

Gunmen kill 11 in Guyana village massacre

By Sharief Khan 26. Januar 2008

GEORGETOWN (Reuters) - Gunmen killed 11 people in a Guyana village early on Saturday in an attack a police source said was likely organized by the nation's most-wanted gang boss amid escalating violence in the small South American nation.

President Bharrat Jagdeo said the leaders of the massacre in Lusignan, 11 miles east of the capital Georgetown, were "animals" seeking to spread terror on Guyana's eastern coast.

The victims included women and children who were still in bed when they were shot.

"These are animals and we have to hunt them down," Jagdeo said in a news conference broadcast on state television, calling the killings an attempt to inflame ethnic tensions between African and Indian Guyanese.

A police source told Reuters that evidence suggests the murders were carried out by Rondell Rawlins, a fugitive gang leader wanted for the 2006 murder of Agriculture Minister Satyadeow Sawh and members of his family.

"He's been involved in several attacks before and is the only gang leader capable of organizing this kind of attack," said the source, who asked not to be identified.

He said a man identifying himself as Rawlins phoned police this week vowing to unleash mayhem if they did not release his girlfriend, whom he accused police of holding.

A police statement on Saturday offered the equivalent of \$150,000 (76,000 pounds) for information leading to Rawlins' capture, but did not link him to the massacre.

Jagdeo said the Lusignan killers were linked to gunmen who fired at police headquarters in Georgetown on Friday.

On Wednesday troops and gang members exchanged fire in the crime-ridden town of Buxton, also close to Georgetown. One soldier was killed and another was wounded.

The government sent police and troops to the area to capture the gunmen and restore public order after angry residents protested by blocking roads.

"The nature of this incident, carried out by unknown and reckless gunmen, (could) seriously affect the stability (of) race relations in Guyana," Robert Corbin, leader of Guyana's opposition parties, said in a statement.

Guyana has suffered from ethnic tension between populations of African and Indian descent and has struggled to contain rampant violence by roving gangs often linked to drug trafficking.

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We're not leaving

Guyana's consul after second slaughter:

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The people of Guyana are angry over the recent massacre in that country but unlike Trinidadians, they will not flee in fear but stand and ensure the problem is resolved, honorary consul for Guyana, Ernie Ross, said yesterday.

"The people of Guyana are different to those in Trinidad. An incident like this won't make them flee but to remain committed and resolve the problem. They are angry of the situation but they would not pack up and leave," Ross said in a telephone interview with the Express.

Gunmen killed 13 people, including three police officers, in Bartica, Guyana, on Sunday.

According to reports, men dressed in military clothes and armed with assault rifles invaded a police station where they stole ammunition and weapons and then attacked civilians. Three weeks ago there was another attack where gunmen struck the coastal village of Lusignan, killing six adults and five children. Both incidents are alleged to be gang related.

Ross described the situation in Guyana as a sad one, stating that "one can't help but come to the conclusion that this is a deliberate act of terrorism".

He said the situation was terrible, especially when Guyana was on a smooth path after stable elections which is usually marred by violence.

He said with Sunday's massacre there was no attempt at a robbery, nor was there an attack on a particular ethnicity. He said claims that there were ethnic divisions and that a political group was behind the killings were not true.

"This is a terrorist group bent on creating havoc by killing innocent people in Guyana," said Ross.

Ross added that at the time of the killings on Sunday, Guyana's President Bharrat Jagdeo was in an undisclosed country on a mission to deal with the pressing situation.

Guyanese people who are living in Trinidad told the Express yesterday that they were saddened by the killings and fear for their family back at home.

"Me living in Trinidad for the past ten years now. Me fraid to go back there," said a woman who gave her name as Debbie.

She said immigration in Trinidad needs to clamp down on the Guyanese people

entering this country as "people are killing innocent people and coming here to hide".

"It is a sad situation, you must feel it, they killing innocent people," said Verna, another Guyanese.

"We can't do anything, if they (family) come over here is the same thing too, all over they killing people," said Guyanese national Bibi.

She said she will be returning home soon to attend a wedding but when asked if she was afraid, she responded: "No, I'm not afraid, that's my country".

BBC News

Guyana gunmen kill 12 in attack

Gunmen in Guyana have killed 12 people, including three police officers, in an attack on a small town, local officials have said.

The gunmen were dressed in military uniforms and took weapons from a police station in Bartica, 80 miles (130km) south-west of the capital Georgetown.

The attack is the second blamed on gangs in recent weeks.

On 26 January, 11 people - including five children - were killed when gunmen attacked the village of Lusignan.

At least six gunmen arrived in Bartica late on Sunday by a speedboat on the Essequibo River and attacked the town's police station, regional official Hilbert Knights said.

'Attacked in bed'

Health Minister Leslie Ramsammy said nine of the civilians killed included five people who were sleeping in hammocks alongside the river, outside Bartica's police station.

The town of 15,000 people is a supply centre for miners prospecting for gold and diamonds in the country's interior.

Police believe that Guyana's most-wanted man - alleged gang leader Rondell Rawlins - is responsible for the January killings in Lusignan.

He has accused the authorities of kidnapping his 18-year-old pregnant girlfriend and has promised to carry out further attacks.

Authorities have offered a reward of \$150,000 for the capture of Mr Rawlins, who is also wanted over the murder of a government minister in 2006.