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Brazil sees record deforestation



Aerial view of deforestation in Brazil, picture by Greenpeace
The Amazon has long been known as the "lungs of the world"
The Brazilian government has announced a record rate of deforestation in the Amazon, months after celebrating its success in achieving a reduction.

In the last five months of 2007, 3,000 sq km (1,250 sq miles) were lost.

Gilberto Camara, whose National Institute of Space Research provides satellite imaging of the Amazon, said the figure was unprecedented.

"We've never before detected such a high deforestation rate at this time of year," he said.

His concern, outlined during a press conference in Brasilia on Wednesday, was echoed by Environment Minister Marina Silva.

Soya expensive

Ms Silva said the rise in the price of commodities such as soya could have influenced the rate of forest clearing, as more and more farmers saw the Amazon as a source of cheap land.

"The economic reality of these states indicate that these activities impact, without a shadow of a doubt, on the forest," she said.

The state of Mato Grosso was the worst affected, contributing more than half the total area of forest stripped, or 1,786 sq km (700 sq miles).

President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva is expected to attend an emergency meeting on the issue.

The rise in deforestation will be an embarrassment for the Brazilian president, who last year said his government's efforts to control illegal logging and introduce better certification of land ownership had helped reduce forest clearance significantly.

Even as he celebrated the success, though, environmentalists were warning that the rate was rising again.

The situation may also be worse than reported, with the environment ministry saying the preliminary assessment of the amount of forest cleared could double as more detailed satellite images are analysed.