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News | Environment

## Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon hits new record in January

*Researches say forest destruction in Brazil has been accelerating since 2019, when President Jair Bolsonaro took office.*



High prices for beef, soy and other commodities in Brazil are boosting the demand for cheap land [File: Paulo Santos/Reuters]

11 Feb 2022



Brazil recorded the most deforestation ever in the [Amazon rainforest](#) for the month of January, according to new government data, as the destruction con-

tinues to worsen despite the government's recent pledges to bring it under control.

[Deforestation](#) in Brazil's Amazon totalled 430sq kilometres (166sq miles) last month, five times higher than January 2021, according to preliminary satellite data from government space research agency Inpe released on Friday.

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That was the highest for January since the current data series began in 2015.

The new data came as environmental researchers have been saying that the [destruction](#) still rising is largely due to President Jair Bolsonaro, a right-wing leader who, since taking office in 2019, has weakened environmental protections in the country.



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has long argued for more commercial farming and mining in the Amazon to help lift the region out of poverty [Adriano Machado/Reuters]

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With little fear of punishment, [forests are being cleared](#) for ranches in illegal land grabs, said Britaldo Soares Filho, an environmental modelling researcher at the Federal University of Minas Gerais. High prices for beef, soy and other commodities are also boosting the demand for cheap land.

“People might be surprised that it didn’t increase even more,” Soares Filho said.

“There is a race to deforest the Amazon.”


The Ministry of the Environment said that making comparisons using single months does not provide the best picture, stating that in August to January deforestation [fell slightly](#) compared with the same period a year ago.



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The federal government is acting more forcefully in 2022 to fight against environmental crimes, the ministry said in a statement to Reuters.



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There is also concern that Colombia's Amazon region is facing similar threats. On Tuesday, environmental groups expressed alarm about a sharp increase in forest fires that they blamed on logging to make way for cattle ranches, coca fields and illegal roads.

More than 150 academics and activists from Colombia, Brazil, France and Spain sent a letter to Colombia's President Ivan Duque urging the government to take a more aggressive stance against deforestation, using the mili-



tary to put out the fires, creating economic alternatives for people in the Amazon region and arresting those who finance efforts to clear the forest.

The [preservation of the Amazon](#), the world's largest rainforest, is vital to curbing climate change because of the vast amount of greenhouse gas absorbed in its trees.

Bolsonaro has long argued for more commercial farming and mining in the Amazon to help lift the region out of poverty.

Facing international pressure from the United States and Europe, Brazil last year pledged to end illegal deforestation by 2028.



The preservation of the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, is vital to curbing climate change because of the vast amount of greenhouse gas absorbed in its trees [File: Adriano Machado/Reuters]

At the UN climate summit in 2021, 141 countries – including Brazil – signed a pledge to [end deforestation by 2030](#).

Soon after those commitments, Inpe released data showing that deforestation in 2021 in the Brazilian Amazon hit the [highest point in 15 years](#). The preliminary data for January shows the destruction is continuing to mount.

Ana Karine Pereira, a political scientist at the University of Brasilia, said while Bolsonaro and his government changed their tone last year, their policies remain the same.

Soares Filho and Pereira said deforestation will only stop rising if Bolsonaro loses the presidential election in October.

“Changing the political profile of the president and federal government leadership is crucial in this moment to see a break in this trend of high levels of deforestation,” Pereira said.

SOURCE: NEWS AGENCIES

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