

Gunfire, bombs used in wave of urban terror in Brazil

Attackers suspected of being members of a gang led by jailed criminals continued to create havoc and fear in Sao Paulo.

The Miami Herald
Aug. 08, 2006

SAO PAULO - Suspected gang members sprayed gunfire at police, set off bombs outside government buildings and torched buses and banks Monday in a new wave of attacks across South America's largest city -- the third in four months.

Criminals believed to be part of a gang run by jailed leaders attacked 78 symbols of government and businesses across Sao Paulo state, Brazil's most populous, said the state police commander, Col. Elizeu Eclair Teixeira Borges.

Police killed two suspects and took 12 into custody. One security guard was injured in a bank attack, and four bystanders were hurt by shards of glass after a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a business, Borges said.

In one of the most prominent attacks, a large explosion damaged the main entrance to the state justice ministry building in the city's historic center, destroying computers inside and blowing out windows of neighboring buildings as high as the sixth floor.

Bullets were fired through windows of a nearby state finance ministry building, and assailants opened fire on three police stations in the predawn attacks.

The suspected members of the First Capital Command gang also targeted 32 bank branches and automatic teller machines, Borges said. A Unibanco Holdings SA branch was gutted after a car was driven through a plate glass window and the building was set ablaze.

Police killed the suspects after they allegedly opened fire on a gas station, torched a bus and tried to flee in a car as officers chased them, Borges said. Several used car dealerships and a subway station were also targeted.

But unlike the previous crime waves allegedly launched by the gang this year, Monday's attacks were mostly hit-and-run operations in which criminals attacked property and fled -- instead of staying to attack responding officers, Borges said.

"I have absolutely no doubt that we will win this war, it probably won't be this month or next month or maybe next year, but we will win it," he told reporters.

In previous attacks blamed on the gang, millions of Sao Paulo residents who depend on bus service stayed home and pulled their children from school, terrified by the bus torchings.

Bus service was suspended Monday in the suburban city of Jundiai, 30 miles from Sao Paulo, and some lines weren't running in Sao Paulo at all.