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Aide in Probe of Mexican Reporter's Slaying Is Shot Dead

Associated Press
Friday, August 28, 2009

CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico, Aug. 27 -- Gunmen killed the aide of a Mexican federal agent investigating the death of a crime reporter -- a month after the first agent assigned to the case was shot dead, authorities said Thursday.

The bullet-riddled body of Pablo Pasillas, 33, was found Wednesday next to a car in the northern border city of Ciudad Juarez, said Ángel Torres, a spokesman for the federal attorney general's office.

Pasillas was secretary to the agent recently appointed to investigate the Nov. 13 killing of Armando Rodríguez, a veteran crime reporter for the newspaper El Diario, Torres said.

The first agent assigned to the case was shot dead last month at his Ciudad Juarez home. Police have not determined whether the three deaths are linked.

Attacks against activists, politicians, police and government officials are common in Mexico. Motives range from land disputes to drug-gang vendettas, and many of the attacks are never solved.

Several international media-advocacy groups have named Mexico the most dangerous country in the Americas for journalists. Last month, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission said 52 journalists or media workers had been killed in the past decade. Only 17 cases of violence against journalists are the subjects of trials, the commission said.

Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso, is Mexico's most violent city, with more than 1,300 people killed this year despite the presence of thousands of federal troops and police officers. Much of the violence is tied to the drug trade.

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In a separate attack Wednesday night, gunmen wounded the founder of Mexico's most influential debtors group in the western town of Tlaquepaque.

The assailants opened fire on Maximiano Barbosa at a recreation center that he owns, said Uriel Vargas, a spokesman for the debtors group El Barzón.

Barbosa and his 23-year-old son were wounded, according to the Jalisco state attorney general's office.

El Barzón initially said in a statement that the son had died, but the group later said he remained hospitalized in grave condition.

Vargas and police said they did not know the motive for the attack.

El Barzón, which means "The Yoke," began in 1993 as a farm movement opposed to high interest rates on loans. The group attracted millions of middle-class debtors after the 1994 peso crash sent interest rates soaring. Its members blocked roads, demonstrated at banks and stripped naked in public to demand relief for bankrupt debtors.

El Barzón said the shooting was "part of a series of attacks against social activists and their families" that have gone unresolved.

"We demand that authorities conduct a thorough investigation and find those responsible for such a cruel act," the group said in a statement.

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In other violence, the bodies of four farmworkers were found Thursday dumped in a stable for bulls in the western state of Michoacan, President Felipe Calderón's home state and the focus of his military-led battle against drug cartels.

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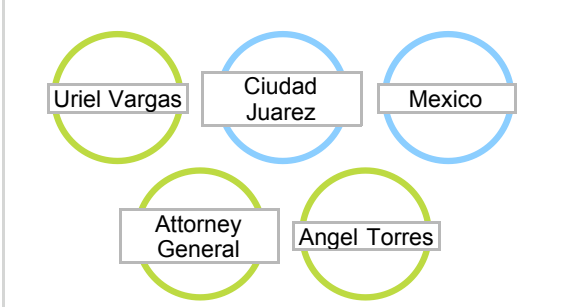
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