

Brazil prison riot kills 52, with 16 prisoners decapitated



Brasilia, July 30 (RHC)-- At least 52 inmates died, 16 of whom were decapitated, in a prison riot that broke out on Monday morning in the northern Brazilian state of Para, the state's prison authority said on Monday, the latest in a series of deadly clashes.

Authorities said the riot involved rival criminal gangs who took at least two penitentiary officers hostage as they battled one another. As Brazil's incarcerated population has surged eight-fold in three decades to around 750,000 inmates, the world's third-highest tally, its prison gangs have come to wield vast power that reaches far beyond prison walls.

Brazil's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro has said he wants to impose tighter controls in the country's prisons, as well as building many more of them. Bolsonaro's ability to curtail violence, however, may be limited as most prisons are controlled at the state level.

In January 2017, nearly 150 prisoners died during three weeks of violence in several Brazilian prisons as local gangs backed by Brazil's two largest drug factions attacked one another.

Gruesome deaths are not uncommon. In May, at least 15 inmates were found dead, choked to death or stabbed with toothbrushes in the city of Manaus.

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