

Rebels Blow Up Pipelines in Mexico, Disrupting Service

The New York Times
September 11, 2007

MEXICO CITY, Sept. 10 — For the third time in three months, saboteurs blew up several pipelines belonging to [Mexico](#)'s state oil monopoly, disrupting service to dozens of factories and briefly rattling financial markets, officials said, but not killing anyone.

Six explosions along pipelines in the state of Veracruz Monday sent flames and plumes of smoke into the sky just before dawn.

The oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos, or Pemex, issued a statement saying that someone had deliberately detonated bombs at six points along four natural gas pipelines and one oil pipeline in the eastern state of Veracruz early Monday morning.

Later in the day, The Associated Press reported that the state police in Veracruz had evidence implicating the Popular Revolutionary Army, a small guerrilla movement formed in the 1990s, in the attacks. The report could not be immediately confirmed.

In July, the same guerrilla group claimed responsibility for similar attacks on two major gas pipelines supplying the cities of Querétaro, Salamanca and Guanajuato. Carried out on July 5 and July 10, those attacks shut down the flow of gas to dozens of factories for more than 48 hours. At the time, the rebel group promised in a communiqué a campaign “against the interests of the oligarchy and of this illegitimate government.”

President [Felipe Calderón](#), on a state visit to India, condemned the violence, saying it had no place in a democracy. “My government repudiates energetically all acts of violence and those who practice or propose them,” he said. He added, “Those who attack the property of Mexicans hurt the poorest.”

The six explosions sent flames and plumes of smoke into the sky just before dawn. At least 21,000 people were evacuated from their homes as a precaution, Pemex officials said.

The news of the blasts briefly caused the price of natural gas futures to spike in markets around the world, but prices dropped in later trading.

Jesús Reyes Heróles, the head of Pemex, said the blasts would mean hundreds of millions of dollars in lost production. He said it would take four or five days from the time the gas fires burned out to repair the pipelines. He said about nine states and the capital, Mexico City, would be affected. “It is a big blow,” he said. “You can’t store natural gas or transport it by truck.”

The sabotage of the gas pipelines punctuated a turbulent political season in Mexico, where it has become clear that the wounds of last year's hotly contested presidential race still have not healed.

Leftist politicians, who do not regard Mr. Calderón's razor-thin win as legitimate, recently used parliamentary rules to keep him from giving his annual address to Congress, and they boycotted a ceremony during which he delivered his address in writing.

In the meantime, [Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#), a leftist firebrand and a former mayor of Mexico City who lost to Mr. Calderón, continues to insist he is the "legitimate president." He argues that the election was riddled with fraud and dirty campaigning, orchestrated by big business, the huge teachers' union and the former president, Vicente Fox.

Mr. López Obrador and his followers have promised to invade the historic central square of the capital on the night of Sept. 15, where traditionally the president rings a bell to mark Mexico's revolution against Spain.

At the same time, opposition congressional leaders, angry about the outcome of the election last year, are pushing forward legislation that would strictly control campaign advertising and limit negative ads.

In addition, the legislation would force out of office the president of the Federal Election Institute, Luis Carlos Ugalde, whom leftists accuse of helping throw the election to Mr. Calderón. Mr. Ugalde vigorously denies the accusation.