

Gang Kingpin Captured as Strike Enters Third Day in El Salvador



San Salvador, July 30 (teleSUR-RHC) Salvadoran authorities have captured a key gang leader behind the country's forced transportation strike, as the death toll of transport workers at the hands of gang members climbed to nine on Wednesday as thousands of commuters were affected on the third day of the ongoing strike.

Authorities detained one of the heads of *Barrio 18*, one of El Salvador's two most powerful gangs, on Tuesday night, after government officials accused *Barrio 18* of being a major force behind the transportation strike that began Monday.

But the left-wing FMLN government has also slammed the transportation strike, fomented by gang violence, as being part of a larger right-wing destabilization campaign against the government, which has also included attempts by the right-wing ARENA party to sow division in the Armed Forces and protests by small groups of soldiers and right-wing civil society groups.

El Salvador's most powerful gangs forced bus drivers and other public transport workers to go on strike Monday in a violent campaign to pressure the government negotiate with organized crime groups in search of reduced punishment for gang members. But the government of President Salvador Sanchez Ceren has repeatedly refused to have a dialogue with gangs, a position again reiterated since the start of the strike.

In light of the violence and ongoing chaos of three days without public transportation impacting thousands mostly in the capital city of San Salvador, the government said it was prepared to deploy the military to guarantee security in the streets.

Hundreds of commuters have found alternative means of transportation, while the transport sector suffers losses of \$500,000 per day and thousands of drivers go without pay, according to a Salvadoran transport driver and rider association.

El Salvador is home to some of the highest murder rates in Latin America, and authorities link most of murders to gang violence. The country recorded 677 homicides in June alone, one of the most violent months on record since more than a decade of civil war came to an end in 1992. But with deep corruption and impunity, less than 5 percent of murders result in a conviction.

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