

Brazilian president sends in army as truck protest strangles economy

*Military and police authorized to clear key highways
Five-day strike over diesel prices continues despite peace deal*

*Reuters in São Paulo
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Brazil's president Michel Temer has authorized federal forces to clear highways **blockaded** / **blɒ'keɪd**/ by protesting truckers whose actions have paralyzed key sectors of the economy despite an agreement by most trucking associations to end a five-day protest over diesel prices.

The protests by truck drivers have **crippled** major sectors of Latin America's biggest economy and led the city of São Paulo, the region's biggest business **hub**, to declare a state of emergency due to **scarce** fuel supplies.

Temer announced on Friday that he had authorized the army, along with federal highway police and state police forces, to clear major roadways following a meeting with ministers in the capital, Brasília.

"Those blocking the highways, those acting in a radical manner, are hurting the population and will be held responsible," Temer said in a televised address.

Negotiators for several trucker groups agreed late on Thursday to suspend their blockages for 15 days after the government vowed to subsidize and stabilize diesel prices, which may cost 5bn reais (\$1.4bn) this year.

But *Abcam*, a trucking group that **ignited** the strike and says it represents about 600,000 drivers, was not among the parties that signed the accord, raising serious questions about how truckers would respond to government concessions.

By Friday afternoon, the strike showed no signs of **letting up** and its impact on Brazilians' daily lives and several key economic sectors in the commodity powerhouse persisted.

No trucks were able to enter the Santos port, Latin America's largest, and the oilseeds crushing group *Abiove* told **Reuters** / **'rɔɪtərz**/ that soy exports would **halt** / **hɔ:lt**/ on Saturday if truckers did allow access to major ports.

The Brazilian meat group *ABPA* said 152 poultry and pork processing plants had indefinitely suspended production. Lack of feed supplies may cause millions of birds and hogs to die.

Gas stations ran out of fuel across the country, while consumers hit grocery stores in a panic in several areas, emptying shelves. Public transport and trash collection was reduced or halted across the country.

To win over truckers, who began the blockades on Monday to protest about high fuel prices, the government also promised to extend for 30 days a 10% diesel price cut announced by the state-led oil company *Petróleo Brasileiro SA*.

Shares of *Petrobras*, as the company is known, rose more than 2% in early trading after **plunging** 19% **in** the prior two days, as news of government subsidies / **'sʌbsɪdɪz**/ softened the blow of political interference in the firm's fuel pricing. They were up 0.7% in afternoon trading.

Auto production in Brazil, which contributes about a quarter of industrial **output**, ground to a halt on Friday in the latest blow to a fragile economic recovery following the worst downturn in decades.

Taken and adapted from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/25/brazil-protests-latest-temer-clears-trucks-highways-army>