

Lat/Am

Obrador sets \$7.5b for youths, elderly

GE's Latin American CEO, 21 others, arrested in Brazil fraud

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 5, (Agencies): Brazilian police arrested General Electric's Latin America CEO **Daurio Speranzini Junior** as part of a probe into suspected fraud and corruption by multinational companies in the Rio de Janeiro state health system.

Speranzini, the former head of Philips Medical Systems in Brazil, was among 22 people arrested, including **Frederik Knudsen**, an executive at the Dutch company.

Police raided 44 sites, including the Brazilian headquarters of Philips and Johnson & Johnson, but not the offices of GE, the Rio prosecutors' office said in a statement.



Junior

Code-named "Operation Resonance," the probe was launched with the goal of dismantling a "suppliers' cartel" accused of committing fraud to secure public health service contracts in Rio between 1996 and 2017.

The cartel, made up of at least 33 companies and led by Brazilian medical instrument distributors **Oscar Iskin**, was nicknamed the "international auctions club."

"Top executives from multinational medical equipment manufacturers arranged among themselves who would win contracts by paying a 13 percent commission on those contracts to Iskin," said the public prosecutor.

Iskin executives would then "serve as a link between public health authorities and the cartel's companies" to steer contracts away from "competitors who weren't part of the cartel."

\$7.5b for youths, elderly: President-elect **Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador** promised \$7.5 billion for youth training and aid to the elderly, keystone programs that could make Mexico's business sector one of the biggest beneficiaries of his first year in office.

Lopez Obrador pledged the government would pay the salaries of apprentices employed by Mexican companies as part of a \$5 billion package of scholarships and job training.

The once-fierce leftist met with Mexican businessmen on Wednesday in a surprisingly

chummy encounter where he sealed the job-training deal in a handshake with business chamber leader **Juan Pablo Castanon**.

The programs for the elderly and youths will be the cornerstones of Lopez Obrador's first year in office, which starts when he takes office Dec. 1.

"We will have to come up with this funding ... even if we are left without a shirt on our backs," Lopez Obrador vowed. The president-elect — whose victory must still be certified by electoral authorities and the courts — implied that most of his other campaign promises will be left to later years in office. Lopez Obrador was elected in a landslide Sunday.

Odebrecht probe hits hurdle: A far-reaching investigation into bribes paid by Odebrecht in Peru has hit a rough patch as the Brazilian builder is pressing local prosecutors to close a plea deal that would give it broader legal guarantees, two sources in Peru's attorney general's office said on Wednesday.

Odebrecht has raised its complaints about the probe in Peru to authorities in Brazil, prompting the office of Brazil's prosecutor general to suspend its judicial cooperation with the Andean country, the office of Brazil's prosecutor general said.

In late 2016, Odebrecht admitted publicly to having orchestrated kickback schemes in a dozen countries and has signed plea deals in Brazil, the United States, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Guatemala.

Be on guard — Maduro: President **Nicolas Maduro** urged his armed forces to be on guard following news reports in the United States that a year ago President **Donald Trump** raised the possibility of invading Venezuela.

"You cannot lower your guard for even a second, because we will defend the greatest right our homeland has had in all of its history," Maduro said at a military ceremony, "which is to live in peace."

He alluded to reports in the US press which said that last August Trump asked foreign policy advisers about the possibility of invading Venezuela, which the Trump administration has derided as a corrupt, left-wing dictatorship.



Anti-government protesters stand forming a 'Human Chain' during a protest against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's government in Managua, on July 4. Thousands of Nicaraguans stood Wednesday forming a 'Human Chain' in the road linking Managua and Masaya in demand of Ortega's resignation and the end of violence which has left over 220 people killed in 75 days of protests. (AFP)

Africa

3 removed from terror list: Ethiopia removed three opposition groups from its list of "terrorist" organisations on Thursday, the latest sign of Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** charting a new course for one of Africa's most tightly controlled states.

The state-run **Fana Broadcasting Corporation** said parliament had voted unanimously to remove the "terrorist" label ascribed to the **Oromo Liberation Front** and the **Ogaden National Liberation Front**, two secessionist groups, and the 'Ginbot 7'.

Ethiopia fires prison officials: Ethiopia has fired senior prison officials hours before the release of a Human Rights Watch report detailing torture and other abuses in one notorious prison and urging the government to hold officials to account.

Attorney General **Berhanu Tsegaye's** announcement of the dismissals and the appointment of new officials was broadcast late on Wednesday on state-affiliated television **Fana**.

He said the new officials should respect human rights in accordance with the constitution. Prisoners in a notorious jail in the Somali region of the country were systematically abused for years with little access to medical care and at times to food, New York-based Human Rights Watch said in its report released on Thursday.

The dismissals come weeks after new Prime Minister **Abiy Ahmed** spoke before parliament with unprecedented frankness about the extent of abuses by security forces on his predecessor's watch. (RTRS)

Liberia bank gov resigns: Liberia's central bank governor has resigned midway through his five-year term, the president's office said.

President **George Weah** had received and accepted **Milton Weeks'** resignation and a successor would be appointed shortly, it said late on Tuesday in a statement that gave no further details.

Weeks was appointed by former president **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf** in April 2016.

Former soccer star **Weah**, who took the helm of the west African nation in January, has said he inherited a broken economy and government, and a currency in free fall. (RTRS)

Ouattara dissolves gov: Ivory Coast President **Alassane Ouattara** dissolved the government on Wednesday, according to a statement from the presidency, amid tensions with his party's partner in the governing coalition.

Prime Minister **Amadou Gon Coulibaly**



Ahmed



Ouattara

was re-appointed to form a new government. The rest of the government, including the key posts of finance and defence minister, remains vacant.

Ivorian politics is historically volatile, marked by conflicts over land and ethnicity. The country was divided for nearly a decade between a government-controlled south and rebel-held north. A dispute over Ouattara's first election victory in 2010 led to a civil war that killed some 3,000 people.

Political tensions are rising again before a 2020 election. Constitutional term limits appear to prevent Ouattara from standing for a third term, but he said last month that he is free to run again under a new constitution approved in 2016. (RTRS)

Bid to remove Sudan from list: The top US envoy in Sudan vowed Wednesday to work with Khartoum in its efforts to be removed from Washington's "terrorism" blacklist as he welcomed the African country's decision to sever ties with North Korea.

In June, Sudan announced its defence firms had scrapped contracts with the Asian pariah state, acknowledging for the first time the existence of deals with heavily-sanctioned North Korea.

Washington has stepped up pressure on Sudan in recent months to cut all of its ties with Pyongyang, even though Khartoum has no official diplomatic relations with the country.

"North Korea is a paramount national security priority for the United States," said US Charge D'Affaires in Khartoum, **Steven Koutsis**, in remarks marking the July 4 celebration at the embassy in the Sudanese capital. (AFP)

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