

Ex-Brazilian president Bolsonaro appears before police in riot probe



Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has denied wrongdoing in connection to the January 8 riot [File: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters]

Brasilia, April 26 (RHC)-- Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is testifying to federal police about his conduct around the January 8 attacks on government buildings by his supporters in capital Brasilia following his election loss.

Bolsonaro arrived at the police headquarters in a vehicle with tinted windows on Wednesday morning and did not make a statement to journalists, the AFP news agency reported.

The far-right former president is being investigated for his alleged role in the riots during which his supporters ransacked the buildings of the Supreme Court, Congress and the presidential palace to protest against his narrow loss to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in October. Hundreds of suspected rioters were expected to stand trial.

For months prior to the presidential vote, Bolsonaro raised the possibility of election fraud in the country's electronic voting system without evidence, and he never explicitly conceded defeat.

Bolsonaro's appearance before the authorities on Wednesday came less than two weeks after Brazil's Prosecutor-General Augusto Aras said Bolsonaro "allegedly encouraged the perpetration of crimes" against the rule of law.

President Lula has previously accused Bolsonaro of planning the January 8 riot, which he described as a "coup."

Bolsonaro left Brazil for the United States early in 2023 and did not return until late March, so he was not in the country during the riot and did not attend Lula's inauguration. Many of Bolsonaro's supporters have falsely said that the election was stolen – a claim that was a driving force behind the riots, which observers have compared with the 2021 attack on the US Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump.

Reporting from Brasilia, Al Jazeera's Monica Yanikiew Brazilian authorities are investigating a now-deleted Facebook post by Bolsonaro from the US questioning the legitimacy of the elections two days after the riot.

"What the federal police and the judiciary system are investigating is that he's endorsing the rioters who have been saying that they were acting to stop President [Lula] from taking office since they thought the elections had been rigged," Yanikiew said. Bolsonaro has denied any wrongdoing in relation to the riot.

Earlier this month, the former president testified to the federal police about three sets of diamond jewellery he received from Saudi Arabia during his time as president. He has also denied any wrongdoing in that case, telling CNN Brazil last month that he was being "crucified" for a gift he neither requested nor received.

Bolsonaro was expected to testify in several other cases about his actions as president.

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