

# Brazil's Amazon: Surge in deforestation as military prepares to deploy

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Much of the illegal logging takes place on the lands of indigenous tribes

**Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon rainforest rose sharply last month as the country prepared to send troops to try to curb illegal logging and mining.**

Brazil's space research agency said the area destroyed in April was 64% bigger than in the same period last year.

In the first four months of 2020, destruction of the forest by illegal loggers and ranchers rose 55%, it said.

Environmentalists say President Jair Bolsonaro's policies and rhetoric encourage illegal activity.

Mr Bolsonaro denies this. Earlier this week he authorised the deployment of armed forces to the region.

The Amazon rainforest is a vital carbon store that slows down the pace of global warming.

## **Indigenous group takes on mining giant**

### **Old enemies unite to save their land**

#### **'We won't accept the destruction of our rights'**

Brazil's National Institute of Space Research (Inpe) said that more than 405 sq km (156 sq miles) of the Amazon had been deforested last month compared with 248 sq km in April last year.

Between January and April, a total of 1,202 sq km was wiped out, it said.

Conservation groups said that, since the coronavirus outbreak began, fewer government enforcement agents had been deployed.

Brazil has been one of the worst-affected countries in South America, with 141,000 cases and nearly 10,000 deaths.



Government agents discovered this illegal gold mine in the heart of the rainforest

"The pandemic has not helped because there are apparently less agents out there and illegal loggers obviously don't care about the virus in remote areas of the Amazon," said Paulo Barreto, senior researcher for the non-profit conservation group Imazon.

Environmental enforcement agency Ibama said it was scaling back field agents in other at-risk areas but not in the Amazon.

Deforestation in the region has soared since President Bolsonaro took office last year.

He has argued that more farming and mining in protected areas of the forest are the only way to lift the region out of poverty.

Mr Bolsonaro's environmental policies have been widely condemned but he has rejected the criticism, saying Brazil remains an example for conservation.

He has criticised Ibama for what he described as excessive fines. His first year in office saw a sharp drop in financial penalties being imposed for environmental violations. At the same time, the agency remains underfunded and understaffed.

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## Brazil launches military operations in the Amazon rainforest

Jake Spring  
2 MIN READ

FILE PHOTO: Smoke billows from a fire in an area of the Amazon rainforest near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil, September 10, 2019.  
REUTERS/Bruno Kelly

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazil launched a military deployment to protect the Amazon

rainforest on Monday, Vice President Hamilton Mourao said, in response to surging deforestation this year with the high season for forest fires still approaching.

The military - along with environmental authorities, police and other government agencies - began with an operation to stop illegal environmental destruction in a national forest in the state of Rondonia near the Bolivian border, Mourao said at a press conference alongside other government ministers.

Defense Minister Fernando Azevedo e Silva said authorities are establishing bases of operation in three Amazon cities, with 3,800 troops mobilized to begin raids against illegal logging and other crimes, with initial operational costs of 60 million reais (\$10.32 million).

Government data released on Friday showed that deforestation rose 55% in the first four months of the year, compared to the same period a year ago, to 1,202 square kilometers (464 square miles). That comes on top of last year's destruction rising to an 11-year high, provoking international outcry that not enough was being done to protect the world's largest rainforest.

President Jair Bolsonaro issued a decree last week deploying the military to the region, repeating a move he made last year to send in the armed forces after forest fires and deforestation surged. This year troops are being sent in three months earlier than in 2019.

(\$1 = 5.8160 reais)