

Brazilian president wants borders reopened, says worth risk



Brasilia, April 20 (RHC)-- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has called for the reopening of the country's borders, as he pushes to restart South America's largest economy. Still, he conceded he might be blamed if the new coronavirus outbreak worsens as a result.

Bolsonaro fired his health minister on Thursday after clashing with him over lockdown measures, which the president argues are overly damaging to the economy and should be rolled back. But the far right-wing leader conceded on Friday that it is not up to him to decide whether or not social distancing measures should be relaxed in states and cities after the supreme court ruled that governors and mayors are responsible for the decisions.

The borders, however, are Bolsonaro's to control. He said he had discussed the possibility of reopening land borders, particularly those with Uruguay and Paraguay, with Justice Minister Sergio Moro. "Opening trade is a risk that I take because if (the outbreak) gets worse, it will fall on my shoulders," Bolsonaro said at the inauguration event for his new health minister, Nelson Teich.

Teich, who replaces Bolsonaro's fired health minister, is the owner of Teich & Teich Health Care, a private company that has made millions of dollars on providing medical services for wealthy Brazilians.

To slow the spread of the virus, Brazil closed its borders last month to nonresident foreigners, with some exceptions, although cargo shipments primarily still flow freely.

Medical experts say the outbreak of the coronavirus is still far from its peak in Brazil as cases and deaths, already the highest in Latin America, continue to rise sharply.

Brazil has over 33,682 confirmed cases, with some 200 fatalities per day in the last four consecutive days, bringing the death toll to 2,141 as of Friday, according to Health Ministry data.

Meanwhile, Bolsonaro has been one of the worst presidents in the region to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, receiving criticism even from the World Health Organization (WHO).

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