

Bolsonaro declares 'the Amazon is ours' and calls deforestation data 'lies'

Far-right president said Brazil is open to partnerships exploiting biodiversity and mining in a conversation with journalists

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Jair Bolsonaro: 'If all this devastation you accuse us of doing was done in the past the Amazon would have stopped existing, it would be a big desert.' Photograph: Marcos Corrêa/Palácio do Planalto

The Amazon belongs to Brazil and European countries can mind their own business because they have already destroyed their own environment, said Brazil's far-right president Jair Bolsonaro, who also described his own government's **satellite data showing an alarming rise in deforestation** as "lies".

"You have to understand that the Amazon is Brazil's, not yours," Bolsonaro said on Friday. "If all this devastation you accuse us of doing was done in the past the Amazon would have stopped existing, it would be a big desert."

But **Brazil** is opening to partnerships exploiting biodiversity and mining – even in Amazon areas, said Bolsonaro, during a wide-ranging, one-hour conversation

with foreign journalists.

He also said he was “fulfilling a mission from God”, defended his decision to **name his own son as Brazil’s ambassador to the US** and described Brexit as “the will of the people” – although he admitted he had never heard of the UK’s likely next prime minister, Boris Johnson.

It was the first time Bolsonaro had invited foreign journalists to his weekly media breakfast and he entered the room with a breezy “good morning” – in English.

But he then accused the international press of misrepresenting his administration which has been **plagued by internal power struggles and plummeting approval ratings** and said foreign reporters missed “corrupt governments” of the past.

“Most of the foreign press has a completely distorted image of who I am and what I intend to do here with our policies and for the future of our Brazil,” he said. “I perfectly understand the level of the poisoning that is done to Brazil by the foreign press.”

His affable mood changed when questions turned to the Amazon, and he stared ahead or scribbled notes on a napkin as he was pushed on deforestation. Bolsonaro has come under fire for attacking the country’s environment agencies and **declaring plans to open up indigenous reserves – some of the best protected in the Amazon – to mining.**



'We preserve more [rainforest] than anyone. No country in the world has the moral right to talk about the Amazon,' Bolsonaro said. Photograph: Felipe Werneck/AP

“We understand the importance of the Amazon for the world – but the Amazon is ours. There will not be any more of that sort of policy that we saw in the past that was terrible for everyone,” he said. “We preserve more [rainforest] than anyone. No country in the world has the moral right to talk about the Amazon. You destroyed your own ecosystems.”

Foreigners complaining about his plans to open up indigenous reserves to mining showed a lack of respect for the human rights of Brazil’s indigenous people, Bolsonaro said.

“You want the indigenous to continue as a prehistoric man that has no access to technology, science, information, the wonders of modernity,” he said. “Indigenous want to work, want to produce and they can’t. They live isolated in their areas like cavemen. What most of the world press do to Brazil and against these human beings is a crime.”

He even questioned recent satellite data from the government’s National Space Research Institute (INPE) that indicated **a dramatic rise in deforestation in May and June**. “I am convinced the data is a lie. We are going to call the president of INPE here to talk about this and that’s the end of that issue,” he said.

Bolsonaro called for “partnerships” with foreign countries and companies, before pulling out a necklace made of black niobium – an expensive and

versatile metal used to strengthen steel that he believes could transform the Brazilian economy.

Among the regions which Bolsonaro said were rich in minerals was Seis Lagos, a remote Amazon region with niobium deposits.

“There is an indigenous reserve there – but we can talk about this without any problem,” he said. “We have an unimaginable biodiversity with discoveries that can beat stages of diseases that are still incurable today. We have a sea of opportunities in Brazil. We are open to talk.”

Bolsonaro defended his **controversial** decision to appoint his congressman son Eduardo as Brazil’s US ambassador. The move has prompted accusations of nepotism, but Bolsonaro presented the nomination as an act of public service by his son.

“He is doing this for Brazil not for him,” he said. “US is the world’s shop window, his responsibility will be enormous.”

Asked what he thought of Johnson, Bolsonaro had to be told who the British politician was by an aide. “Good luck there,” he said of the Conservative party leadership struggle, adding that Brexit was “the will of the people”.

Friday’s interview came at a time of rising international criticism over Bolsonaro’s environmental policies, and was the culmination of a week of meetings between powerful Bolsonaro allies and foreign media. On Monday his vice-president, retired general Hamilton Mourão, spoke to foreign reporters in Rio de Janeiro, followed the next day by Rio’s far-right governor, Wilson Witzel. Military officers were present at all events, in uniform or civilian clothes.

He praised Vladimir Putin, telling a Russian reporter that he had “deep respect” for the Russian leader, who he said left a “good impression” after a brief meeting at the G20 in Japan.

He told a Chinese reporter he wanted to deepen Brazil’s relationship with China – its main trading partner – and confirmed an October visit. And he told a Portuguese reporter that Portugal is a “brother country”.

Bolsonaro described himself as a unique Brazilian president.

“For the first time in the history of Brazil a president of the republic is looking to fulfil with everything he does what he promised during the campaign,”

Bolsonaro said. “God willing, everything will work, policies like mine will continue in Brazil forever.”

But governing Brazil is no easy matter, he concluded. “It is difficult to be president of Brazil because it is a president that has less authority,” he said. “I am fulfilling a mission from God.”