

# Sao Paulo largely avoids gang violence

The Miami Herald  
Aug. 08, 2006

**SAO PAULO, Brazil** - Suspected gang members exchanged gunfire with police, hurled Molotov cocktails at banks and burned buses for a second night in a row, but South America's biggest city largely avoided the violence with criminals rampaging in cities far from Sao Paulo.

The attacks late Monday and early Tuesday came a day after suspected members of the First Capital Command torched buses and banks, sprayed police stations with gunfire and set off bombs throughout the metropolis of 18 million.

Sao Paulo's public safety department didn't immediately release updated information Tuesday on the fresh round of attacks across Brazil's most populous state or say whether there were any deaths or injuries.

But Brazilian media reported that banks, police stations and other government buildings were targeted and buses were burned in at least eight cities, most hundreds of kilometers (miles) from the city.

The latest outbreak of violence allegedly initiated by the gang, known here as the PCC, marks the third time in four months that it has unleashed its fury on the streets to oppose the prison transfer of its leaders.

Anchored in local prisons and led by hardened criminals who issue their orders via cell phones and instructions given to their attorneys, the PCC is one of Brazil's most notorious organized crime groups.

In the initial attacks Monday, 78 symbols of government and businesses across Sao Paulo state - many in the city itself - were attacked in the pre-dawn hours, said state police commander, Col. Elizeu Eclair Teixeira Borges.

Assailants used machine guns, rifles, Molotov cocktails and "other explosive devices" in hit-and-run attacks, avoiding direct confrontation with police.

Police killed two 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.

Twelve suspects were taken into custody. One security guard was injured in a bank attack, and four bystanders were hurt by 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 and blowing out windows of neighboring buildings.

Bullets were fired through windows of a nearby state finance ministry building. The suspected PCC members also targeted 32 bank branches, Borges said.

Borges said the number of patrol cars circulating in Sao Paulo at night was tripled and the number of police officers was doubled.

He said police expected the PCC would unleash several new attacks "between now and the presidential election" in October.

Sao Paulo State Gov. Claudio Lembo said the justice ministry building may have been targeted because some prisoners believed they would be refused permission to leave prison next Sunday - Father's Day in Brazil - for visits home before being required to return to their lockups.

During the May outbreak of violence, the PCC launched unprecedented attacks on Sao Paulo's streets and inside dozens of prisons that prompted a week of violence. The gang initially targeted police officers - shooting them on the streets, at stations and in their homes - leaving 41 dead.

Nearly 200 people in all were killed, among them prison guards, suspected criminals, jail inmates and bystanders. Another 100 attacks on July 11-15 left at least six people dead.

The attacks came after gang leaders enraged at the May transfers of 700 of their members to more secure prisons allegedly used smuggled cell phones to order their "soldiers" on the streets to attack.