

Venezuela Arrests 250 in Crackdown on Colombian Border

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Tachira Gov. Jose Vielma Mora and the military commander on the border, Gen. Efrain Alvarado, announced the tally during a nationally broadcast joint press conference in the state capital.

Vielma Mora said that the majority of the detentions are linked to the smuggling of products subsidized by Venezuela into Colombia, especially food, medicine and fuel, with the exception of the 34 suspected Colombian paramilitaries who were surprised while engaged in unspecified violent activities.

Gen. Velasco said that the “34 alleged terrorist paramilitaries will be tried for terrorism” and that “human rights were respected (in all) 250 detentions carried out since the closure of the frontier.”

The detentions in Tachira came within the framework of the state of exception that has been in effect in the border zone after the closure of the frontier.

Maduro initially ordered the closing of the main crossing point into Colombia from the cities of San Antonio and Ureña de Tachira, a decision he took based on the efforts to fight smuggling and paramilitary violence in the area.

Later, he extended the closure to the states of Zulia and Apure, warning that the measure will be implemented “at the proper time” in the state of Amazonas and that it will be lifted when the

two nations agree on a new border policy to end the criminal activity along the border's 2,219 kilometers (about 1,376 miles).

State oil company PDVSA has calculated that the country is saving some 7 million liters (1.85 million gallons) of fuel per day by closing the border and fighting smuggling.

Smuggling products made in Venezuela or imported from elsewhere is very attractive for criminals because of the great difference in their prices in the two countries.

Venezuela has a policy of state subsidies that make gasoline sold there the least expensive in the world.

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