

Floods and landslides kill dozens in Brazil's Sao Paulo state

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Torrential rain triggered flooding and landslides causing havoc in Sao Sebastiao [Sao Sebastiao City Hall via AFP]

Brasilia, February 20 (RHC)-- Torrential rains have triggered flooding and landslides in coastal areas of Brazil's southeast, killing at least 36 people and displacing hundreds of others.

In Sao Paulo state, television and social media footage from the town of Sao Sebastiao on Sunday showed entire neighbourhoods under water, debris from hillside houses swept away by mud, as well as

flooded highways and cars destroyed by fallen trees.

The town, 200 km (124 miles) north of the city of Sao Paulo and where many people from the capital spend the holiday weekend ahead of the Christian festival of Lent, was one of the hardest hit, as a record 600mm (24 inches) of rain fell in 24 hours, city officials said.

At least 35 people died in San Sebastiao, according to a statement from the Sao Paulo state government. A seven year old girl was also killed in the neighbouring town of Ubatuba, news reports said.

Sao Paulo state Governor Tarcisio de Freitas declared a state of emergency in five towns along the coast. His government said 566 people had been displaced or made homeless.

Carnival events were cancelled in Sao Sebastiao, Ubatuba, Ilhabela and Bertioga.

"Our rescue teams are not managing to get to several location; it is a chaotic situation," said Felipe Augusto, Sao Sebastiao's mayor. "We are working at nearly 50 residences that collapsed under the force of the water and there are still people buried," he told GloboNews.

More than 100 firefighters were working on the scene, with the aid of helicopters, according to local media. Amid the loss and destruction, authorities said a boy aged two was rescued from a sea of mud, as was a woman who was giving birth.

Weather forecasts show heavy rains are set to continue in Sao Paulo's coastal area, challenging rescue workers and raising the prospect of a higher death toll.

The federal government ordered the mobilisation of several ministries to assist victims, restore infrastructure and start reconstruction work. Operations at the port of Santos, South America's largest, were meanwhile interrupted amid gusts of wind exceeding 55 kilometres per hour (34 miles per hour) and waves of more than one metre high on Saturday, according to a local news outlet.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on his social media account he will visit the main affected areas on Monday.

Lula said government at all levels would work to "take care of the injured, look for missing people and restore roads, energy and telecommunications".

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