrill-seeking, great kid who was going to be in that part of the world for a college experience," Fred Warmbier explained.

Young Pioneer Tours described itself as providing "budget tours to destinations your mother would rather you stayed away from". They also included Iran, Iraq and former Soviet countries. He booked a five-day tour for late Dec 2015 and was in the process of leaving on Jan 2 2016, to return to China when he was detained. The US State Department warns against travel to North Korea. While nearly all Americans who have been there have left without incident, visitors can be suddenly seized and face lengthy incarceration for what might seem to them to be minor infractions. A state-run news agency released a short, grainy video with a shadowy, unrecognizable figure that purported to show Warmbier taking the banner down from the wall of his hotel.

### Critics

There have been critics at home of Americans who venture into the unfriendly country, leaving themselves open to becoming pawns. Ohioan Jeffrey Fowle was detained in 2014 when he intentionally left a Bible in a night club. Fowle was freed after six months; he said he was kept isolated most of the time but not physically abused. He and others freed from North Korea have said they were coached and coerced into giving a confession there.

Former National Basketball Association star Dennis Rodman gets warm receptions there. When he arrived on his latest visit the day of Warmbier's

release, there was immediate speculation about his role. But officials in Washington and Pyongyang said he had none. A British member of the Young Pioneer tour group who was Warmbier's Pyongyang hotel roommate, Danny Gratton, told The Washington Post last week that he never heard or saw any hint that Warmbier planned or did anything wrong. He called him mature and very polite.

Warmbier was abruptly pulled out of the airport security line, Gratton said. He didn't resist or seem scared, he recalled, and gave Gratton a half-smile as he was led away. "He was just a young lad who wanted a bit of adventure," Gratton told The Post. "Every once in a while they single out someone to make a point, and this was just Otto's turn. It's so sick and warped and unnecessary and evil."

Warmbier's father has accused the tour company of helping lure Americans to North Korea. The company has claimed Warmbier was the first to be arrested of the 7,000 people it had taken to North Korea. What happened to Otto Warmbier after his sentencing might never be known outside the reclusive country. His parents discount the North Korean claim that he contracted botulism, caused by a rare toxin, and then fell into coma after taking a sleeping pill. His doctors in Cincinnati found no evidence of botulism, but also said there were no signs of fractures to indicate he was beaten into his present state. His condition is consistent with cardiopulmonary arrest from a loss of oxygen to the brain, they said.

US doctors said they received some North Korean medical records but can't make conclusions about the cause or the care he got. In his upscale hometown of Wyoming, after nearly 18 months of wariness about saying anything that might disrupt diplomatic efforts, people now feel able to speak freely of their admiration for the popular young man who played soccer and was salutatorian of his 2013 class at the esteemed Wyoming High School. — AP

## TEMER, BILLIONAIRE ACCUSE EACH OTHER OF CORRUPTION

**SAO PAULO:** Embattled President Michel Temer exchanged furious denunciations of corruption Saturday with a leading businessman who alleges Brazil's leader was behind the bribes paid by business executives to politicians and government authorities in exchange for political favors. Meatpacking billionaire Joesley Batista, who is himself under investigation for fraud, claimed in an interview published in the newsmagazine Epoca that "Temer leads Brazil's largest and most dangerous criminal organization." He provided no specifics to back up his charge.

Temer's office fired back with a statement describing Batista as "the most notorious and successful bandit in Brazil's history" and it promised to file criminal and civil lawsuits against him. Batista is now a key witness in corruption investigations that threaten to force Temer out of office before his term ends in December 2018. Prosecutors have said they are considering charging the president with receiving bribes and with trying to obstruct the investigation into a colossal corruption scheme at the state-run

oil company that involved huge kickbacks to politicians in return for inflated contracts. Dozens of politicians and business executives already have been convicted in the Petrobras case.

A key part of the evidence against Temer comes from plea bargain agreements with prosecutors signed by Batista and his brother Wesley that allow the two men to remain free. Under investigation in a pension fund fraud, they have said they paid kickbacks to more than 1,800 politicians to win favors for their JBS meatpacking company. JBS is the world's biggest meat processing company and operates more than 100 industrial units around the world, including in the United States.

Their revelations include a recording of a March meeting between Batista and Temer in which the president appears to condone the payment of hush money to imprisoned former Speaker of the House Eduardo Cunha, who is serving a 15-year corruption sentence. Prosecutors have said that in the recording Temer is heard authorizing Batista to pay Cunha the equivalent of about \$150,000 a week for not reaching a plea bargain deal. — AP