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Brazil: Deforestation in Amazon rainforest hits record January high

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An aerial view shows a tree at the centre of a deforested plot of the Amazon near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil Photograph:(Reuters)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS
Nearly 360 square kilometers of forest cover, an area more than six times the size of Manhattan, were destroyed in the Brazilian Amazon from January 1 to January 31

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Brazil recorded the most deforestation ever in the Amazon rainforest for the month of January, according to government data.

Nearly 360 square kilometers (140 square miles) of forest cover, an area more than six times the size of Manhattan, were destroyed in the Brazilian Amazon from January 1 to January 31, said Brazil's national space research institute, INPE.

Environmentalists said that translated into a high risk that 2022 would be another devastating year for the Brazilian Amazon.

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Facing international pressure from the United States and Europe, Brazil last year pledged to end illegal deforestation by 2028 and signed a global pact to stop all forest destruction by 2030.

President Jair Bolsonaro has faced international outcry over the surging destruction of the Amazon, a key resource in the race to curb climate change.

The Brazilian Amazon hadn't recorded a single year with more than 10,000 square kilometers of deforestation in over a decade before Jair Bolsonaro's term started in 2019.

Bolsonaro took office with promises to develop the Amazon, and dismissing global outcry about its destruction. His administration has defanged environmental authorities and backed legislative measures to loosen land protections, emboldening land grabbers.

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"We are seeing the Amazon rainforest being destroyed by a government which made environmental destruction its public policy," said Márcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate Observatory, a network of environmental nonprofit groups.

"This is the real Brazil that the Bolsonaro government tries to hide with fantastical speeches and actions of greenwashing abroad," Mauricio Voivodic, international environmental group WWF's executive director for Brazil, said in a statement.

"The reality shows that the Bolsonaro government accelerated the path of Amazon destruction."

Britaldo Soares Filho, an environmental modelling researcher at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and Ana Karine Pereira, a political scientist at the University of Brasilia, said said deforestation will only stop rising if Bolsonaro loses the presidential election in October.

"In order for us to break through this trend of high deforestation rates, I believe that a change in the political profile of the president and the conduct of the federal government is crucial," Pereira said.

High deforestation is unusual in the current rainy season, when the rainforest is harder for loggers to access. The January data showed that new clearing was still less than half of what is common during the peak months from June to September.



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