

Former President Bolsonaro's coup trial opens in Brazil



Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro began trial on Monday after allegedly plotting a coup
[Sergio Lima/AFP]

Brasilia, May 20 (RHC)-- The trial of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has begun, with charges that he plotted a coup d'etat and led a "criminal organization" to overturn the result of the October 2022 election, in which he was narrowly defeated by current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The country's Supreme Court is hearing testimony from high-ranking military and political figures from Monday over the next two weeks.

The 70-year-old far-right leader, a former army captain, who governed Brazil from 2019 to 2022, could face up to 40 years in prison if convicted. Bolsonaro denies the allegations, claiming he is a victim of "political persecution".

More than 80 witnesses are set to testify via videoconference, including Generals Marco Antonio Freire Gomes and Carlos de Almeida Baptista Junior, who served as commanders of the army and air force under Bolsonaro.

In previous statements to federal police, both men said Bolsonaro had "raised the hypothetical possibility" of using legal means to annul the 2022 election and justify a military intervention.

According to prosecutors, the alleged plot included plans to declare a state of emergency, hold new elections and assassinate President Lula. A 900-page federal police report details the scheme, which prosecutors say ultimately collapsed due to a lack of support within the military.

The charges also encompass the January 8, 2023 riots in Brasília, when thousands of Bolsonaro supporters stormed Congress, the Supreme Court, and the presidential palace one week after Lula's inauguration.

Though Bolsonaro, a close ally of United States President Donald Trump when they were both in power, was in the U.S. at the time, prosecutors argue he backed the violence, calling it the "last hope" of those seeking to overturn the election.

Seven of Bolsonaro's former aides are being tried alongside him, including four former ministers, a former navy commander, and the head of Brazil's intelligence services during his presidency.

This marks the first time a Brazilian president has faced coup charges since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985. Bolsonaro, who has often expressed admiration for that era, is already banned from holding public office until 2030 after making claims about Brazil's electronic voting system.

Despite the ban, Bolsonaro has indicated a desire to return to politics. But speaking to UOL last week, he likened the charges to a "telenovela scenario" and warned that a conviction would be a "death penalty, political and physical".

Bolsonaro was heavily criticised when he was Brazil's leader during the COVID-19 pandemic and when his policies and spread of misinformation contributed to the nation having the highest overall death toll in Latin America, and the second highest in the world after the United States, from the coronavirus.

Earlier this month, he was recently discharged from hospital after undergoing major abdominal surgery, the latest in a series of procedures stemming from a stabbing attack in 2018.

[SOURCE: teleSUR and AFP]

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