

26 October 2010 Last updated at 10:05 GMT

Amazon tributary drops to record low in Brazil



River levels are expected to rise in the next few weeks

The worst drought in decades in the Amazon has seen a major river fall to its lowest level since records began in 1902, Brazilian officials say.

The Rio Negro, which last year was at a high of nearly 30m (100ft), was measured at a depth of 13.63m, the government's geological service said.

Dozens of communities who rely on the river for work and transport have been stranded.

The government has already announced some \$13.5m (£8.6m) in emergency aid.

Officials from the Brazilian Geological Service (CPRM) measured the Rio Negro at Manaus where it flows into the Amazon River and is at its deepest, indicating that locations further upriver could be nearly dry.

They say the river could fall lower in the coming days, as it will take time for rain in other parts of the Amazon to begin to affect water levels.

"The water is expected to start rising again in about three to four weeks," hydrology expert Daniel Oliveira told the Associated Press.

In May last year, the Amazon basin was hit by flooding that saw the Rio Negro reach a record high of 29.77m.

Now not only the Rio Negro, but the Amazon and Solimoes rivers are at their lowest level in decades.

The government has been bringing in food, water and medicine by helicopter to isolated

communities.

More than half of the 62 municipalities in the Brazilian Amazon have declared a state of emergency because of the drought, which has affected agriculture, fishing, and transport.

It is estimated that more than 60,000 families have been affected.

The rainy season in the region usually begins in November.

The Amazon is the world's second-longest river, after the Nile, but discharges far more water from its mouth and drains more territory.

22 October 2010 Last updated at 23:51 GMT

Severe drought afflicts Brazilian Amazon



Some rivers are at their lowest level in decades
The Brazilian government has announced \$13.5m (£8.6m) in emergency aid for Amazon regions hit by the worst drought in decades.

The money will fund water pumping and purification, as well as food deliveries to towns cut off by the drop in river levels.

The Brazilian air force has already flown 500 tonnes of supplies to areas that usually depend on water transport.

The River Amazon at Manaus has fallen to its lowest level since 1963.

Scientists say the region is facing its worst drought since that year.

In Amazonas state 27 municipalities have declared a state of emergency because of the dry spell.

Several tributaries of the Amazon have almost completely dried up, paralysing river transport and the fishing industry.

The rainy season in the region usually begins in November.

The Peruvian Amazon, 2,000km (1,240 miles) upstream has also been affected.

The rainy season in the region usually begins in November.

Environmental groups say severe droughts are likely to become more frequent in the Amazon as a result of global warming, putting further strain on the rainforest.

The Amazon is the world's second-longest river, after the Nile, but discharges far more water from its mouth and drains more territory.

Amazon drought emergency widens

A prolonged dry season has left the Amazon region facing its worst dry spell for many years, as key waterways dry up.

Last Modified: 17 Oct 2010 02:17 GMT



A worsening drought has prompted Brazil to extend an emergency across Amazonas state [GALLO/GETTY]

Brazil has adopted emergency measures to deal with one of the Amazon region's worst droughts in decades.

A state of emergency has been declared in 25 towns as key waterways and rivers are left completely parched, the Amazonas state government said on Saturday.

So far, the severe months-long drought has affected 40,000 people in communities who depend on the South American rainforest for sustenance.

In response, the government has airlifted six tonnes of food and 200 tonnes of donations to the stricken villages. However, according to officials, aid delivery has been slow due to the low water levels in rivers, which prevent large vessels from navigating them.

"The boats cannot navigate, and then the transportation can only be done by canoe. In some places, people were running out of food," Anisio Saturnino, a representative of one of the municipalities under emergency rule, said.

Besides the lack of food, many people are suffering intestinal problems caused by poor water quality.

Ane Alencar, a researcher with the Amazon Institute for Environmental Research (IPAM), said the drought affecting the Amazon is an extreme weather event resulting from El Nino, which occurred in late 2009 with its fallout being felt this year.

She said the drought in the state of Amazonas has been more frequent and more intense than before.

Severity 'unexpected'

Environmentalists say the severity of the drought was unexpected, but that dry weather like this will become more common due to climate change.

"There is already a climate change going on at some level. Greenpeace is tracking the impacts this can have on the Amazon, the impacts that the global warming - some two degrees - may bring to the Amazon, using as examples the years when those episodes are more severe. This year was out of the line," Rafael Cruz, a Greenpeace worker, said.

The river's shallow levels may affect trade along the Amazon River as transporters worry ships will run aground should the drought worsen.

Crops have also been damaged in the dry spell.

Scientists say the dry season will likely continue for another month, giving way to the rainy season at the end of November.

The dry weather is partly due to an intense hurricane season in the Atlantic Ocean. The storms suck moisture from the Amazon region, which make for more powerful sea storms.