

231 Dead After Brazilian Club Fire

JOHN SHAFFER

Two hundred thirty-one Brazilians lay dead, and 83 more were hospitalized as the result of a deadly fire that broke out in the Brazilian night club Kiss in the heart of Santa Maria, Brazil. 2,000 people, twice the club's legally occupancy crowded the dance floors to see the band Gurizada Fandangueira play. Pyrotechnics from the stage show set fire to the clubs ceiling. First, a percussionist tried to throw water on the blaze which had no effect. Next, a security guard tried using a fire extinguisher which failed to function, and the fire grew out of control.

The only exit to the dangerously over-packed club was the front door, which was located down a thin and dark hallway. Upon realizing that the club was on fire, the partygoers stampeded towards the door, bottlenecking at the hallway and trampling one another. Club security initially stopped the tenants, not realizing that the club was in fact on fire. The roof of Kiss then collapsed, trapping the remaining

concert attendees inside. Those on the outside were able to hear the chilling screams and pleas of those who were trapped inside the inferno. Many charred bodies were found in the bathrooms. People were searching all areas of the club for a second way out that was not there. Brazil's focus has since turned from the sorrow and tragedy of the event to calls for justice from those who demand to know how such an event could occur.

A local fire official told Brazilin network Globotv that the club's permits had been expired for months and that it was not fit to operate. Officials have taken the band's singer, the show producer, and the club's two owners into custody. No formal charges have been filed against the men yet.

Indian Gang Rape Stirs National Talks

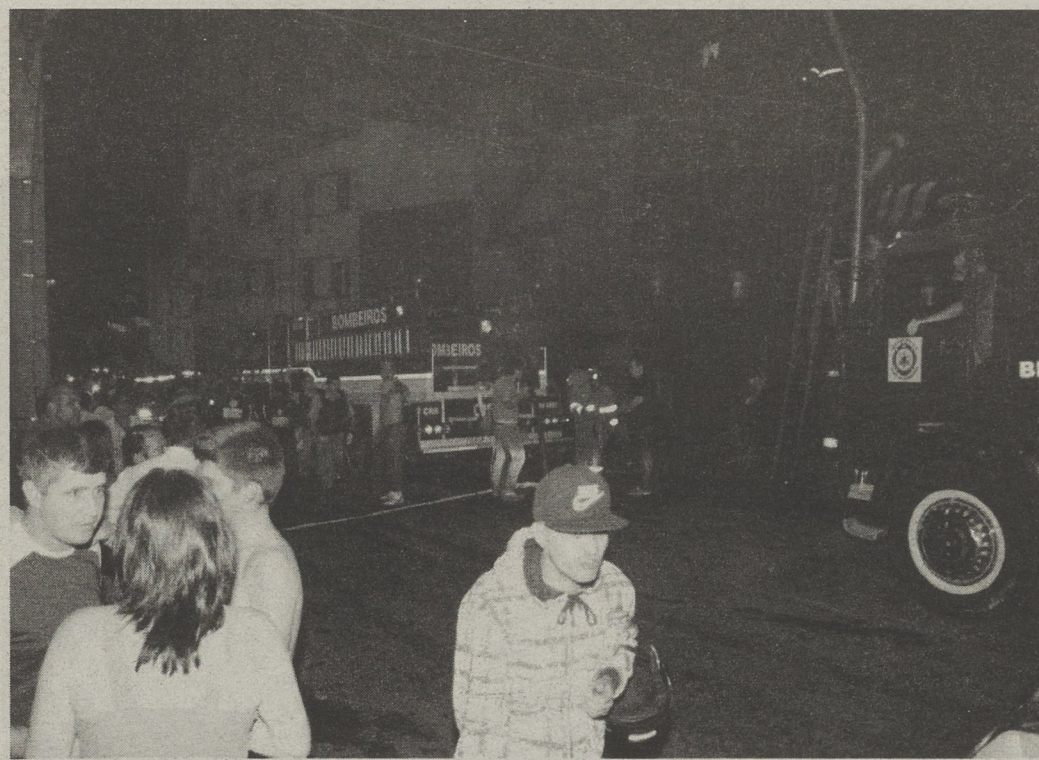
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FABULOUS FLORES

The fatal gang-rape of a student on a New Delhi bus, December 16, has sparked a mass outcry for harsher punishments for rape crimes. India, New Delhi in particular, is known for their lack of safety for women and is often referred to as the "rape capital" of India. The trial of the five men, and suspected sixth, will set a precedent for future sex crime cases. Prompted by public outcry has led India to entertain the idea of the death penalty for rapists.

Not much can currently be reported on the progress of the case. As of January 25, the second day of the trial, Judge Yogesh Khanna has barred lawyers from speaking to the press, stating "I have already passed an order, If you are not happy with the order you can challenge it in the court." Most rape cases in India are concealed from the public eye, the added legal measure in this particular case prevents the media from reporting on court proceedings. The family is seeking immediate closure

wants the case handled and settled swiftly. Five men standing trial face the charges of murder, rape, robbery and kidnapping, with the expectation that prosecutors will demand the death penalty. The sixth suspect claims he is 17 and therefore will appear in juvenile court. The brutality done to one by many has led to a tidal wave of protest for women's rights in India.



Left: Survivors huddle outside the charred nightclub. Right: Rescue workers scramble to assess the situation.

Photos courtesy of Agencia Brasil