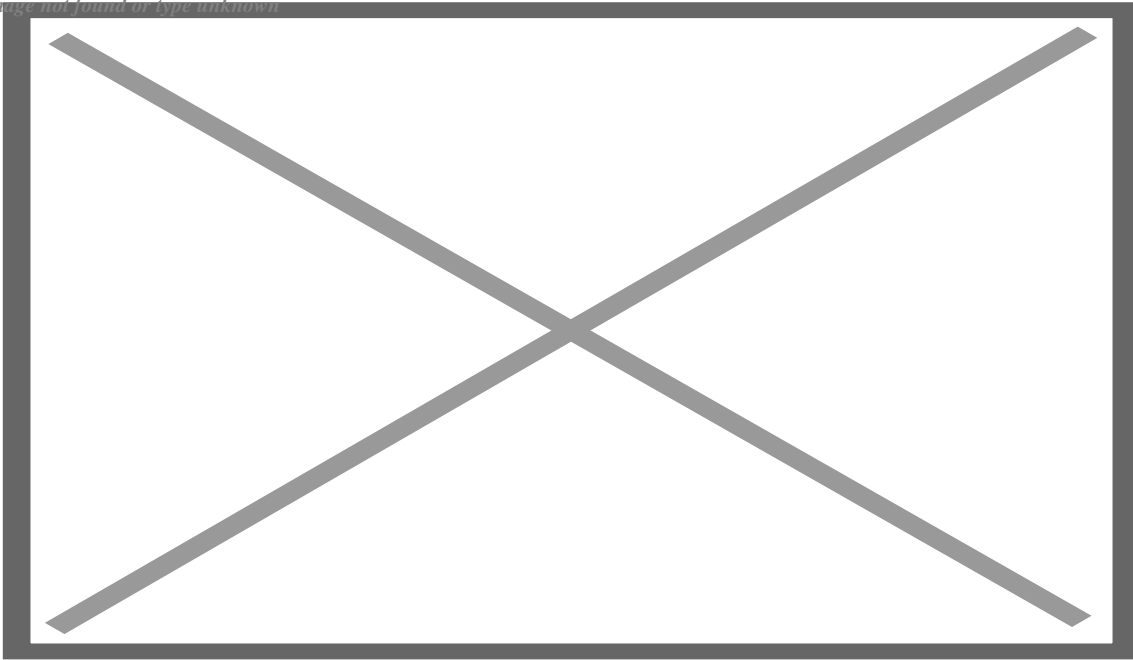


Amazon deforestation reaches new high in Brazil

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Brasilia, November 12 (RHC)-- Deforestation in Brazil's Amazon has hit a new, alarming milestone, government data showed, as environmentalists warned a "frantic race towards devastation" is under way before a government transition that is set to usher in more protection for the rainforest.

Preliminary government satellite data collected by space research agency Inpe and released on Friday showed that approximately 904 sq km (349s q miles) were cleared in the region in October, the highest for the month since tracking began in 2015.

From January to October, 9,494 sq km (3,666 sq miles) were cleared, equal to an area more than 12 times the size of New York City and also a record for the period, exceeding the previous high set in 2019 by 12.7 percent.

Incoming Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who is set to take office on January 1, has promised to bolster environmental safeguards and funding for state agencies tasked with protecting the Amazon. The rainforest, which is critical to the global fight against climate change, has seen years of increased deforestation under the administration of Lula's predecessor, outgoing President Jair

Bolsonaro.

The far-right former army captain had pushed for more mining and other development projects in the Amazon, saying they would stimulate the economy. But rights groups accused Bolsonaro of gutting Brazil's environmental and Indigenous protection agencies, leading to an uptick in deforestation and violence across the sprawling region.

Annual statistics released last year showed deforestation had already surged to a 15-year high under Bolsonaro. His office and the Ministry of the Environment did not immediately respond to a request for comment from the Reuters news agency on Friday.

For his part, Lula, in a victory speech after narrowly defeating Bolsonaro in an October 30 run-off, said Brazil was "ready to resume its leading role in the fight against the climate crisis", especially by protecting the Amazon. He also has pledged to "fight for zero deforestation."

Lula, who previously served as Brazil's president from 2003 to 2010, will travel to Egypt next week to take part in the COP27 global climate summit and meet international leaders. "I will travel to Egypt on Monday. I will have more conversations with world leaders in a single day than Bolsonaro did in four years," Lula said on Thursday during a meeting with legislators in the Brazilian capital, Brasilia. The Workers' Party leader did not specify who he would meet with, but said he planned to reposition Brazil at the centre of international geopolitics.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian branch of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said on Friday that the increase in Amazon deforestation in October was expected, "but the preliminary data for the first days of November is terrifying."

"It's a true, frantic race towards devastation" before the change in government, WWF-Brazil said. "The new government will have a lot of work to do to put the country back on track, to put an end to the perception that the Amazon is a lawless land," WWF-Brazil's Raul do Valle said in a statement.

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