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CIA Chief visits Colombia 10.38 PM Yesterday Category: International News Keywords: Colombia-Drugs

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02< ^AP-Colombia-Drugs<,0577<^CIA Chief Visits Colombia<< BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) _ The CIA chief traveled to the base city of the world's largest cocaine syndicate Monday, and a shadowy group called "The Avengers" threatened terrorism unless a escaped drug lord surrenders. John Deutch, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was in Colombia to gauge operations against the powerful Cali cocaine cartel. U.S. intelligence played a key role in a police crackdown on the cartel last year that put six kingpins behind bars. One, Jose Santacruz Londono, escaped from a Bogota prison last week. Police helicopters circled the southwestern city of Cali on Monday, hunting for him. Deutch was expected to discuss Santacruz's escape with Colombian law enforcement officials, who have offered a \$2 million reward for his capture. Infuriated U.S. officials said the escape will affect the U.S. decision in March on whether to certify Colombia as an ally in the war on drugs. Colombia could lose some U.S. aid if it is decertified. Seven officials of La Picota prison were suspended Monday as part of an investigation into Santacruz's flight. Authorities assume he bribed prison staff to help him escape. A 15-foot tunnel, apparently being built for another escape attempt, was discovered Monday in a section of the prison distant from where other drug kingpins are being held. In a statement, a previously unknown group calling itself "The Avengers" threatened to kill Santacruz's family and corrupt officials who it said helped him flee. The group, which listed names of its potential victims, said it was tired of wealthy drug traffickers' corruptive influence on the police and other government agencies. "We can't permit so much ridicule and defamation because of these sons of the devil," the group said. After each killing, it said, it will give Santacruz 48 hours to surrender. The threats are similar to those of a group called "Dignity for Colombia," which claimed responsibility for the assassination of a former senator and an attack on the president's lawyer last year. That group criticized drug corruption and demanded the resignation of President Ernesto Samper, who has faced allegation that his 1994 election campaign took money from the Cali cartel. Another vigilante squad, the "People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar," murdered associates of the Medellin drug lord and destroyed his property until security forces killed him in 1993. Santacruz, whose Cali cartel took control of the cocaine trade from the Medellin syndicate, is believed to have been involved in that group. Santacruz is also suspected in the 1992 murder in New York of a journalist investigating drug trafficking. Police are asking pharmacy owners to put up leaflets with the reward offer and a photo of Santacruz in their stores.

Body: Santacruz reportedly suffers from psoriasis, a skin disease that requires regular medication. Deutch,
recstat: Record
DeliveryPriority: N
DeliveryReport: B
ReturnReceipt:
Categories: