

# It Was the World's Second Biggest Bank Heist Ever. But in Brazil Nobody Saw a Thing.

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Tuesday, 09 August 2005

The story of Brazil's biggest bank heist ever starts like this: Three months ago a house was rented for commercial use in Fortaleza, capital of the state of Ceará, in the Brazilian Northeast.

The house was located some 80 meters away from the local Central Bank of Brazil (BC) building on a street (25 de Março) that ran parallel to the street where the BC was located (Avenida Dom Manuel).

A landscaping firm called Grama Sintética (Synthetic Grass) opened for business in the house.

For the past three months the occupants of the house have been doing some unusual landscaping. It was all underground. They dug a tunnel exactly 78 meters long, with interior lighting and air conditioning.

The tunnel was dug 4 meters below the surface. It was 70 centimeters high, 70 centimeters wide and lined with canvas and wood.

When the diggers reached their destination, the vault of the BC, they had to cut through 1.10 meters of solid steel-reinforced concrete before they could get to the money.

That is what they did this weekend. The bank vault closed on Friday and when it was opened Monday morning a lot of money had disappeared and the robbery was discovered.

The amount of money missing, in used, untraceable bills, total led US\$ 65 million (150 million reais), making it the biggest bank robbery in Brazilian history, and the second biggest ever (behind only a US\$ 72 million robbery in England in 1987).

The police say they have descriptions of the men involved and have begun a manhunt. The BC president, Henrique Meirelles, has ordered the bank to make its own investigation and report back to him.

Meirelles is curious about how that much money, weighing an estimated 3.5 tons, could have been moved around without anyone seeing anything. There is also the problem of an alarm system inside the vault that did not work.

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